

## **JUNIOR SPORT POLICY**

The Australian Sports Commission has developed a national junior sport policy framework. Orienteering Victoria has adopted an interim Junior Sport policy to fit within this framework. At present, this mainly consists of placing our current practices and strategies within the ASC template.

### Introduction

The purpose of this junior sport policy is to assist in the provision of quality experiences in orienteering for young people. It will encourage the provision of safe, enjoyable, and accountable environments for everyone involved in junior orienteering. Many of the practices described will also be applicable to the broader orienteering community.

As *duty of care* issues become increasingly important, providers of junior orienteering activities must be familiar with, and put into practice, procedures to ensure young people have a positive experience in their sport. The health and welfare of junior participant must be central to all objectives which include providing:

- fun experiences
- safe and supportive environments
- skill development, challenge and the joy of achieving
- access for all to participate
- a clear pathway for improvement
- equal opportunities for all young people

#### 1. Getting Young People Involved for the Long-term

Getting young people active is important because it is an integral component of a healthy lifestyle. Sports such as orienteering assist in preventing lifestyle diseases and promotes physical, psychological and social well-being.

Quality experiences in junior sport provide the entry to a lifelong involvement in sport for:

- enjoyment and recreation with pleasurable social involvement
- fulfilling individual potential in sport.

An understanding of what young people look for in sport helps us provide positive experiences that encourage young people to remain active participants throughout their lives.

Orienteering provides an opportunity to develop physical, social and emotional abilities and therefore should be accessible to all young people. A wide variety of skills and abilities developed in participating in orienteering transfer to non-athletic careers and sport influences social factors such as community pride, identity and leisure.

Marginalisation still occurs on the basis of disability, ethnicity, gender and sexuality, geographical location, Indigenous background, social class and socio-economic status. A less obvious factor that shapes participation, but one of growing importance, is the way young people perceive their body image and mental skills.

Recognising the difficulties from the perspective of young people, and the restrictions they have on being involved, allows sports such as orienteering to meet the challenge of all young people having the fundamental right to be involved in sport. Meeting legal obligations related to equity of opportunity must also be considered.

#### *Strategies for getting young people involved*

- The sport is promoted to young people, particularly through schools. The annual Secondary and Primary Schools Championships, and programs run for and in individual schools, are potentially a major promotional tool.
- There is a progression of length and difficulty of courses (from very easy through easy and moderate to hard), providing the opportunity for a staged progression through the sport as skills and abilities develop, as well as the opportunity for all to participate at their own skill and ability level.
- Participation and training at the junior level has a significant social element, particularly at the team/squad level. Virtually all events involve people of both genders.
- Orienteering is a sport which places demands on mental as well as physical skill, and therefore provides opportunities for people with a wide range of body shapes and stages of physical development.
- Programs are being provided close to population centres in major regional centres (e.g. Bendigo, Ballarat, Albury-Wodonga), providing participation opportunities within relatively easy reach of potential participants.
- Programs (e.g. the Western Series in Melbourne) are being targeted at areas of low socio-economic status.
- Opportunities are provided equally as far as possible. In general all opportunities open to males are open to females (and vice versa). Gender-specific language is not used. Discrimination also does not take place on the basis of religion, ethnicity etc.

#### *Strategies for long-term involvement*

- A wide range of participation opportunities provides for ongoing participation, either at the elite level or a more recreational level.
- Participants are encouraged to start at a level appropriate to their ability, ensuring a positive first experience which will encourage longer-term involvement.
- A strong pathway assists retention of potential high level competitors (through Australian Schools Championships, Junior World Championships, National League).

## 2. Pathways through Physical Growth and Maturation

Physical activity is essential for the normal growth and development of the child. However, there are potentially harmful effects for young athletes through the impact of intense training. This can adversely affect the dynamics and timing of growth and physical maturation. Determining when children are ready for more intense training and competition is a duty of care required of sports leaders.

