

Stay and Play Research Project

Why is there a trend of teenagers dropping out of sport and what can be done to make them stay and play?

16 key insights and 10 recommendations

Conducted by 18 Ltd
November 2005 – September 2006.



Methodology

Qualitative study with teenagers aged 14 – 17
Nine focus groups across the country

Quantitative study with 277 young people aged 14 – 21
Online research using Research Solution's Conversion Model methodology

Qualitative study with parents, teachers and coaches.
Three parent focus groups consisting of six parents per group (18), four P.E. teachers from four Auckland high schools and three coaches (Swimming, Netball and Soccer)

Qualitative study with relevant Development Managers

- Netball (Kate Agnew; Game Development Manager)
- Touch (Lance Watene; National Junior Development Manager)
- Cricket (Alec Astle; National Development Manager)

During the study a series of definitions were used in order to provide structure and methodology to the project. Definitions include 'Sport' and 'Non-Competitive Sport' and the categorisation of youth and their activity (inactive, active, relatively inactive, sedentary) – Please see Appendix for full definitions.





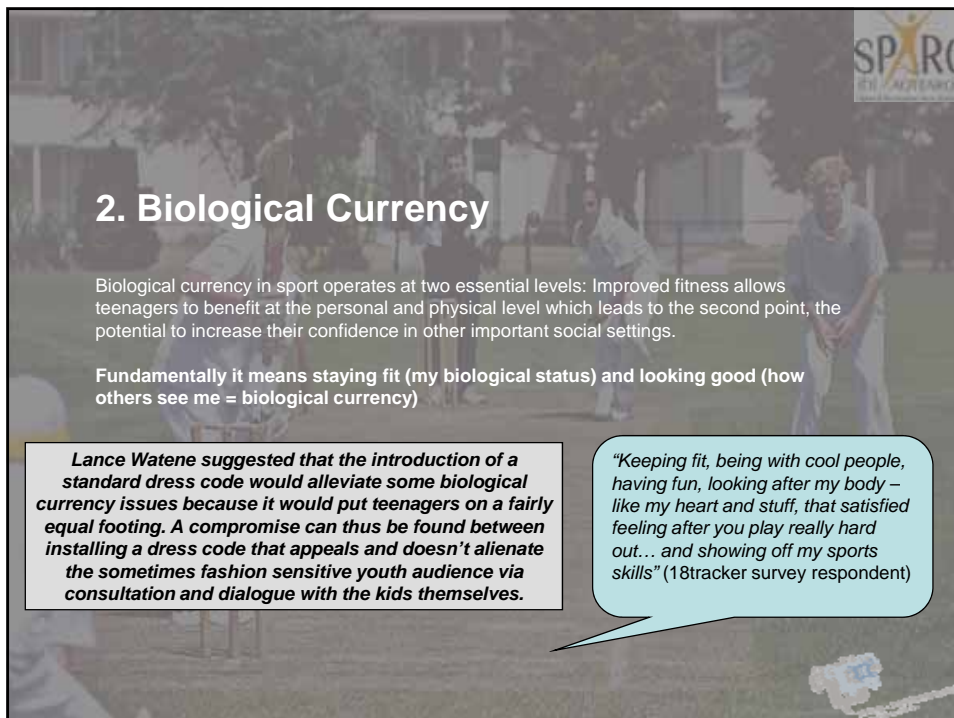
1. Statistics

- 55% of kids are sedentary
- 15% of kids are relatively inactive
- 15% of kids are relatively active
- 15% of kids are active

- 70% of kids who participate in sport drop out between 13 and 17
- 50% of kids don't do any sport
- 62% of kids who play sport indicate they are highly likely to drop out of sport

One in six play five+ hours per week of non-competitive sport during summer / one in 11 in winter

One in 10 play five+ hours of sport during summer / one in six during winter



2. Biological Currency

Biological currency in sport operates at two essential levels: Improved fitness allows teenagers to benefit at the personal and physical level which leads to the second point, the potential to increase their confidence in other important social settings.

