

The Fun Integration theory: Sustaining children & teenagers in Sport participation. [www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov](http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov) March 2015(summary by N F Bartlett- AAI Nov 2020)

Children view Sport as “fun”, thus the main reason for taking part and a lack of fun as a reason for stopping. A study was completed between youth players, Coaches and Parents, to establish ideas around “what fun is”.

The outcome of “concept mapping” was established by way of “fun maps”, identifying 4 fundamental reasons for fun in youth sport, within 11 fun dimensions.

The conclusion was development of a FIT (Fun Integration Theory), a framework that can be used to maximise fun to promote and sustain an active and healthy lifestyle through sport.

Sports are known for being important for youth’s need for physical activity. The health benefits along with social, emotional and cognitive benefits are well documented through sport participation. However, withdrawal from organised youth sport can be as high as 70% by adolescence. This is mainly due to a lack of positive experiences with sport.

Note well: Positive movement experiences have been deemed the key variable for sustaining children’s participation in sport. The most frequent reason by youth dropping out of sport is that it is no longer fun. However, fun remains a relatively elusive concept.

The outcome of this comprehensive study is as follows:

There are 11 fun determinants of team specific sports (also applies to individual sports)

- 1: Being a good sport: Warming up together. Showing good sportsmanship. Encouraging one another.
- 2: Trying hard: Trying your best. Being active. Setting and achieving goals. Working hard.
- 3: Positive Coaching: Coach treat participants with respect. Coach provides encouragement. Coach being a positive role model. A Coach who demonstrates or takes part (not always possible). Getting clear and consistent communication. A knowledgeable coach. A Coach who stays positive. A Coach who listens and who you can talk to. A friendly coach. A Coach who has a humorous side.
- 4: Learning and improving: Being challenged to improve and get better. Improving skills. Learning new skills. Going to Sport clinics.
- 5: Support: Encouragement from parents and club officials.
- 6: Competition: Competing against other athletes and teams
- 7: Practice: Well organised training and club nights. Completing lots of different drills. Practicing in small groups. Coaching from specialist Coaches.
- 8: Friendship: Being around your mates. Making new friends.
- 9: Mental learnings: Learning to keep a positive attitude.

10: Rituals: End of season prizegiving. Going out as a group.

11: External rewards: Getting new sports gear. Winning medals. Wearing a special uniform. Travelling away to compete.

Fundamental tenets: In this study, it was identified that 4 fundamental tenets exist, for the fostering of a fun experience:

A: Contextual: Practices and games.

B: Internal: Learning and Improving, trying hard.

C: Social: Making friends, Being a good sport.

D: External: Positive coaching. Support at competitions.

Whilst this study was a sole example of youth soccer participants, coaches and parents, conclusions can be made with individuals sports such as Athletics.

Final thoughts: In every decision we make in regards to youth sports, we must consider the athletes first and foremost.