



Your Questions Answered

In response to our last article on Triathlon and Parenting, a number of you wrote in with questions on how to best help and support your children in pursuit of their triathlon goals. Here's a selection of those questions from parents and responses from our resident coaching expert, Wayne Goldsmith.

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“Dear Wayne. How do you involve your child in your own (i.e. adult level) training when they are interested but do not have the ability to train at our level?” Julie and Rob Spence, Victoria (via email).

The first great thing about your question is that you recognise children and adults have very different needs when it comes to triathlon training and racing.

Children are not little adults: they need training programs and racing schedules that are appropriate to their age, growth and training background.

As a general guide, keep kids' triathlon training programs focused on the five S principles:

1. **Stamina:** help them to develop a good background (base) of aerobic training through regular swim, bike and run sessions at low intensity, i.e. 60-to-70 per cent of maximum.
2. **Speed:** help them to develop real speed by learning to sprint with good technique over very short distances with lots of rest, e.g. 15-to-20-metre swimming efforts, 10-to-20-second efforts on the bike and 20-to-80-metre sprints on the running track.
3. **Skills:** help them to develop outstanding skills and technique in the pool, on the

road and on the track. For example, provide them with the opportunity to master cornering, braking, climbing, descending and accelerating on the bike.

4. **Suppleness (flexibility):** help them to develop flexibility and mobility.
5. **Stability:** help them to develop a strong, stable core, i.e. to develop their core muscles in their abdomen and sides and lower and upper back.

“Dear Wayne. My kids love to race but how do you make training for triathlon fun so you maintain their interest?” David P, Queensland (via email)

Kids today learn very fast and they also get bored very quickly. They have the ability to be working on a laptop while watching TV, listening to music, updating Facebook, tweeting and texting their friends all at the same time.

The greatest challenge for triathlon coaches all over the world is to develop training programs for kids that are fun, challenging, interesting and engaging yet at the same time appropriate to prepare kids to race effectively in triathlon. It's not easy!

However, the way that kids

interact with the electronic world has given us the key to coaching them. We need to make sure that training includes plenty of variety and that we endeavour to keep the training environment interesting, exciting and entertaining.

The old way of coaching kids was to give them a lot of hard work and expect them to do it without question. Now we have to find ways of encouraging them to work hard – there are no short cuts – but to do it in such a way as to keep their hearts and minds engaged with the program, so, in this order, think:

- **FUN** – make training enjoyable;
- **FRIENDS** – provide training environments where kids can work together;
- **FITNESS** – progressively build fitness and all the attributes required to compete in triathlon.

“Dear Wayne. My son is 15 and plays AFL. He loves footy but also loves triathlon. Can he manage to train for both or does he have to specialise on one sport?” Peter Jessop, Western Australia (via email).

Fifteen is an interesting and challenging age for everyone. Your son is no doubt also studying hard, growing up, has

an active social life and he is playing footy and training for triathlon. Add to that eating and sleeping and he has about as much free time as the Prime Minister!

Fifteen is a real 'choice' age. At 15 he will be asked to choose school subjects that will lead him to his future career.

And increasingly he will need to make choices about which sport he would like to specialise in as a senior athlete. As the training demands for any sport are highly specific, it will be harder and harder for him to remain seriously competitive in both sports.

The real question is this: which sport, AFL or Triathlon, is he most passionate about? In the long term, it is passion that is the most critical indicator of future success in any sport.

If he chooses AFL – and AFL is what he is most passionate about – then give him your full support and unconditional love. If triathlon is his first choice, then also love and support him to your best ability.

And if he chooses AFL, there's nothing wrong with a bit of swimming, cycling and running in the off season and of course, when his footy career is over, we will welcome him back into the sport of triathlon with

open arms as an age grouper and help him prepare for his first ironman! That's the great thing about triathlon – at any age at any stage – you're welcome.

“Hi Wayne. Our daughter is 13 and she has been swimming four-to-five times a week for three years. She'd like to start training and racing triathlon. How much training should she be doing? Stephanie Owen, New South Wales.

The first thing is that at 13, please encourage her to keep swimming. Swimming is such a skills-based sport and it will be a great advantage for her triathlon career if she keeps up regular swimming training.

We don't focus on age, i.e. chronological age, in triathlon, so much as training age. Training age relates to how long a triathlete has been involved in regular triathlon training.

So as your daughter has been training for swimming for three years, her swimming training age is three. However, her triathlon training age is zero and it is important she takes time to develop excellence in skills, great technique and the five 'S's (see previous page).

As a general guide, for the first three years of her triathlon training program, progressively add one cycling and one running training session per week, for example:

In her first year of triathlon training, try introducing one

cycling session and one running session per week and decrease her swimming training schedule by one session, i.e. four swim sessions, one cycling session, one run session per week for a total of six sessions per week.

In her second year of triathlon training, add another cycling and running session per week and decrease her swimming load by one session, i.e. three swim sessions, two bike sessions and two run sessions: that's seven triathlon training sessions per week.

And in her third year of triathlon training, when she's 16 years of age, add one more cycling and running session, i.e. three swim sessions, three bike sessions and three run sessions, (nine sessions in total each week) for a nicely balanced program that will see her transition successfully from specialist swimmer to teenage triathlete.

The key to ensuring the sustainable success of a young triathlete's career is in the three Ps:

- Plan – systematically increase their training load over time;
- Progressive – increase training load little by little. And think in terms of years of training, not weeks or months;
- Patience – give her your love and support and be patient as she develops the skills, techniques and abilities she needs to be a successful triathlete. 



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