Fundamentally it means staying fit (my biological status) and looking good (how others see me = biological currency)

Lance Watene suggested that the introduction of a standard dress code would alleviate some biological currency issues because it would put teenagers on a fairly equal footing. A compromise can thus be found between installing a dress code that appeals and doesn't alienate the sometimes fashion sensitive youth audience via consultation and dialogue with the kids themselves.

"Keeping fit, being with cool people, having fun, looking after my body – like my heart and stuff, that satisfied feeling after you play really hard out... and showing off my sports skills" (18tracker survey respondent)

3. Social Currency

Sport is not limited to what happens during four quarters, 50 overs or 80 minutes. There is so much more happening on and off the sports field. Friends and active participation in a sporting environment ultimately has the power to enrich teenagers' social relationships and improve their social skills.

"Social Currency" tells us that sport has a vital social function and should not be viewed as an activity that is only about winning.

25% of the audience claim their **PRIMARY** motivation to participate in sport was **"FUN"**
 12% say **"SOCIAL INTERACTION"**

"A lot of people will play for the fun of it. You'll never win every game, but you've gotta have fun – that's it. Having fun and making new friends" (15 year old Auckland male, Touch player).

"The kids enjoy the social side of it, the camaraderie you get in sport... and they develop long-lasting friendships" (Soccer coach)

4. Professionalism

Professionalism is about the organisation, facilitation and supervision of sports that directly or indirectly encourages teenagers to play sport in a positive way.

Coaches who encourage and show their players respect provide the best results, incorporating and encouraging feedback as opposed to a top-down, dictatorial approach.

Good organisation is an absolute critical key to maintaining participation – kids who witness disorganised events, training etc **WILL DEFINITELY** walk away.

This issue appeared to be most evident and worrying for the more 'social' or lower league teams and created a feeling that these participants weren't good enough to warrant the same treatment as others who played in the top teams. This issue of kids walking away is extremely important and must be addressed.

"Kids are drawn to good organisation. In a world where the world moves beneath them on a constant basis, it's enjoyable for them to be part of something that's organised and structured" (Alec Astle)

"The best coaches would be the coaches who have also played the sport and still do a little social, they give the most encouragement and the moral traits" (Central Auckland parent)

"Bad coaches are coaches that are negative and don't know how to relate to you" (18tracker survey respondent)

5. Excuses

As with people in general, kids use excuses not to do something and in this study we isolated the excuses to not play sport from the real reasons:

Excuses

- Sport is no longer important anymore because I can drop it at school
- It's too time consuming
- Sport is boring
- Sport means I miss out on parties and socialising

Real reasons

- Friends have dropped out which breaks up the social circle
- Too scared to play because of the threat of injury
- It's intimidating – being laughed at for ability / making mistakes
- Sport is too competitive

"The time factor, as it requires a lot of commitment. The reason I quit Cricket was that you spend your whole Saturday playing, sometimes there is boredom and repetitiveness, training can be a bitch and also if I'm not very good at that particular sport it makes me want to quit or not participate" (18tracker survey respondent)

"I don't enjoy sport, I'm not competitive, I'm not an outdoorsy type. Sport of any sort just isn't my thing. I don't have any skill" (18tracker survey respondent).

6. Distractions

Several other de-motivators are able to affect the enthusiasm or amount of time teenagers devote to sports participation in their early-to-mid teenage years.

