

# The benefits of sport for mental health

## ASSOCIATIONS BETWEEN ORGANISED SPORT PARTICIPATION AND MENTAL HEALTH

### **Team sport participation has been associated with fewer mental health difficulties.**

Participation by children in team sport compared to non-sport participation has been shown to be associated with self-reported lower anxious/depressed scores, lower withdrawn/depressed scores, lower social problems scores, lower thought problems scores, and lower attention problems scores (Hoffman et al., 2022). Sport appears to be associated with improved psychosocial health above and beyond improvements attributable to participation in physical activity. Team sport seems to be associated with improved psychosocial health outcomes compared to individual activities, due to the social nature of the participation (Eime et al., 2013).

Children in high sports training frequency (3-5 times/week) have been found to have higher physical and mental health test scores than children with no and low frequency sport training (Jiang et al., 2021). Further emphasising the value of frequent sport participation by children, consistent participation in extracurricular sport has been found to predict significantly higher levels of classroom engagement (Harbec et al., 2021).

Children's participation in sport can encourage the development of physical, behavioural-social, emotional, and cognitive skills transferable to managing challenges in everyday life (Holt et al., 2017; Holt et al., 2020). Interactions between children in sport contexts can enable opportunities for the development of often assumed or neglected behavioral-social skills, such as self-discipline, self-control in conflict/goal obstruction, self-awareness, and teamwork (Felfe et al., 2016)

**Participation in organised sports during childhood is associated with better social and emotional health when compared with nonparticipation.** It has been found that greater psychological difficulties are experienced by children who drop out of sports, and greater social and emotional problems are experienced by children who drop out of sports and who do not participate in organised sports. A study with parent reporting found that children who maintain participation in sport had lower rates of parent-reported psychological difficulties compared with children who dropped out of sport and children who did not participate in sports (Vella et al., 2014).

**Children's participation in developmentally appropriate team sports helps to protect health related quality of life in children and so participation should be encouraged for as long as possible** (Vella et al., 2015).

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