



# Parent's Handbook

Long Term Player Development Model

**LY** Volleyball  
Ireland

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## 1.0 Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) for Parents

Many parents wonder what is best for their children when it comes down to choosing a sport, and whether they should focus on one sport early in their development or should they participate in various sports at one time.

This has been a question for many experts and governing bodies across the world. What is best for young players is learning skills and taking part in activities that match their stage of development? This approach is known as Long Term Player Development, or LTPD.

But what are the ‘stages of development’? And what does this mean for you as a parent?

The underlying principle of the LTPD is all about what is best for your child. Volleyball Ireland has been working to develop an LTPD plan specific to Irish Volleyball. It is based on scientific research and the original LTPD model developed by the Canadian Sport Authority, all which tells us that early specialisation, and early intense training doesn’t help the child develop to be the best they could possible be. This is the case for all late specialisation sports which include volleyball.

The evidence shows early specialisation prevents children from developing to their full potential, and in many cases results in ‘burn out’ with children leaving their favourite sport before they reach adult competition.

Volleyball Ireland’s LTPD model provides an 8-stage pathway with learning objectives at each level. The ultimate aim is that all players can reach their potential and go on to lead an active life participating in Volleyball for many years.

You should check out the VI LTPD overview document alongside this parent’s guide, as well as these other handy resources:

<http://www.volleyballireland.com/ltpd>

<http://www.sportparent.eu/en/resources>

<https://www.icoachkids.eu/>

<http://www.volleyballireland.com/safeguarding.html#/>

## 2.0 What is LTPD?

Human development all the way from birth to adulthood is a continuous process. To understand the process better, experts divide human development into distinct stages of development each with specific characteristics.

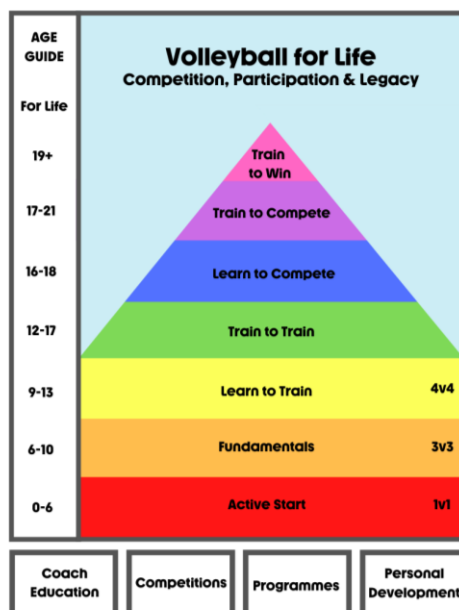
There are eight stages of development, each with its own physical, mental, emotional, and cognitive characteristics. The eight stages make up our Long Term Player Development model, and it’s the basis for the optimal training and competition kids need to enjoy sport the most and perform their best.

The Volleyball Ireland LTPD model includes a range of supports including appropriate competition & programmes, coach education workshops as well as a range of personal development activities for each player. More information on this can be found in the LTPD Overview document.

The following guide outlines the things you can do as a parent to support your child in their sporting endeavour in the early stages of development, as well as things you should know within the latter stages. The document also outlines key messages for improving young player’s mental fitness along the pathway.

We hope this guide will help you and your child have a great sporting experience and reach your child’s full athletic potential, whilst instilling a life long love for Volleyball.

**Unleashing Potential**  
**Volleyball Ireland**  
**Player Development Model**



### 3.0 Why do we need the LTPD model?

Because participation in recreational and competitive volleyball has been limited, and because the international performances and success of Irish volleyball players have been marginal.

Because NOT matching skills and activities to a stage of development has serious negative consequences, and volleyball as well as other sports have been suffering from them for some time. To mention just a few of them:

- Children do not have fun
- Bad habits are developed because of the over-emphasis on winning
- Their skill development is poor
- Players do not reach their optimal performance level
- Many players drop out from sport and burn out

So, what can you do and what should you know as a parent of a developing player to fulfil their full potential and preserve the joy of sport?

## 4.0 Getting an “Active Start”

Intended Ages: 0 to 6years old

This stage is all about children having an active start to life. Making physical activity a fun part of daily life creates the right setting for your child to learn.

Things you can do...

