



Australian Government
Australian Sports Commission

Validation of *Playing for Life* philosophy for children aged five to 12 years

Frequently Asked Questions



What is the *Playing for Life* philosophy?

The *Playing for Life* (P4L) philosophy is based on a theoretical approach that uses games rather than drills to introduce the skills and tactics of a particular sport or structured physical activity. It is designed to create a fun and inclusive environment for children of all abilities to participate in sporting activities resulting in a positive and rewarding experience.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) initially developed the P4L philosophy for the junior sport sector (children aged five to 12 years). Since 2005, the P4L philosophy has been adopted by the ASC's Active After-school Communities (AASC) program. Recently, the ASC commissioned Victoria University's (VU) Institute of Sport, Exercise and Active Living (ISEAL) to validate the P4L philosophy through a research report.

Who can use the *Playing for Life* philosophy?

The ASC has adopted the P4L philosophy as part of the AASC program delivery. In addition, a range of national sporting organisations (NSOs) have also adopted it for the delivery of their junior sport programs, including: Athletics Australia, Baseball Australia, Equestrian Australia, Gymnastics Australia, Netball Australia, Squash Australia, Table Tennis Australia and Touch Football Australia.

The P4L philosophy is used by coaches, who engage children in the sport or structured physical activity being delivered.

The P4L philosophy has six core coaching principles:

- **Game is the focus** — the coach enables players to develop skills and tactics through games. Sessions are designed with a particular skill outcome in mind.
- **Coach is a facilitator** — the coach acts as a facilitator and sets challenges for players to find solutions rather than directing players.
- **Discrete coaching** — players are coached discretely to create an encouraging and supportive environment.
- **Role models** — coaches use players to highlight skilful play and demonstrate good technique.
- **Ask the players** — coaches ask players how the game can be made easier or harder. This engagement increases participation and indicates if the game is achieving its outcome.
- **CHANGE IT** — simple variations to games create fun, safe, inclusive and challenging environments, and means children of all abilities and backgrounds are engaged and the P4L philosophy is achieved.

How has the *Playing for Life* philosophy been validated?

The research report undertaken by ISEAL, had three main objectives:

- validate the P4L principles for primary school-aged children (aged five to 12 years)
- reconfirm its appropriateness for those aged 13 and above
- determine if the P4L philosophy helps to overcome barriers to participation in sport.

The research incorporated 520 children from nine primary schools and one secondary college in the Melbourne metropolitan region. Approximately half of the children participated in coaching sessions that utilised the P4L philosophy while the other half participated in regular school physical education lessons. Sessions took place once per week for up to 15 weeks. Coaches and parents also contributed to the research by completing surveys and/or undertaking interviews.

What were the key findings from the research?

The research identified that the P4L philosophy provides a number of benefits:

- **Overcoming barriers to participation** — barriers to participation are broken down by providing a safe environment, ensuring the children feel comfortable and allowing participation with friends.

- **Increasing physical activity** — parents perceive P4L to have significant social and psychological benefits for their child, supporting a more active lifestyle.
- **Improvements in fundamental motor skills (e.g. kick, run, jump)** — participation in P4L assisted in the development of fundamental motor skills.
- **P4L principles are effective and appropriate** — consistent with the children's perspective, coaches feel there is still a place for drills in skill development.
- **Reconfirm the appropriateness of the P4L philosophy for children aged 13 years and above** — the research indicated that although the P4L philosophy has been targeted at primary school-aged children, the approach can offer similar benefits to adolescents aged 13 and above.

How can coaches and sporting organisations use the Playing for Life philosophy?

The ASC has collaborated with NSOs to develop a variety of resources to assist coaches in the delivery of the P4L philosophy. These include:

- **P4L Resource Kit** — this includes a coach's guide, activity finder, companion books, activity cards and change it guide which aims to assist coaches. For information please visit ausport.gov.au/aasc.
- **AASC-endorsed junior sport program coaching manuals** — developed by the ASC and various NSOs, these resources are based on existing national junior sporting programs. The resources also follow the P4L philosophy to teach primary school-aged children sport-specific skills through modified games.

What other research has been conducted for children's participation in sport?

The ASC recently conducted research into attitudes, motivation and behaviours into Australian children's involvement in sport. The research titled *Children's Market Segmentation for sport participation* was undertaken to:

- gain an in-depth understanding of the 'demand side' of the Australian community
- develop a 'consumer-centric' needs-based segmentation of current and non-sports participants to drive and inform retention and growth strategies.

The findings from this research highlighted that one of the key reasons for children dropping out of sport was the perceived focus on 'performance'. For some children, the perceived competitive nature of sport clubs came at the expense of fun and enjoyment and this was contributing to a drop off in younger age groups.

Given the findings from the *Children's Market Segmentation for sport participation*, the P4L philosophy provides sporting organisations with a validated approach to help shape their delivery of sport. This will assist to better meet the needs of those children whose primary motivation to participate in sport is to have fun and play with their friends.

Further information

An executive summary and video can be found at ausport.gov.au/p4l. For more information regarding the P4L resources as part of the AASC program, visit ausport.gov.au/aasc.

To obtain a copy of the full report of the *Validation of Playing for Life Philosophy for Children Aged Five to 12 Years* please contact:

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