

Discuss the importance of sport and physical activity in a child/young person's life.

UNCRC rights of the child (1989) state that all children of any age have the right to live a full and decent life, playing an active part in the community (article 23) while developing their physical abilities and talent to the fullest potential (article 29) and engaging in play and recreational activity appropriate to their age (article 31) regardless of their individual needs.

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by skeletal muscles that requires energy expenditure (World Health Organization, 2024). Sport is an activity played for enjoyment individually or as part of a team, usually following a set of rules. This written piece will explore the benefits of sport and physical activity in the following aspects of youth life; physically, cognitively emotionally, socially.

Children who participate in sport gain a faster progression of bone growth, increased fine and gross motor skills and better overall physical health as it reduces the likeliness of multiple illnesses like type 2 diabetes; cancer; hypertension; and premature mortality (NHS, 2024). From partaking in physical activity children can increase their muscular fitness, heart and lung health, cardiometabolic health, and measures of a healthy weight (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2024). This helps to keep risks of obesity, cardiovascular issues and low fitness levels to the minimum.

Endorphins (feel-good hormones produced in the brain) are released when individuals take part in sport and or physical activity, these cause individuals to feel happier during and after their workout. Thus, helping to relieve stress and lowering levels of depression. Resilience levels are also increased while playing sport as children learn to not give up after failure (loss) and setbacks (missing a shot in football) (SportInspired, 2025).

Exercise has brain benefits too. Many studies have suggested that the parts of the brain that control thinking and memory are larger in volume in people who exercise than in people who don't. Exercise can also boost memory and thinking indirectly by improving mood and sleep, and by reducing stress and anxiety (Harvard Health Publishing, 2024).

When participating in sport and physical activity, a child will be in a group of young people all with different backgrounds and needs, fostering an inclusive, safe and belonging environment. Sport demands that you work with others to achieve common goals (winning,) and in doing so, you learn valuable lessons about trust and reliance. Moreover, the structure and rules inherent to sports provide a framework for understanding fair play and respect (Turner, 2024). From playing sport and gaining experience, children have a sound knowledge of the rules creating good discipline. Furthermore, a value most children will develop and learn from joining in with physical activity and sport is empathy. This is due to them understanding and knowing what it's like to try something new for the first time and make mistakes, therefore are better at helping their teammate learn a new skill.

Overall, sport and physical activity is a vital component of childhood, the skills learnt can help them to adapt to different life situations. It will reduce their risk of illness in adulthood, while building their confidence, memory and resilience. It would appear sport and physical activity help to shape children and young people into well rounded, healthy individuals.

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