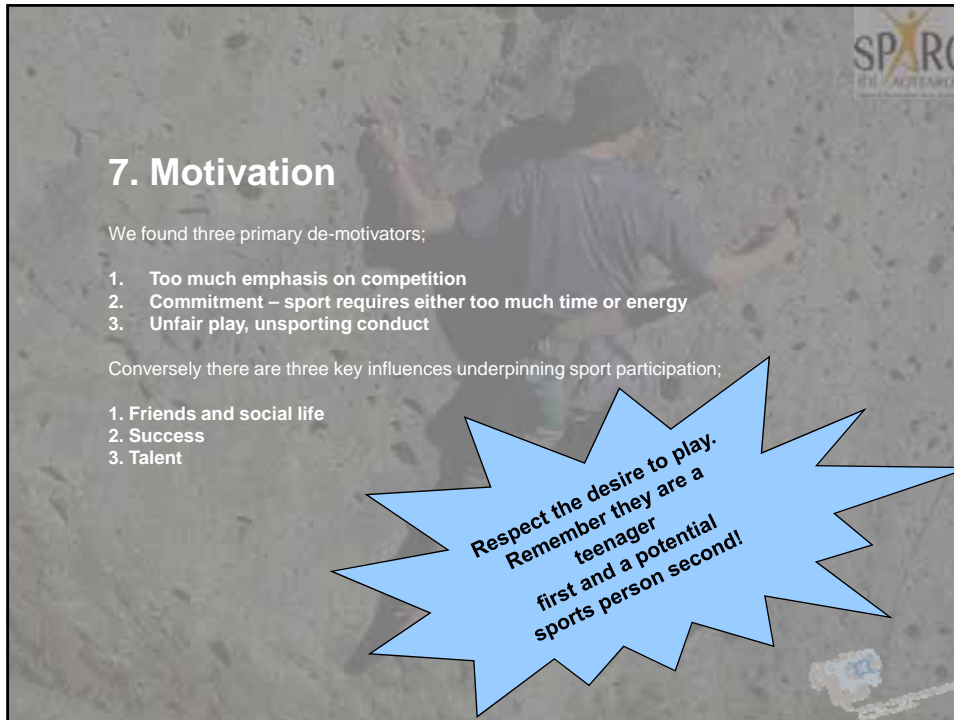
Institutional De-motivators (Homework, NCEA, studying)

Financial De-motivators (Part-time employment)

School pressures and part-time work commitments are distractions which SPARC will find difficult to overcome or challenge.

"The main reason [I dropped out] was I wasn't getting any work done and I decided to concentrate more on studies.... It was always after school and it went on for two or three hours and I'd get home at like 7pm and I'd be all dirty and muddy, have a shower, eat dinner and then go to sleep. I had no time" (19 year old Auckland female, past Touch player)

"I think one of the major things is that when you're like 15 you start looking for jobs so you can get money coming in regularly. If you want good money, then you probably work in the weekends" (Timaru focus group participant).



7. Motivation

We found three primary de-motivators;

1. Too much emphasis on competition
2. Commitment – sport requires either too much time or energy
3. Unfair play, unsporting conduct

Conversely there are three key influences underpinning sport participation;

1. Friends and social life
2. Success
3. Talent

**Respect the desire to play.
Remember they are a teenager
first and a potential
sports person second!**



8. Time and Commitment

Looking at the main activities that are undertaken by at least 50% of the respondents over the course of a week we get an idea of their time commitments.

More than five hours are spent on each of the following:
Downloading / listening to music, hanging out with friends, part-time work, using the internet.

More than three hours are spent:
Doing homework, spending time with family and a minimum of two hours playing computer games.

Although we can't change the need to hang out with friends or enjoy music, we can integrate these activities into sport at suitable times. More insightful however is that...

- Nearly 50% of kids say that they could be convinced to reduce their time on the internet
 - Over half are essentially bored and don't like doing nothing
- Nearly two thirds will reduce the time spent playing computer games

9. Sport is Cool

Hanging out with friends and listening to music rank as the coolest activities - 86% say these activities are becoming cool or are the pinnacle of cool.

Non-competitive sports is the third coolest thing on the list (69%)

Sport is ranked as being just as cool as going shopping, using the internet and going to pubs and bars.

Things like going shopping and internet usage is starting to show signs of losing cool.

"Sport is so cool and you get to know new people"
(18Tracker respondent)

"A lot of my friends played as well, so we actually all saw each other on Saturday mornings. If you wanted to do something on a Saturday you couldn't really back out 'cos you were committed to Netball. When you're at that age it's very cool – everyone's playing" (18 year old Auckland female, past Netball player).

10. Parents

Some parents view sport as a vehicle that improves life skills such as team work, communication, discipline and general social skills. Accordingly they fully support the child with time commitment, travel assistance, financial support and encouragement.

