

SCHOOL
GAMES

Positive Experiences of Competition

School & Teacher Toolkit



YOUTH
SPORT
TRUST

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Competition is an emotive word, it can trigger feelings of dread, excitement and many other emotions in all of us but one thing is for certain, competition is a significant part of life within and beyond sport in school, in the community and in broader society. Competition can occur when you are striving towards a goal **by yourself, with or against others**. Learning not to fear it, to thrive in it and accurately reflect on it is crucial to flourishing in life.

Sports competitions can provide **positive outcomes** for young people but also have the capacity to foster negative outcomes. A positive experience can support the physical, emotional, social and personal development of a young person and encourage **life-long enjoyment and engagement in physical activity**. This includes developing important life skills such as leadership, teamwork, empathy and conflict resolution. In contrast, without careful planning, sports competitions can promote overly aggressive behaviour, rejection, fear of failure and the development of a negative mindset.

Understanding **when** and **how** sports competitions provide both positive and negative outcomes is vital in our ability to design and deliver experiences that effectively meet a young person's **motivation, competence, and confidence** levels. Evidence from YST Research has revealed that young people self-report that the best thing about taking part in sport and physical activity is **“fun”**. This is supported by further research which cites fun as the primary reason for sustained participation in sport. The simple idea of fun (e.g. ‘messing around’ or laughing) is not shown to be the most reliable indicator of enjoyment within sport. Instead, events with **engagement, meaning and purpose** were key contributors to what ‘fun’ means in sports. The fun-factors that were shown to be of primary importance amongst young people were:

- > **Trying Hard**
- > **Positive Team Dynamics**
- > **Positive Coaching**

The School Games aims to provide every child with a positive experience in an environment where the young person's **motivation, competence and confidence** are at the centre of the competition. The following toolkit is designed to support teachers of all children (i.e. primary, secondary, special and alternative provision settings) to carefully consider their part in reducing the risk of a negative experience in sports competitions. It is intended to help you to **select, prepare and support** more young people to have a positive experience of competition.

PRINCIPLES OF COMPETITION

1. The young person's motivation, competence and confidence are at the centre of the competition.
2. The focus is on the process rather than the outcome (on the learning and values development of the young person rather than the result).
3. Volunteers, leaders and officials are appropriately trained and display behaviours reflective of the nature of the competition.
4. The environment is safe and creates opportunities to learn and maximise social development.
5. The facility and the environment that is created for the competition reflects the motivations, competence and confidence of the young people and format of the competition.

The 'Road to Competition'

When you understand more about what makes a positive experience of competition for young people, you can recognise that your role in supporting this starts before the day of competition itself and may look very different for each individual depending on their 'own starting point'.

The following “**Road to Competition**” framework is designed to help guide you through a self-review process. From our pilot project insight, we found **the three biggest priorities for change** were to ensure the **selection, preparation** and **support** given to young people is fit for purpose:

- 1. Selection:** Think about your young people first – who in your school needs the benefits of competition the most to support their personal development? This involves understanding the motivations for taking part that young people have before you enter or create competitive opportunities that meet their needs.
- 2. Preparation:** Preparing young people to be competition ready – a competition is much more than an isolated event. Ensuring time is spent building confidence and knowledge as well as developing physical competence will help young people to thrive and grow in competitive situations.
- 3. Supporting a positive experience:** Through creating a supportive environment that focuses on the process as opposed to final standings or who lifts the trophy, teachers, parents and peers can help a young person to **understand** and perceive an experience to be positive or negative.

These ideas and more form a part of this framework, that will help you to make the most of competition, starting with the realisation that less is more and competition is for the many, not just the few.



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On your marks (Selection)

Identify young person in need

Do you have a group of young people with a similar need (eg: confidence) OR similar motivations (eg: team game) that can each benefit from the same competition experience?



Recruit and communicate

How will you attract and invite the young people that need it most to train and compete?



STEP 1



STEP 2

Find the right competition

How does the identified competition match the needs of your YP?

STEP 3



STEP 4

Purposeful preparation

How do you prepare the YP physically and mentally over a period of time?



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What next

How do you offer support to the next opportunity?

