



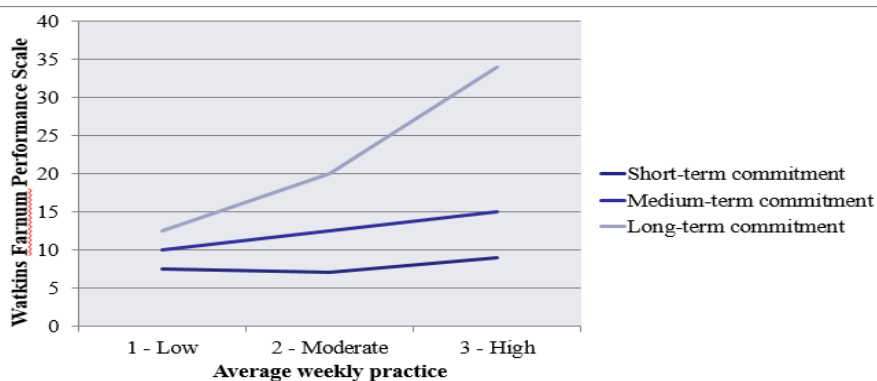
PARENTING FOR SUCCESS

Winter Sport Parent Information



POWER OF INTRINSIC MOTIVATION

How can our kids get the most out of quality practice? Some research says the answer is actually an idea in our children's minds about their expectations of the future. A study was done by Dr. Gary McPherson to determine why some children progress quickly at music lessons while others don't. The results were striking and I believe there are parallels to participation in sport. Based on responses to the question "how long do you think you'll play your new instrument", the children were put into one of three groups based on their response – either short-, medium- or long-term commitment. They were then tracked based on the amount they practiced and how well they performed for several years. All kinds of factors were identified and measured that could differentiate performance for these young musicians; things from IQ, to sense of rhythm, to income level, and on. Of all these, the most significant factor by far was the child's early motivation to continue playing. The graph is below.



Intrinsic motivation is not something we can simply give our children. Their motivations will change from time to time. When children become motivated to pursue skiing or snowboarding more intently, they set themselves on a course where success isn't easy and the road to mastery is long. Many life skills are learned along the way. Skiing and riding are also lifelong, family-oriented sports. These factors may lead us to encourage our children to pursue the sports at a greater level. However, without their true buy-in, as shown by the graph to the right, frustration can be a result, especially if results are the main emphasis. To create an environment where your child is most likely to develop the motivation for skiing or snowboarding as a long-term pursuit, consider these ideas:

- Be sure your children's early exposure to sport is fun and is on their terms.
- Use lots of positive encouragement when they are first starting out.
- The duration and amount of sessions should leave your children wanting more – don't push too much too soon.
- Use imagery – let them see videos of great skiers or snowboarders, hang posters, check out books at the library, etc.
- Tune in to what they enjoy about skiing and riding, and make sure those things are available as often as possible.
- [Let them decide](#) the level they want to pursue their sport.

Two things stand out. When the child has a strong vision of their future self in their activity, it lays the ground work for long-term commitment. It is akin to the child's intrinsic motivation. With intrinsic motivation, practice is much more meaningful and is much more likely to lead to great improvements in performance. Conversely, when the child does not identify with a future in their activity, practice has little impact on performance. The lack of progress from the children in the short-term commitment group (darker blue line), whether they had a low amount of practice (20 minutes/week) or a high amount of practice (90 minutes/week), is stark. The ones that practiced a lot must have had some motivation to do so, likely prodding from parents or their teachers. But this type of external motivation had little impact compared with the intrinsically motivated group (light blue line). With a high amount of practice, those with a future vision, the ones with intrinsic motivation, outperformed their less motivated peers by over 400%! The intrinsically motivated children who only practiced 20 minutes a week also outperformed the less motivated group who practiced more than four times as much by a significant amount!

What does this mean for us as parents? For our children to excel in sport, or other activities, we cannot discount *their* motivations. When we push them to do more before they are ready, improved results are not likely to follow even with additional high quality training. If we give them the freedom to discover what they truly love and value, they will develop a future vision of themselves in the sport, and the boost they receive from training can quickly make up for lost time. Not all children develop intrinsic motivation at the same time, but when they do, the chance for them to excel with quality practice is great.

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