- Keep children active: Children this age should not be sedentary for more than 60 minutes at a time except when they are sleeping.
- Provide unstructured physical activity for at least 30 minutes for toddlers and at least 60 minutes a day for pre-schoolers.
- Ensure that children acquire movement skills that build toward more complex movements. These skills support development of foundation for lifelong physical activity.
- Encourage basic movement skills- they do not just happen as a child grows older but develop depend on child’s heredity, activity experience, and environment.
- Focus on improving basic movement skills such as running, jumping, twisting, kicking, throwing, and catching. These motor skills are the building blocks or more complex movements.
- Design activities that help children to feel competent and comfortable participating in a variety of fun and challenging sports activities.
- Organise some physical activities- get a group of children and parents together and go to the park to let them explore the swings and slides.
- Let children explore their physical environment but keep a watchful eye on them and keep the environment safe. Let the run, jump, climb and swing- it is important for their development.
- This is a great time to get children into introductory gymnastics and swimming programs- not to create elite gymnasts or swimmers but rather provide wonderful learning opportunities in different environments.

Positive, positive, positive!

Be your children’s biggest fan!

Most importantly, tell them you love, support, and believe in them.

## 5.0 FUNDamentals

Intended Ages: 6 to 10

The focus at this stage is on learning fundamental movement skills and building overall motor skills.

Fundamental movement skills are the building blocks of success in sport and life-long enjoyment of physical activity. Children who develop them are more likely to engage in activity both as children, and later as adults.

This is a time when children are probably involved in a minor sport program and have their first coach.

Things you can do...

- Arrange for your children to be physically active every day. Remember that several short bursts of activity are probably better at this stage than one long training session.
- Make sure your children choose sports that focus on running, jumping, throwing, catching, and kicking. Encourage children to build on the gymnastics and swimming activities they started in the Active Start stage.
- Ask sport programs in your community to use trained or certified coaches—they can help children develop the fundamental movement skills.
- Encourage participation in a wide range of sports (Participation in preferred sport once or twice per week, along with participation in other sports three to four times per week). Trying different sports helps children work on their agility, balance, coordination and speed.
- Talk to children about the importance of having fun and enjoying participation. Focusing on results and over-specialising hurts rather than helps later in sport performance.
- Pay attention to the equipment used to improve strength. Children in this stage not use heavy weights or weight machines.

Share your own happiness and support when children show their enjoyment, effort, and creativity!

## 6.0 Learning to Train

Intended Ages: 9 to 13

During this stage, children are ready to learn and refine the general sports skills they need for athletic development and participation in sport and overall health.

Things you can do...

- Help children further develop fundamental movement skills and learn overall sports skills. Don't let them specialise too much too soon- it can have a harmful effect on later skill development.
- Encourage your children to play at least three different sports they enjoy. Also encourage them to engage in unstructured play.
- Identify sports the child enjoys and may have a successful predisposition toward, as enjoyment and success will increase the possibility of the child being active for life.
- Make sure your children do the right kind of strength work. This includes doing activities that use their own body weight (sit-ups, push ups), working with medicine balls and Swiss balls, and hopping and bounding.
- Be aware that training for speed is effective in this stage. Children can develop speed through activities that focus on rapid, darting movements and on fast hand and foot movements. Rapid changes of direction are also great- think tag and dodging type of games.
- Make sure your children get the right amount of competition. Children in this stage enjoy competition, but they must train too. The goal should be 70% activity time in training, 30% in competition. In a team sport, this means 2 or 3 practices for every game.
- If your child is in a team sport, make sure he or she gets a chance to compete. This is not the time for coaches to play only the star players and leave the less-developed players on the sideline. Some of those slower developing children will some day reach the highest levels of performance in their sport.

Continue to believe in your child!

Emphasise effort, teamwork, and respect for others!



## 7.0 Training to Train

Intended Ages: 12 to 17

Players start to specialise in the sport of their choice in this stage. While children start competing more seriously, the major focus during competition is on applying what they have learned in training- not on winning at all costs.

Your involvement in your child’s training probably changes in this stage. Up until now, you’ve most likely been directly involved- helping your child learn movement skills, for example, or starting them out in a sport you enjoy. But in the Training to Train stage, your children are more independent, you are less likely to do sports with them, and your role is more an advisory one.

The focus from here on is on things you need to know as opposed to things you can do.

Things you need to know... (PHV = peak Height Velocity or Growth spurt)

- Stamina training is essential since the body adapts more easily to such training in this stage than at any other time. Running, jogging, biking etc
- Aerobic training is of high priority, particularly toward the second half of this stage, after PHV / a growth spurt has occurred. But children still need to work on developing skill, speed, and strength. They also need to maintain or improve their flexibility as is a time of rapid growth for bones, tendons, ligaments, and muscles.
- Strength training produces better results at sometimes than at other times. These optimum times are called windows of accelerated adaptation. For girls, there are two windows; the first is right after PHV/growth spurt, and the second starts with the onset of menstruation.
- For males there is a single window- about 12 to 18 months after PHV/ growth spurt.
- Children need to learn to cope with the physical and mental challenges of competition. Integrating basic mental preparation skills into training can play big dividends.

