

WHY IS UNDERSTANDING MATURATION SOMETHING PARENTS NEED TO KNOW?

In and of itself, being an early maturer or a late maturer is not a concern. However, the potential short term and Long term ramifications if one ignores maturational differences are of concern.

Early maturers, who hit their growth spurt prior to their same -aged peers, tend to have an advantage in sports, especially sports requiring speed, power, and endurance where body mass is helpful. For biological reasons, not because of greater talent or ability, they are often able to outperform their peers. In childhood, they have much early success for which they receive reinforcement and recognition and, therefore, tend to initially stay with the sport.

Into high school we start seeing problems as the early maturers, who are used to experiencing success, get frustrated because now peers are catching up with them. Others may ridicule and tease them because they are not experiencing the same outcome success and assume it is because they are not training hard or not putting forth the effort. Part of the dropout from sport we see around age 14 is due to early maturers leaving the sport out of frustration when they are not experiencing the same success as they did when they were younger. In reality, it's the physical changes that are occurring in their peers that are allowing others to catch up with them. We need to figure out a way to help our early maturers keep early success in perspective.

With late maturers, we have a different set of issues. The late maturing kids often experience early failure because they are at a biological disadvantage (they are not as physically strong or developed) that affects performance outcomes. In training, even though they may be working as hard, they often can't keep up with their peers which is a huge source of frustration. This leads to much ridicule by their peer group. These late maturers, who are not demonstrating success relative to their peers, then don't get the coaches' attention, encouragement, or recognition that their early maturing peers are getting.

Unfortunately, in developmental sport programs, we often don't allow late maturers the time to allow their physical maturity catch up and their skills to develop. Instead, these children often leave the sport early because of lack of success and extreme frustration. This seems to hit late maturing boys the hardest because they are at an extreme disadvantage. Ironically, they may have the potential to be better athletes but we have to keep them involved at the younger ages to make sure they continue with their skill development. We need to figure out how to keep late maturers interested and involved in sport despite a lack of early success.