However, as the child becomes more independent, parental support and encouragement shifts from sport to participation in other activities and independence begins.

Some parents abdicate their role to schools, coaches etc.

Parents view the coach as the key influencer.


Successful participation.

If a parent is into sport (active or passive) then the likelihood of drop out decreases significantly

GET PARENTS INVOLVED – MAKE IT FUN, GET THEIR BUY IN!

Cricket's 'Have a Go – be a coach program' provides a successful case study of how to get parents involved.

"In 6 years we have had 10,000 Mums and Dads become Have a Go coaches... Learning skills keeps you in the sport both from the kid's perspective and the parents' perspective.... It's about developing the link between parents and playing."
(Alec Astle – Cricket).



11. Competition


The single most common attribute associated with Sport is 'Competitive' (97%). The second is "Something you do while at school" (79%).

Attributes least associated with sports are 'Can do even if not talented' (19%) and 'Can do whenever I want' (16%).

Non-competitive sports on the other hand had a 'Can do at any age' and 'Cool' attributes associated with them.

"I do realise that it's quite competitive. You get a bit nervous because you don't want to lose because everyone would be angry with you 'cos you'd let the ball go past. But most of the time you're just there to try and enjoy it" (14 year old Auckland respondent, Touch player).

"When you're young there's heaps of teams that you can get into but as you get older it slowly fades out and there's just less and less teams and to get into them you have to be like highly competitive to even find a team to play in" (Tauranga focus group participant).



12. Engagement

Acknowledging the wide range of people, how they connect with each other and the various networks that underpin the teenage sports system is another major key to driving youth sports participation forward:

PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT ensures that everyone from parents, coaches, teachers and youth themselves get to have their say about sports participation;

VIRTUAL ENGAGEMENT takes full advantage of both the new *and* traditional technologies that are widely available to help maximise youth involvement in sport;

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT recognises the significant role that school, family and friends play in sport. If these groups are accommodated sport can become an inclusive and collective social space.

Talk with the parents and the teachers – they control the kids.

Text communication breaks down barriers with the kids

PR is good – utilise the community and promote support

13. Language

Opening the channels of communication between both coaches and their teams is vital for ensuring teenage sports participation is a **POSITIVE** experience for all involved.

Communication between coaches and their teams must follow an interactive model which moves beyond the so-called authoritative (i.e. "top-down") approach in favour of a more constructive two-way model where all parties listen to each other.

Respect and understanding can be grown from the ground up when the right kind of language is used by participants in the school sports system.

"Don't tell them they're wrong, it kills them. Never abuse your players in your team – never abuse them. Yell but you've got to yell positive. Yell encouragement – don't yell because they stuffed up"
(Netball Coach)

"We had rules like no girlfriends, no mobiles, you're here to play, these things are just a distraction.... When I asked them what they wanted they said, 'we want you to discipline us when we don't behave'" (Alex Astle)

"You want a coach that will take advice from you as well – he might not know everything but you might be able to give him some pointers" (17 year old Christchurch male, Cricket player)

14. Non-Competitive Sport

Understanding non-competitive sport provides some essential clues to the attraction of sport and the way today's youth have elected to customise their chosen physical activity.

Non-competitive sport is rated as cool and second only to hanging out with mates and listening to music. Competitive or traditional sport can learn the following from this maverick consumption of sport:

Competitiveness and ability are no longer barriers to participation – participation itself is enough and 'having a go' creates a sense of inclusiveness and belonging

Language and professionalism are still relevant factors but they are adhered to on a more democratic level. The rules are subsequently changed to suit the participants and environment to ensure everyone can 'play' and that no one is excluded

Social – this is the key ingredient of **ALL** non-competitive sport. Even structured 'social' teams would potentially classify themselves as non-competitive because for some the goal is not to win the game but rather a chance to get together, do the best they can and ultimately have 'fun'

The Push Play campaign is a fantastic vehicle for promoting this activity. Traditional or competitive sport should challenge itself and ask how many of the principles of non-competitive sport such as 'having a go', 'play', 'fun' and 'inclusive' are active in its set up.