Help him/her manage increasing competitive pressure by focusing on the process and de-emphasising winning and outcome!

## 8.0 Learn to Compete

Intended Ages: 16 -18

Players in this stage start to prepare for competitive environments. They must continue to develop and refine technical skills, ancillary skills, and also physical attributes.

Parents be aware that players will require to develop a different mental state as they shift focus to winning matches as opposed to the focus of applying skills in the previous stage.

Training to Competition is still 60% training to 40% competition ratio. This a critical stage of retaining players as they choose to specialise in their individual sports.

Children will start to learn and be involved in more high-pressure environments and therefore these changes should be noted and supported by parents remaining in communication as the player progresses.

Things you need to know...

- Players shift mental focus towards winning
- Training sessions increase especially in intensity and are more position specific
- Players begin to choose their sports. At this stage it recommended players choose sports that complement each other.
- Although the ration remains the same as train to train the mindset has shifted to competitive focus and winning games
- More advanced mental preparation is prevalent at this stage
- The body requires a step up in technical tactical and physical preparation for position specific play

Communicate and give your player space if needed before and during competition!

Celebrate together afterwards

## 9.0 Training to Compete

Intended Ages: 17-21

This stage is about the development of players as young adults. By this stage, they are specialising in one sport and working on event- or position-specific skills and physical demands. They are middle blockers, not setters, outside hitters not liberos.

Everything in this stage is about optimising physical preparation. But there is a caution. Players must FULLY develop their learning to compete skills and physical preparation before starting Training to Compete skills and activities.

Things you need to know...

- Players now train year-round. Training intensity is high, and training is individualised for the player, his or her event, and his or her position.
- Players work on using skills developed in practice in competition conditions. They prepare for high-level competition by modelling, in training, every aspect of what to expect in competition.
- Players select one or, at most, two complementary sports in which to specialise.
- Physical and mental preparation should be individualised, and optimal recovery from training should be determined for each player. Tactical and technical training focuses on building on the player’s strengths and eliminating known weaknesses.
- There is more competition or competition-specific training than general technical/tactical and fitness training. Players should spend about 50% of their activity time in training, and about 50% in competition and preparation for competition.

Showing encouragement, enthusiasm, and excitement around a competition is good, but too much can add extra pressure for a player.

## 10.0 Training to Win

Intended Ages: 19+

This stage is about training to win at the highest levels of sport: International competition. Only the very best and most dedicated reach this stage. Those who succeed in this stage almost always work with highly trained and qualified coaches.

Promote positive communication with your child and provide them with the space required before, during and after a competition!

Things you need to know...

- This is the final stage of player development, and the focus is on maximising fitness preparation and sport performance in all its dimensions under competitive conditions. These dimensions include strength, endurance, flexibility, nutritional preparation, and physiological preparation.
- Success in this stage requires that the required physical, technical, tactical and psychological skills be fully established. It also requires that the physical conditioning groundwork was completed at the developmentally appropriate times.
- Players train to peak at major competitions, and training consists of a relatively high amount of work done at high intensity. Training is carefully planned, with the training year divided into one, two, three or more cycles, depending on the demands of the sport and the individual athlete’s strengths.
- Frequent preventative breaks to prevent physical and mental burnouts are utilised.
- Training-to-competition ratio is now 25:75, with the competition percentage including competition-specific training and actual competition.

## 11.0 Active for Life

Intended Age: Enter at Any Age

Active for life begins at an early age. It can be focused around bringing those kids that are not interested in perhaps playing the sport of volleyball into other aspects of the game, not limited to officiating, marketing, promotion etc. This stage can also be about a smooth transition from a competitive career to lifelong physical activity and involvement in sport. The goal is to make the transition from competitive sports positive and to keep everyone active and involved in sport for life.

Things you need to know...

- Not all kids are players. Other have different skills and can contribute to the development of volleyball in other ways. Thus allowing them to be part of the game for life. It is these kids we must work closely with to find their place within the volleyball community and sport.
- For too many people, the last experience in competitive sport is negative; being cut from a team, not making a performance standard etc. This causes many to drop out of sports altogether, which is bad for both sports and the individual. This needs to change.
- Those leaving competitive sports should be encouraged to try sports where they are predisposed to train and perform well or where their activity, health and social needs can be met. This is most likely to happen if the child mastered fundamental movement skills in the FUNdamentals and Learning to Train stages. This gives them a better chance of succeeding early in any new sports they try.
- Those leaving high-performance competition should also be encouraged to move to less intense competition or master’s events or to participate in other sports at the recreational level.
- Careers in sport, sport management, or coaching could be explored, as could opportunities for entrepreneurial activities related to sport. And of course, there is always room in sport for volunteers as coaches, officials, or administrators.



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