Celebrate selection

How will you share selection criteria (eg: attendance at training versus most improved versus ability versus availability)

STEP 5



STEP 8

Straight after

How do you support accurate reflection?

STEP 9



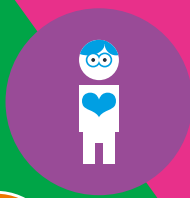
During competition

What role will you play during competition to ensure hard work pays off and benefits sought are realised by all?

STEP 7



STEP 6



On the way to the competition

How do you support young people psychologically to make final preparations for competition?



On your marks (Selection)

All young people can benefit from appropriately designed competition, but there can often be many barriers that prevent some children and young people from taking part. Understanding those barriers is the first step in helping you to remove them, so that all children and young people have access to opportunities that promote physical activity.

This section is designed to help you to identify those young people who would benefit the most from positive experiences of competition, understand what motivates them to want to take part, and by doing so, help you to determine what an appropriate positive experience looks like.



STEP 1: Identify young people in greatest need

INTRODUCTION:

A good starting point is to reflect on what percentage of young people currently access competitive sporting opportunities in your school. It may be that only a small percentage of young people currently engage in your opportunities and a large percentage are missing out.

Making opportunities truly accessible to all young people can be challenging as there may be a number of reasons why only a small percentage are currently engaging. What we do know is that young people have lots of different motivations for wanting to take part in sport and competition and ensuring that the opportunities offered cater for a range of different motivations can help.

However, whilst offering an abundance of opportunities might sound like a problem solved, there are logistical challenges from capacity to resource that makes this difficult. Without providing the necessary support to help young people overcome the barriers that prevents them from accessing competition, it might result in the same young people as before taking part.

It may be more likely that a targeted approach to supporting those young people who are not accessing competitive sport opportunities outside your school, or who are not accessing at least 60 active minutes a day, or who face disadvantage are the young people who are in the greatest need and would benefit the most from the opportunities you provide.

POSITIVE ACTION:

How do I identify young people in greatest need?

Instead of looking at what competition events are available, start with identifying which young people would benefit from competition, putting them at the centre of the process.

1. How many of the young people you support are accessing at least 60 active minutes a day?

Do you have this information? If not, how could you find this out?

2. Which young people are not accessing competitive sport opportunities outside of school and/or in different settings?

Is there an easy way to capture this information using school survey systems?

3. What tools do you have available to you to identify young people facing the greatest disadvantage?

For example, data on Free School Meals.

4. Who can help you to identify your priority groups?

For example: Head of Years, SENCOs, other teachers.

Whilst all young people could benefit from appropriately designed competition, it is important to be reminded of the outcomes that can be gained from positive experiences of competition to think deeper about which young people would benefit the most.

STEP 1: Identify young people in greatest need

OUTCOME	TARGET GROUP
Physical Development Being active for at least 60 minutes a day supports young people to have immediate and long-term health benefits.	Example Target Group A group of young people who don't currently meet the physical activity guidelines.
Personal Development Sports competitions can have a positive impact on young peoples' personal development, such as developing their leadership skills and resilience.	Example Target Group A group of young people who lack confidence in everyday life.
Emotional Development Sports competitions can improve young people's self-esteem, reduces stress, supports their mental wellbeing and builds their resilience.	Example Target Group Young people who are often frustrated or demonstrate inconsistency in their behaviour at school.
Social Development Sports competitions can provide a sense of belonging, enabling young people to develop their teamwork, communication, empathy and respect for others.	Example Target Group Young people who have transitioned to your school and currently have a low number of friendship groups.

Remember, that even when you identify different groups of young people who may benefit, their individual motivations to take part might all still be different from each other.

TASK:

How many different target groups can you identify who could benefit from sports competition?