15. Leave School, Leave Sport

The change of life stage between leaving school and going on to tertiary study or work creates a moment in time where sport participation is once again threatened.

The following factors come into play or dramatically increase in terms of importance:

Leaving home
 Greater financial responsibility
 Friends change
 Alcohol consumption increases
 Career
 Relationships / sex

As much as we are not able to control most of the above we can control a key finding from the study:

Trying to find somewhere to play sport in the post-school world can be difficult or too hard thus we fuel the excuse 'I don't know where to go'

"We make it easy for them at school....
 They don't have to think or seek... and
 schools train them not to look"
 (Kate Agnew – Netball NZ)

"They [schools and clubs] could work together heaps more.... One of my goals was to increase that club contact because you do want the kids to carry on and maintain sport after they've left but a lot of them just don't know who to approach, where to go and what to do"
 (P.E. Teacher, Lynfield College).

16. Part-Time Work

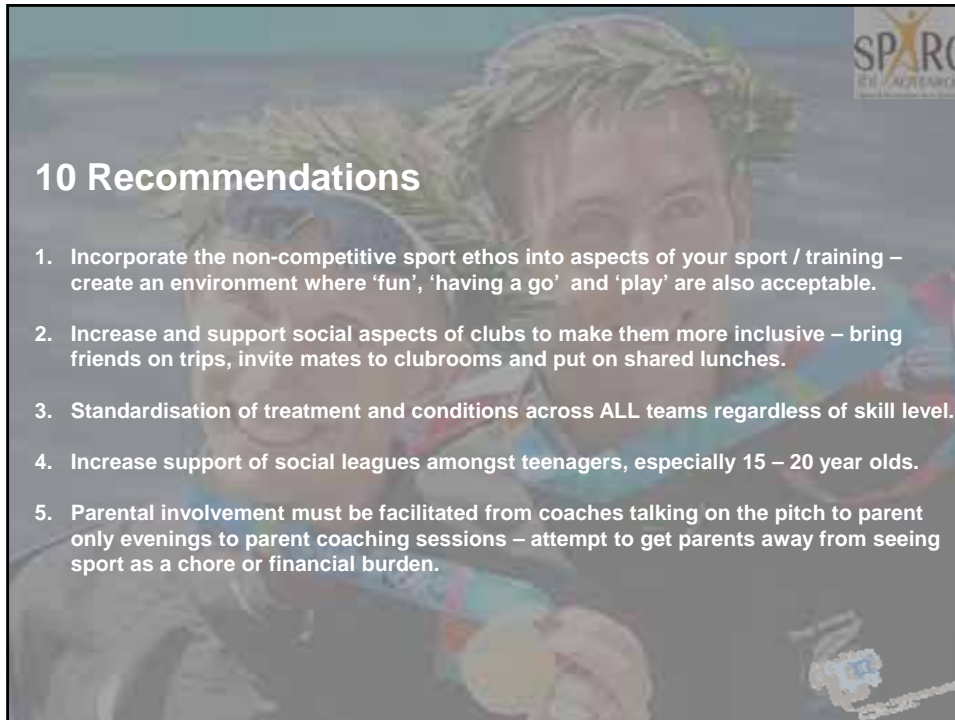
Part-time work is an area where parents have varying levels of influence. Employment is seen by some parents as a mechanism that can provide access to the next stage of life skills development which in turn can undermine teenage sports participation.

More importantly part-time employment provides freedom and choice through financial gain that both parents and teenagers find desirable.

