

Sports programs can offer wide range of benefits, some risks

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A new AAP clinical report reviews the benefits and risks of organized sports for youths, addressing the roles of parents, pediatricians, schools, coaches and communities.

Positive effects of organized sports participation can include higher self-esteem, improved academic performance and general life skills. Involvement in sports can enhance kids' physical, emotional, social and psychological health. However, parents and pediatricians need to be mindful of the risks of burnout and overscheduling, early specialization, unsafe environments or rules, abuse, bullying, hazing and the harms of harsh criticism or overly high expectations.

The report, *Organized Sports for Children, Preadolescents and Adolescents* from the AAP Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness, is available at <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2019-0997> and will be published in the June issue of *Pediatrics*.

Despite the advantages of sports participation, daily opportunity for free play is important in the development of motor skills needed for organized sports participation.

The report points out that more sports options are needed for children with special needs. Schools and community organizations could offer more opportunities at multiple levels of play. Improvements also are needed to overcome financial and transportation barriers for families.

Positive parental support and a focus on fun and progress — instead of winning — can greatly influence whether children enjoy and continue involvement in organized sports.

Resources

- [AAP News article "How to help parents cover their bases when choosing a sports program"](#)