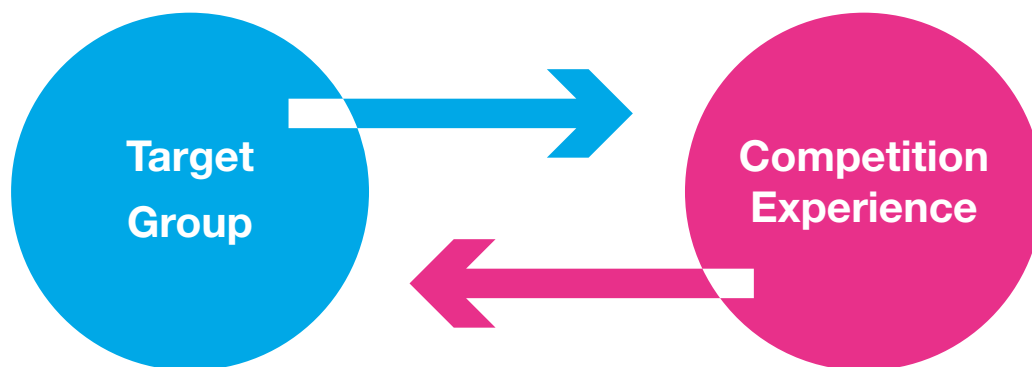
Who are your priority group?	What outcomes would they benefit from?



STEP 2: Identify an appropriate experience

INTRODUCTION:

When working with different target groups and planning for different learning outcomes, it is important to understand that not every competition design out there will be appropriate. Equally, the level of preparation required for young people to be competition ready will also be influenced by their previous experience, motivations, competence and confidence levels.



Selection of young people taking part in competitions is a crucial step in the process. Find competition experiences that best suit your target group's current levels of motivation, confidence and competence, whilst providing tailored support to prepare them for the competition they are working towards.

POSITIVE ACTION:

Consulting with young people

The first step in understanding what competition experience is appropriate for your target group of young people is understanding their motivations, competence and confidence to take part.

Consultation can help you to identify the barriers that prevent young people from taking part to help you to remove them from any competition experience you look to provide.

TOP TIPS for consulting with young people:

- > Consult with young people who might have a variety of motivations for taking part, don't always speak to the same young people.
- > Set up a school sport organising committee to provide insight on their motivations for taking part.
- > Use surveys to ask key questions about the barriers to participating.

[Visit the Youth Sport Trust Youth Voice toolkit for further inspiration.](#)

STEP 2: Identify an appropriate experience



Case study findings:

“ The best thing we did during our pilot project into Positive Experiences of Competition was an in-depth consultation with our staff and students to properly understand what they wanted and needed most.

Emma Fitzgerald, Partnership Development Manager,
Ascot & Maidenhead School Sport Partnership

POSITIVE ACTION:

How can you find out about competitions taking place?

After understanding the motivations of your target group, it is time to find an appropriate competition experience that meets their needs. The ‘starting point’ of motivations for taking part will help you to understand which settings might be appropriate, and which might not be. Competition can take place in a variety of settings and environments such as:

- > **Intra** – competition taking place **within school** with teachers they already have a relationship with and in an environment, they are used to can help to alleviate anxieties and raise confidence.
- > **Inter** – competition with **other schools** can create opportunities to build on social development and bring pride in representing your school.
- > **County** – competition with others **across the county** can create a strong sense of belonging or provide additional stretch and challenge for young people along with experience of another setting.
- > **Virtual** – using **virtual platforms** to stimulate competition might create an environment which feels more comfortable for a young person to take part in, without the pressure of performing in front of others.

STEP 2: Identify an appropriate experience

Key questions:

1. From the competitive sport opportunities available in your area, which would meet the needs of your young people and which would not?
2. Where can you find out this information and what questions may you need to ask of competition organisers?
3. If there are not currently suitable opportunities that meet the needs of your young people, how could you work with others to create them in your local area or in your own school?

Sometimes the right opportunity might not currently exist, and it might be more appropriate to create new opportunities. Whether the competition organiser is yourself or you are approaching others, here are some key questions that you may want to ask to help you identify an appropriate experience:

Key questions to ask of a competition organiser:

- > What intended outcomes does your competition aim to provide?
- > What are the selection criteria for taking part?
- > What previous experience is required?
- > How will you ensure that young people have a positive experience at the competition?

TASK:

Speak to your School Games Organiser

Did you know that there is a School Games Organiser in your area who is ready to listen and support you in finding the right experiences for your young people?