Growth is a complicated process because parts of the body mature at different rates, and periods of growth vary considerably between individuals. This differential growth of various body parts has a major influence on the performance of motor skills.

Maturation is the genetically programmed series of changes leading to maturity. Tissues and systems mature at different rates and although every child passes through all the stages of maturation in the same order, there is great variation in developmental rates and the length of time taken to pass from an initial stage to a final stage. Chronological age is of limited value in determining levels of maturity for children.

Ages 8 to 20 are a time of tremendous development for young people on all levels – physically, psychologically, emotionally and socially. Planning for the progressive development of sports skills in young people requires consideration of:

- identifiable stages of development
- different levels of ability
- different rates in gaining sports skills
- different interests of young people in sport.

It is the responsibility of sport leaders to manage the experiences available to young people so that activities and challenges are offered in a planned and sequential manner.

### *Strategies for sport pathways*

- Participants progress through a range of courses, starting with very easy courses, then onwards to easy, moderate and hard courses.
- A Victorian Junior Squad exists for regular junior participants. This leads on to opportunities for selection in the Victorian Schools team, and ultimately the Victorian National League team, as well as opportunities at the national level.
- An annual Victorian Secondary Schools Championships is held, and Primary Schools Championships are held in a number of regions (Eastern Zone – Melbourne metro, Western Zone – Melbourne metro, Bendigo). Non-championship regional gala days are held in Ballarat and Castlemaine.
- Young people are encouraged to be involved in a wide range of volunteer roles within the sport.

*Strategies for physical growth and maturation*

- Courses are set at a level and length appropriate for the physical maturation of juniors at that age level.
- Coaches are encouraged to make training programs appropriate to the maturity level of the juniors involved, and to be aware of any signs of overload/excessive training.

3. Forming links

Consultation and co-operation are essential for effective and efficient junior sport participation.

A number of agencies have responsibilities for organizing and conducting sport including sporting organizations, schools, commercial and non-profit providers, government (local, state and federal), and non-government agencies.

All of these are partners in junior sport and their cooperation and goodwill is vital to the successful delivery of junior sport. Consultation and cooperation provide many benefits including:

- identifying gaps and overlaps in delivery and resolving cooperative approaches to them.
- consistency in the provision of junior sport with regard to age grouping, competition rules etc.
- sharing sports resources.

Issues of duplication and inconsistency are less significant in orienteering than in many other sports, as the vast majority of organized activities take place under the auspices of Orienteering Victoria or one of its affiliated clubs.

*Strategies for forming links*

- Orienteering Victoria liaises with schools in providing orienteering experiences to young people.
- Orienteering Victoria liaises with peak bodies (such as the VSSSA) to provide a suitable competition and representative structure for school-aged participants.

4. Quality coaching and people making it happen

Understanding the learning process and the developmental stages in this process are necessary for quality junior sport experiences. Young people have preferences for how they like to learn, and their preferences might change depending on the type of task and their prior experiences.

Some might like to watch, listen and experiment, and others may like to try an activity first and refine their learning through feedback.

Young people typically learn more than one thing at a time. In the process of learning physical skills, young people also learn what behaviour is expected of them, how to work with others, and what they are good at.

Recognizing that learning is multi-dimensional is important. It highlights the complexity of acquiring skills and how broader social aspects of life impact on young people as they learn physical skills.

People in leadership roles should plan for each session and the season ahead. Planning should address not only what is presented, but also how it will be presented to optimize learning, safety and equipment.

Participants in junior sport potentially come into contact with, and are influenced by, a diverse range of people including:

- young people
- parents and carers
- teachers
- coaches
- officials
- administrators
- volunteers

These people are an important resource in junior sport because they provide the necessary infrastructure for its delivery. They also determine the social atmosphere of sport.

The importance of their contribution cannot be underestimated because of the close relationship between the quality of leadership found in sport and the quality of the sport experience for young people.

