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## CANADIAN SPORT FOR LIFE

### Learn to Train

"Learn to Train" (girls ages 8-11 and boys 9-12) is the third stage of the Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) model. Within this stage, children are ready to begin training based on more formalized methods.

The stage is important for the development of sport specific skills as it is a period of accelerated learning of coordination and fine motor control. It is also a time when children enjoy practicing new skills and seeing their own improvement.

It is the time to develop and refine all fundamental movement skills, and learn overall sport skills. Late developers (those who enter puberty later than their peers) have an advantage when it comes to learning skills as the Learn to Train stage lasts longer for them.

Competition is important, but it is learning to compete that should be the focus – not winning. For best long-term results, training should occupy about 70% of the time in a given activity or sport. Formal competition (e.g. league games) should occupy about 30% of the time. The CS4L website provides an excellent summary of the competitive needs for developing athletes titled: "Competition is a Good Servant, but a Poor Master." ([www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca))

Although many children in this stage will have developed a preference for one sport or another, for full athletic development they need to engage in a broad range of activities, playing at least 2-3 different sports in different seasons. Focusing only on one sport year round should be discouraged. Parents should also encourage their child to participate in unstructured play outside of formal activities.

If a child has taken an interest in a late specialization sport such as soccer or baseball, parents should monitor it. At issue is ensuring the child is not over-training, over-competing, or inappropriately specializing.

Early specialization sports include artistic and acrobatic sports such as gymnastics, diving, and figure skating. These differ from late specialization sports in that very complex skills are learned before maturation since they cannot be fully mastered if taught after maturation. Most other sports are late specialization sports.

All disability sports are late specialization and it is important that children with a congenital disability or a disability acquired at an early age be exposed to the full range of fundamentals before specializing in the sport of their choice.

With good fundamental movement and sport specific skills, athletes who are between 12 and 15 can select a late specialization sport and have the potential to rise to international stardom in that sport. Patience, however, is required as scientific research suggests that it takes 10 years and 10,000 hours of training for a talented athlete to reach elite levels. This translates into more than 3 hours of training or competition daily for 10 years.

In summary, while it is tempting to over-develop "talent" at this stage through excessive single sport training and competition (as well as early positioning in team sports), this can be very detrimental to later stages of development. It promotes one-sided physical, technical, and tactical development and increases the likelihood of injury and burnout.

The content of this article is taken from the Canadian Sport for Life resources which can be found at [www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)