Contact them via the School Games website by registering here



Case study findings:

“ Ensuring you connect in with wider opportunities locally through sports and community clubs is essential to unlocking participation beyond school.

Ian Jackson, Sports Partnership Manager,
Forest Heath Sports Partnership

STEP 3: Recruit and communicate

There are a number of different methods you might use to select young people for taking part in competition. You might base this on who shows interest, who attends extra-curricular clubs, who demonstrates positive behaviour, who demonstrates ability or physical competencies.

Adopting the approach in both **step 1** and **step 2** might mean you already have a target group of young people in mind. Whatever methods you use, consider the pros and cons as highlighted in the table below:

Method of Selection	Pros	Cons
High attendance at extra-curricular clubs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Can encourage and reward commitment > Can provide you with an opportunity to actively prepare young people for competition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Some young people may not be able to attend due to home responsibilities or bus transport schedules > Attendance may not be a suitable method of identifying those who are ready to experience competition
High ability or physical competence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensures young people have the physical competencies to perform safely > Can provide motivation to improve physical competencies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Can accentuate the barriers to participation for some young people who don't already take part > Selecting young people based on ability may miss those young people in greatest need of the benefits
Pupil interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Ensures you are selecting young people who have an interest in taking part 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Can miss a group of young people who might be motivated to take part but are low in confidence > Young people may be less likely to show interest if they have had a previous negative experience
Trials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Can provide additional competition opportunities within school that young people can learn from > Can help you assess young people's readiness for competition prior to an event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > The fear of attending trials based on being judged or a fear of rejection may stop some young people from turning up
Demonstrating positive behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Can help to influence positive behaviour across the school environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Young people's behaviour may be a result of challenges they face in their life. These young people may be those who would benefit most from competition but wouldn't be selected > Whilst using sport and competition to positively influence other areas of life can be beneficial, removing what young people enjoy as a consequence of poor behaviour may be counter-productive to the support that they need

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STEP 3: Recruit and communicate

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Method of Selection	Pros	Cons
Randomly generated selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Could help to select different young people compared to those who would usually take part in competitive opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Doesn't take into consideration a young person's motivation, competence or confidence to take part in competition or match their motivations with the desired experience> Whilst aiming to be a fair process, it may exclude some young people based on being a random selection
Targeted recruitment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Consultation with young people can help to match a young person's motivation with a desired competition experience increasing the chance of it being positive> Will help select different young people to take part and provide opportunities to those in greatest need	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Without transparency and clear communication, some young people might be confused as to why they haven't been selected but their classmates have been

Be clear and intentional in the methods you adopt for selecting young people for competition. Whilst pulling names out of a hat might feel like a fair way of deciding, we know that not every competition experience will meet the needs of different young people. It is your role to provide competition experiences that do meet their needs.

POSITIVE ACTION:

Communication

It is clear from the pros and cons highlighted above that getting the selection process right is not an easy thing to achieve. Whatever methods you adopt, providing young people, parents and other school staff with clear and effective communication that helps them to understand why young people have been chosen can help to increase young people's motivation for taking part, help empower others to celebrate their involvement and be a supportive network that can best prepare young people for their experience.

Key Questions to consider:

1. How will you attract and invite the young people to take part?
2. What will you communicate to them to help them to best understand the competition experience?
3. Are your methods of communication appropriate in reaching the young people you intend to engage?
4. Who else in your setting could help support you in reaching those young people you feel would benefit the most?
5. How do you interact with parents to help them understand the purpose and intent of the competition experience to encourage participation?