#### *Strategies for people making it happen*

- Young people are encouraged to become involved in orienteering.
- Parents/carers are encouraged to become involved in orienteering, both as participants and as volunteers. In most cases competitions for adults (both competitive and recreational) are held at the same time as those for juniors, allowing all members of a family to participate at the same time and venue.
- Teachers are encouraged to gain knowledge of orienteering through presentations by Orienteering Victoria at conferences and professional development courses, and the staging of Level 0 coaching courses (Orientation to Orienteering Courses)
- Orienteering Victoria has endorsed the ASC's Codes of Conduct as part of its Member Protection Policy.

- Officials are encouraged to obtain suitable training. A formal accreditation scheme exists for event controllers, who are responsible for overseeing events and making sure that they meet standards (with respect to technical rules, safety etc.).
- Coaches are trained as part of the National Coaching Accreditation Scheme. Level 1 training courses are run regularly. There is a detailed section on handling 'children'.
- All regular participants, regardless of age, are strongly encouraged to become involved in volunteer roles at some stage during the year.

#### *Strategies for quality coaching*

- There is regular coaching of junior squads/teams at the state level. This often takes place in the form of weekend camps/activities which also have a substantial social element.

#### 5. Making Orienteering Safe for Young People and Within The Law

Sports organizers have a legal duty of care to not expose young people to risk in any aspect of providing the sports experience. This is especially important in orienteering in that participants spend a lot of time alone in competition areas. Moreover, while serious accidents seldom happen, the competition areas have potential to be dangerous for young people, so officials, especially course planners, need to take special care with planning courses for juniors. Areas of concern for which advice, training and procedures (written where possible) should be in place include:

- competition venues and courses
- training and preparing for competitions
- infectious diseases
- medical conditions
- drugs
- dealing with emergencies

To protect the welfare of young people in sport, organizations must be aware of the relevant legal issues and put safeguards in place. By doing this you will be protecting both your junior members and the organization.

The legislation relevant to the safety and welfare of participants in junior sport covers:

- discrimination
- child protection
- drugs
- health and safety
- privacy

All of this legislation emphasizes the serious obligations undertaken by any person or organization taking responsibility for the care and/or coaching of children. The

community and the courts have a high expectation that officers of organizations and members of management committees are aware of their legal obligations and taking steps to ensure compliance.

#### *Strategies for making sport safe*

- There are documented technical standards for courses at each difficulty level, covering areas such as navigational standards and safety issues. Event controllers are appointed and are responsible for ensuring that these are followed by event organizers.
- First aid equipment is available at events and there is normally someone with first aid qualifications present at events. For major events a full first-aid presence is maintained using St. John's Ambulance or similar.
- There are documented procedures for ensuring that all competitors are accounted for at the end of an event, and for undertaking searches if a participant is missing.
- Any significant incidents are recorded by event organizers and reported to Orienteering Victoria
- Forest events are generally not held on days of Total Fire Ban when conditions pose a high risk to participants in bush areas.
- Water is provided on courses at regular intervals and at the start and finish of events, and participants are encouraged to drink at regular intervals. Disposable cups are provided to minimize the risk of infectious diseases.
- Sunscreen is provided at events and shades are usually available at the start and finish of events. Most competitions take place in natural shade, and few take place during the middle of the day between October and February.
- Members of representative teams are required to complete a medical questionnaire to provide any relevant information about special needs and conditions.
- Members of representative teams are required to abide by a code of behaviour which covers areas such as alcohol and drug consumption. Any breaches of this code will result in removal from the team concerned.

#### *Strategies for meeting legal obligations*

- Orienteering Victoria has a Member Protection Policy, which covers areas such as harassment, discrimination and child protection.
- As part of the Member Protection Policy, all individuals working directly with children are required to undergo a screening process.
- Orienteering Victoria is a party to Orienteering Australia's Anti-Doping Policy which prohibits the use of performance-enhancing drugs in orienteering.
- Orienteering Victoria has a privacy policy consistent with the National Privacy Principles. In particular, information defined as sensitive under the Privacy Act (such as medical information) is not distributed to people other than those with a specific need for that information, such as team leaders.