Possible strategies:

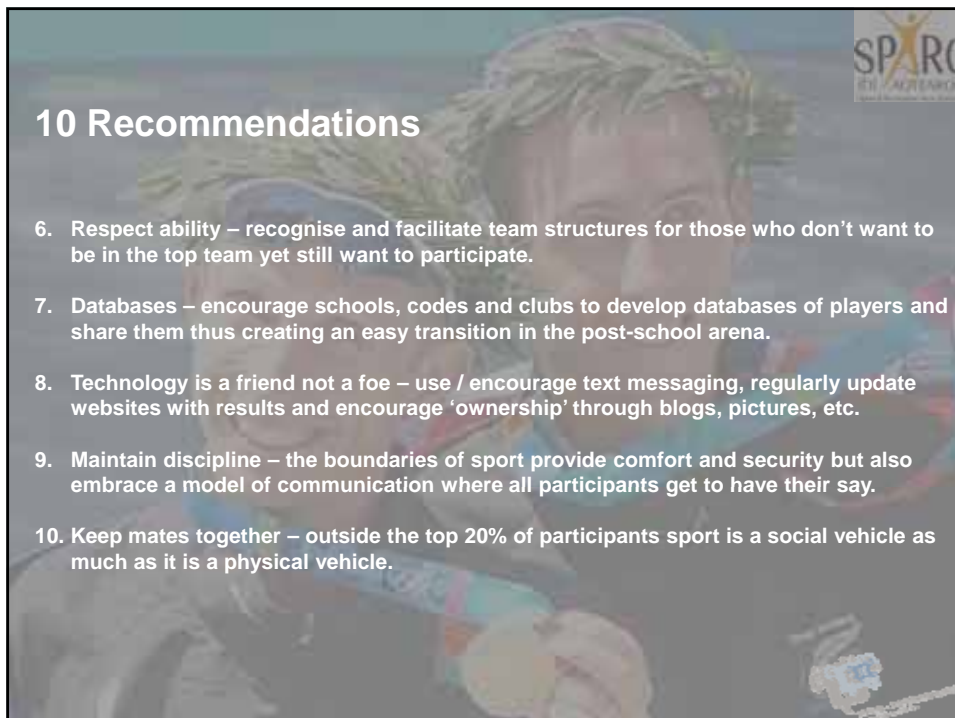
1. Communicate with employers – Kate Agnew provided examples where she had spoken to employers about time off for events on behalf of teenagers because they were too scared to ask.
2. Scheduling – Just because training has always been on a Thursday night it doesn't mean it should continue. Create opportunities for negotiation in order to discuss schedules.

* The issue of scheduling was mentioned as one of the key reasons for the drop out by rugby players. In a society where corporate responsibility and obesity are buzz words there must be an opportunity to facilitate constructive dialogue with major youth employers.



