

fit TO BE TRIED

Can't find the right sport for your kid?
Don't fret. There's more to be gained
from simply being active.

Ted Temertzoglou isn't big on sitting. He wears a pedometer everyday ("Yeah, I'm a pedometer addict," he admits) and walks around the boardroom when on the phone in order to make the most of what would otherwise be bum time. ("I also have surgical tubing in my office where I do my strength training if I don't have time to do it in the morning." Yikes.) He's trained with the Toronto Argonauts, is a certified personal trainer and a phys ed teacher and serves as the Ontario representative for the Board of Directors for Physical and Health Education Canada. He has written text books about healthy active living and is a contributor to physical education curriculum for the Ontario government. Suffice to say, he's very, very big on activity. Just listening to him talk about the benefits of activity can feel like a workout (but in a good way).

Which makes it a bit surprising, when asked about choosing sports for kids, how little he sounds like your Grade 9 gym teacher. Gone are the days of "no pain, no gain." And no longer is it just a choice between soccer and hockey. "It's like reading," says Ted. "A friend once said there are just too many books out there for you not to enjoy something about reading. There is just

so much. You know, the same is true of activity. The body moves in so many amazing ways, it's hard to believe that we can't find activities that kids love."

People who make it their business to find ways to make other people more active, know your kids can do a lot, that they want to do a lot, and that there is a lot out there for them to do.



Why bother?

There is a dark side to any discussion of physical activity in Canada. Kelly Murumets, president and CEO of ParticipACTION, knows all about it, and when she talks about the drop in activity levels, she uses the word “crisis.” “Parents don’t really believe we have an inactivity crisis. I think they know their kids should be more active, but a recent study has shown that 88 percent of parents believe their kids meet the daily physical activity guidelines, yet only 13 percent of our kids do.” Consider these statistics:

- Over the last three decades, the overweight/obesity rate of adolescents aged 12 to 17 more than doubled from 14 percent to 29 percent, and their obesity rate tripled from 3 percent to 9 percent.
- According to Active Healthy Kids Canada’s Report Card on Physical Activity for 2008, total screen time among Canadians in grades six to 10 is seven hours and 25 minutes per day on weekends, and five hours and 56 minutes per day on weekdays.
- Statistics Canada reports participation rates in Canadians aged 15–18 declined from 77 percent to 59 percent between 1992 and 2005.

Our kids are at risk of not getting in on the ground level of physical activity, and it’s an absence they will feel for the rest of their lives, says Kelly. Active kids are less stressed, are better able to find balance and more readily find enjoyment in other areas of their lives.

Staring down DCD

Not all kids are created equal, and therefore not all kids are picked first for the team. For some, it’s a matter of interest, for others there can be a developmental barrier. Lisa Rivard is a physiotherapist with the Canchild Centre for Childhood Disability Research in Hamilton and is an expert on Developmental Coordination Disorder (DCD). “DCD is a motor skills disorder,” she says. “Basically children with DCD have trouble learning to coordinate their movements. And as a result they have trouble performing some of the common everyday tasks that are required of them at home, at school and on the playground.”

“Often parents are aware that something isn’t quite right, but they can’t put their finger on what it might be ... you might hear parents

say things like ‘it took me so long to teach them to ride a bike.’ ”

While DCD might present the worst case, the goal is the same for all children when it comes to physical activity. “The ultimate goal is encouraging participation because you really want to prevent them from developing low self esteem,” says Lisa. “They may start to withdraw from others as well, so their social participation is key.”

But even then, there are options. “Children with DCD may have more success with individual rather than team sports ... swimming, running, bicycling, skating and skiing.” Of course individual sports don’t always provide the team experience that you want to encourage, but this can be encouraged through other activities, such as a drama club or scouts.

The bottom line is the same for all parents: be encouraging, choose an activity in which the child can have success, and have fun.

Sports are not enough

Organized sports – team or individual – are just a part of your child’s activity, not the whole of it. For an eight-year-old, for example, being involved in a sport doesn’t always mean a lot of activity: practices can be light and, along with a game, may only amount to two outings a week.

When we were children, we were naturally active because we didn’t have the internet and we were free to run through our neighbourhood in a pack of kids. Because of that, activity levels were less of an immediate concern. But “that kind of lifestyle has changed,” says Kelly. “Parents believe that just having their kids in structured sport will address those changes, and in fact that’s not true. We have to build physical activity into our everyday lives, as well as ensure that our kids are playing sports because there are a whole bunch of phenomenal benefits that come from sports.”

Ok. But what?

