



PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

Winter Sport Parent Information



Varying maturation rates can lead to misleading competition outcomes for athletes in the middle and high school years.

Puberty can be a challenging time for our kids on many fronts. The peak of the adolescent growth spurt occurs at around 12 years old for girls and 14 for boys. During this time, adolescents are undergoing physical changes that allow them to make rapid gains in endurance and strength. At the peak of the growth spurt, there is often a period of awkwardness where coordination is negatively affected and it is more difficult than normal to learn new skills. Patience and persistence are traits we need to encourage and praise during this period.

Using the USSA Training Systems for athletes who mature at different rates:

The [USSA Training System matrix](#) for each sport is broken into six developmental phases. Each developmental phase is based on three factors: the athlete's biological age (physical maturation), chronological age and training age (years in their sport). When using the matrix to identify what your child should focus on, use the biological age rather than just their age, assuming that their training age matches with the phase and that they have a strong foundation in the areas of emphasis from the previous phases.

Watch three-time Olympic medalist and SSWSC athlete Johnny Spillane reflect on his challenges as a late maturing athlete [here](#).

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EARLY AND LATE MATURERS

In the early adolescent years, physical maturation between two children that are the same age can vary by as much as five to six years. In a sport like alpine skiing, where strength and size are advantageous, or cross country skiing, where stamina is so important; the skier who matures early can gain a distinct advantage. Likewise, a skier or rider who matures much later than his or her peers has some unique challenges. The impact of different maturation rates on results is evident in all sports at the SSWSC to some degree, but there are things we can do as parents to help our children balance the effects and keep the right long-term outlook.

Early maturing skiers and riders can see a boost in their results due to their gains in strength and stamina. These gains occur regardless of the effort they put into practice (though with greater effort the gains will be even more rapid). Sometimes early maturers will back off of their training, either because they experience success without work so they don't see a need to work hard, or because they already stand out physically and they don't want to stand out athletically as well for social or emotional reasons. Many have success despite technical skill deficiencies, and may be unmotivated to work on these skills because based on their results, they think that it is beneath them. Their success may enable them to compete in a higher level series where they have less time to train. This may not be in their best interest – at least to the point additional starts would impact training time. With early maturing skiers and riders, rather than emphasizing results, we need to focus on their effort and motivation. This can be the worst possible time for a skier or rider to back off. Strategies can include exposure to competitive opportunities against older athletes who are similar in biological age to challenge them. However, social and emotional needs must be factored in and in most cases the bulk of their time should be spent with their age group peers, which allows them more time to work on their technical fundamentals that often are weaker than their results would indicate. Early maturers are prone to dropout later in their high school years if they're overly focused on results and lack attention to the fundamentals.

For late maturing athletes, it can be a game of catch up. One of the biggest challenges for these skiers and riders is a belief that they are further behind than they really are, particularly where results are emphasized over development. However, those that stick with it are often resilient and gritty competitors. They are forced to work harder to keep up and the benefit really kicks in as they get bigger and stronger later on. Late maturers have more time before puberty to solidify their fundamental skills and often have better agility and coordination into early adulthood than their early maturing peers. These advantages do translate into results, eventually. For these athletes we provide extra encouragement and let them know that things will even out later on. De-emphasize results and provide opportunities that allow them to gain confidence. Late maturers are prone to early dropout due to frustration, but those that continue to participate tend to have long careers.

In the end there are many examples of both early and late maturers who reach the highest levels in skiing and snowboarding. Over the long run there is no proven advantage to either. Our children will tend to have similar maturation rates as we had. Understanding the impact of maturation on their experiences helps us to keep their performances in perspective and guide them to deal with the adversity of the adolescent years in sport in a positive way.