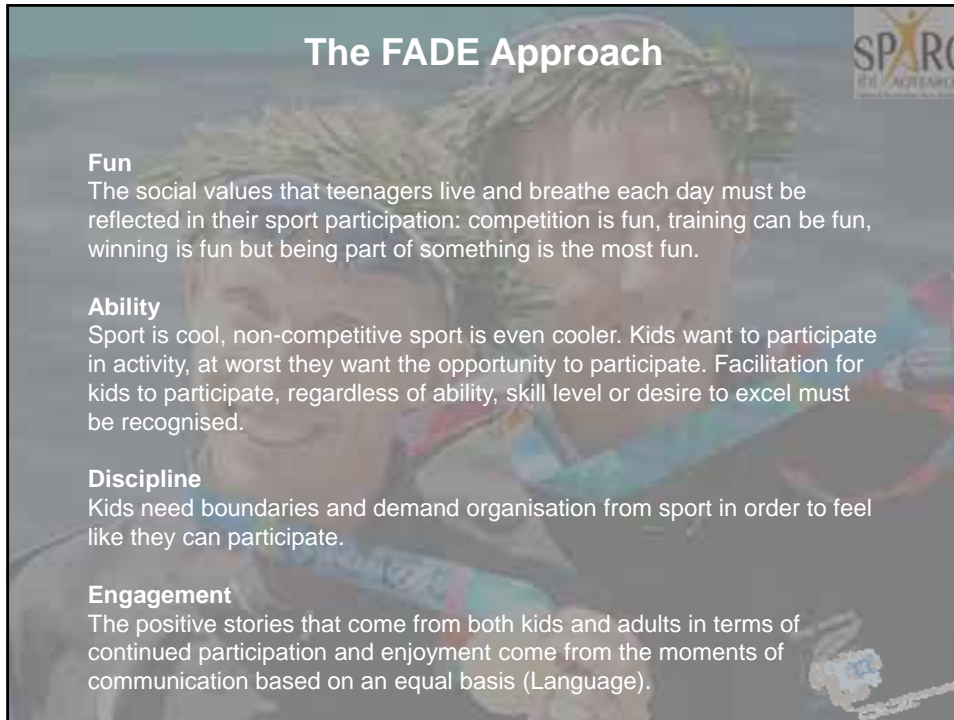
10 Recommendations

1. Incorporate the non-competitive sport ethos into aspects of your sport / training – create an environment where ‘fun’, ‘having a go’ and ‘play’ are also acceptable.
2. Increase and support social aspects of clubs to make them more inclusive – bring friends on trips, invite mates to clubrooms and put on shared lunches.
3. Standardisation of treatment and conditions across ALL teams regardless of skill level.
4. Increase support of social leagues amongst teenagers, especially 15 – 20 year olds.
5. Parental involvement must be facilitated from coaches talking on the pitch to parent only evenings to parent coaching sessions – attempt to get parents away from seeing sport as a chore or financial burden.



10 Recommendations

6. Respect ability – recognise and facilitate team structures for those who don't want to be in the top team yet still want to participate.
7. Databases – encourage schools, codes and clubs to develop databases of players and share them thus creating an easy transition in the post-school arena.
8. Technology is a friend not a foe – use / encourage text messaging, regularly update websites with results and encourage ‘ownership’ through blogs, pictures, etc.
9. Maintain discipline – the boundaries of sport provide comfort and security but also embrace a model of communication where all participants get to have their say.
10. Keep mates together – outside the top 20% of participants sport is a social vehicle as much as it is a physical vehicle.



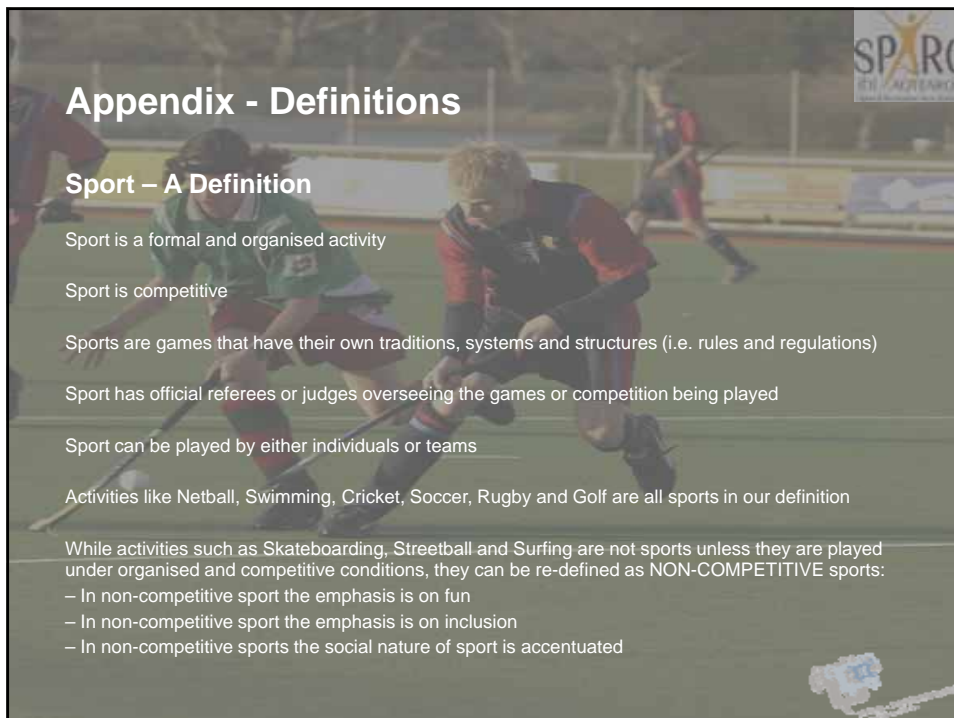
The FADE Approach

Fun
The social values that teenagers live and breathe each day must be reflected in their sport participation: competition is fun, training can be fun, winning is fun but being part of something is the most fun.