There are lots of things to consider when introducing your child to new sports, such as specific aptitudes, cost, team experience, and building strength and agility. But each of our four experts said the same thing: let the kid decide, keep it fun, and relax. Finding the right sport will be easy, as long as you follow some basic guidelines:



Sport participation rates in Canadians aged 15–18 declined from 77% to 59% between 1992 and 2005.

1. TEAM SPORTS ARE GOOD...

Teams build confidence and help kids learn to deal effectively with both their strengths and weaknesses. Teams usually come with a coach too. “Coaches can teach how to manage your emotions when things aren’t going right,” says Jen Bhalla, who has a PhD in sport and exercise psychology in St. Paul, Minn. “Do you sulk, or do you learn to move on from that? How do you get along with a ref who makes a bad call?”

2. ... BUT NOT FOR EVERYONE

"If the kid doesn't inherently love team sports, then don't push him," says Ted. If you think your child would like the social stimulation provided by being on team, look into doing individual sports, but with a friend.

3. BEWARE OF BAD COACHING

"Look out for the overly aggressive coach who puts winning over playing time, who benches kids or doesn't play everyone because of their ability levels," says Ted.

4. EXPLORE YOUR OPTIONS

"Open up the definition of sport to include things like dance, yoga, climbing, martial arts, hiking, orienteering, roller skating and fencing. Then children can find their interest and it can be fun again," says Ted. Kelly says that introducing kids to a variety of activities, rather than focussing on a single one can be a good way to foster an active lifestyle.

5. LET YOUR CHILD CHOOSE

"We had Zach in hockey school," says Ted of his now nine-year-old son, "but he just didn't

take to it. He didn't want to play hockey. So, we didn't push it and we found another activity, which was downhill skiing, and now we do that as a family, which I think is awesome." Be open to the idea that your child's definition of fun may not always match your own.

6. CHOOSE SOMETHING THAT FITS YOUR LIFESTYLE

The right sport is one that stays out of the way of a child's other priorities. "Parents should ask, 'Is it being played at the right time, or it is interfering with the child's family or school times?'" says Jen.

And that goes for parents, too. It's going to be harder to get up at 5 a.m. on Saturdays in order to make it to the hockey practice if, let's face facts, you like entertaining on Friday nights and you don't really enjoy hockey.

7. PLAY TO THEIR STRENGTHS...

Choose an activity that your child can feel successful doing at least 50 percent of the time. The less the workout feels like a workout, the better. If participating feels like a long walk up a very steep hill, try something else.

8. ... BUT NOT TO YOURS

Kids watch their parents as much for learning as entertainment. "I'm a terrible swimmer," says Ted, "but kids love seeing that. When a kid sees a parent struggle, and when a parent overcomes that struggle, that's an incredible learning experience for that kid."

9. TAKE YOUR CUES FROM YOUR KIDS

When parents try to live through their kids and push them toward certain activities, it's a recipe for doom. "Kids, especially very young kids, just like to run around," says Jen. "Even falling down, just sort of experiencing that on their own. I think when we try to put confines on that, they could lose their motivation." If they are being active, and so long as it's not ultimate fighting that has caught their interest, go with it.

10. BE A GOOD ROLE MODEL

"If we are going to tell our kids to be active, then we should be active, too," says Kelly. "Go for a family walk, go for a family bike ride, go for a hike in the valley. Do something with the kids." 🌍

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AWESOME ACTIVITIES THAT YOU CAN DO *rightnow* (or thereabouts):

1 SPEND AN HOUR AT THE PLAYGROUND

2 WALK

3 JUMP ROPE

4 SKATEBOARD

5 SWIM

6 CYCLE

7 RUN

8 BALLROOM DANCING

9 SET WORLD RECORDS IN THE BACKYARD

and two for winter

BUILDING SNOWMEN

TOBOGGANING

"Going up and down a slide is incredibly beneficial to a kid."

—TED TEMERTZOGLU

In the living room, all you need is some music.

"Tobogganing is a phenomenal way to keep in shape. Coming down isn't as active, but walking up that hill is really good."

—TED TEMERTZOGLU

"Park your car not right in front of the school, but maybe a couple blocks away and walk with your son or daughter to school. All those little things add up." —TED TEMERTZOGLU

"If your child has coordination issues, each of these involve learning movements that repeat over and over and do not require reacting to objects that are moving such as a ball or a puck." —LISA RIVARD

"We'll go out in the back yard and the kids like setting up these little obstacle courses with pylons. And we have personal world records. We design a specific course that the kids run through or skip through or hop through or gallop through. ... we chart their records within their age groups. Sometimes, little James next door, who is 7, is the only kid in that age group, so he's always setting world records and feels pretty good about that."

—TED TEMERTZOGLU