Ability
Sport is cool, non-competitive sport is even cooler. Kids want to participate in activity, at worst they want the opportunity to participate. Facilitation for kids to participate, regardless of ability, skill level or desire to excel must be recognised.

Discipline
Kids need boundaries and demand organisation from sport in order to feel like they can participate.

Engagement
The positive stories that come from both kids and adults in terms of continued participation and enjoyment come from the moments of communication based on an equal basis (Language).



Appendix - Definitions

Sport – A Definition

Sport is a formal and organised activity

Sport is competitive

Sports are games that have their own traditions, systems and structures (i.e. rules and regulations)

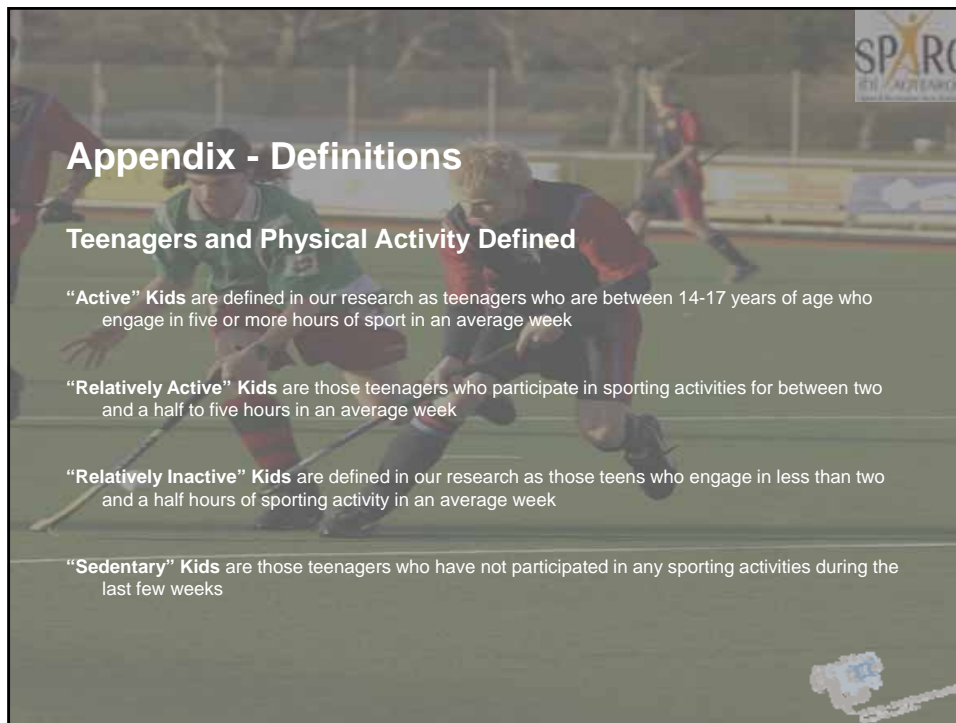
Sport has official referees or judges overseeing the games or competition being played

Sport can be played by either individuals or teams

Activities like Netball, Swimming, Cricket, Soccer, Rugby and Golf are all sports in our definition

While activities such as Skateboarding, Streetball and Surfing are not sports unless they are played under organised and competitive conditions, they can be re-defined as NON-COMPETITIVE sports:

- In non-competitive sport the emphasis is on fun
- In non-competitive sport the emphasis is on inclusion
- In non-competitive sports the social nature of sport is accentuated



Appendix - Definitions

Teenagers and Physical Activity Defined

“Active” Kids are defined in our research as teenagers who are between 14-17 years of age who engage in five or more hours of sport in an average week

“Relatively Active” Kids are those teenagers who participate in sporting activities for between two and a half to five hours in an average week

“Relatively Inactive” Kids are defined in our research as those teens who engage in less than two and a half hours of sporting activity in an average week

“Sedentary” Kids are those teenagers who have not participated in any sporting activities during the last few weeks