TOP TIPS

- > **Transparency is key** – Part of a young person preparing for a competition is providing them with the knowledge and understanding of why they are taking part and what the competition intentions are to be able to actively demonstrate the outcomes you are looking to develop. It might be equally important to communicate to young people who might not be selected to alleviate any anxieties they have about why they haven't been selected.
- > **Communicate with parents/carers** – Parents/carers play a vital role prior to, during and post competition in supporting their child to have a positive experience. Sharing the purpose of the competition and the reasons why their child has been selected will allow them to positively reinforce this message in the home setting. Parent/carers can also play an important role in helping prepare young people which will be covered in more detail in step 4.
- > **Communicate early** – Selecting young people with short notice or even the day of competition will have a significant impact on the ability to help prepare a young person effectively for competition. This would likely raise anxieties levels dramatically. Always plan ahead and communicate early whenever possible.
- > **If they don't play, do they feel part of the team?** It can be advantageous if communicated clearly to select young people to attend competitions without the purpose of participating to provide them with the opportunity to experience a competitive atmosphere as part of building their confidence to be competition ready. However, young people will most likely want to take part and selecting large numbers for an event without the intention of providing them with equal playing time can reduce motivation and increase the likeliness of a negative experience occurring. If your outcomes of competition are to support and develop young people, then give them the opportunity to play, not just watch.



TASK:

How and when will you communicate with those you select for competition?

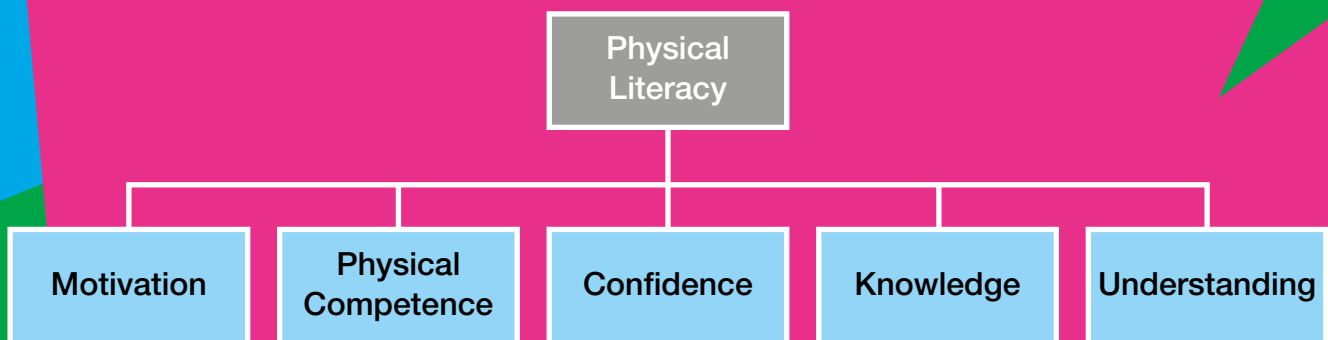
Get set

(Preparation)

If children are not prepared to take part in competition, there is a greater opportunity for negative experiences of competition to occur, which in turn could put off a child from taking part in the future. Developing physical literacy provides young people with the tools to remain active throughout life and it can be useful to reflect on the role that sports competition can play in the development of all elements of physical literacy, to help shape what effective preparation might look like.

Developing the physical skills to perform movements safely and with success is vitally important in contributing to a positive experience of competition, but it can often dominate the focus when it comes to preparing young people for competition.

Ensure that within your preparation, you provide a balance of all five elements of physical literacy to ensure that a young person feels safer both physically and psychologically to take part.



As you aim to provide young people with competitions that meet the motivations, competence and confidence of the children that are attending, then we should consider how each of these elements impact on the role we can play in preparing young people to be competition ready.

“ We need to make sure schools just don’t pick the children to come to the competition without offering them any preparation. This just puts young people off school sport.

Claire Tennyson, Partnership Manager & School Games Organiser
Redcar & Eston School Sport Partnership



STEP 4: Purposeful preparation

INTRODUCTION:

Acknowledging that sports competitions are not inherently positive or negative is important in reflecting on the role we can play prior to competition to support foster positive experiences. Here we take a deeper look at how you can ensure all of the elements of physical literacy play a role in how you support the purposeful preparation of young people for competition.

POSITIVE ACTION:

Motivation

We have already referenced the importance of listening and understanding the motivations of young people in helping to identify the most appropriate competition experiences that meet their needs, but your role doesn't stop there. There are practical things you can do to help turn young people's motivation into real meaning and purpose and having an identified competition to work towards is part of the process.

How to set effective goals

Being motivated doesn't always mean you will act on your motivations. You might have your own reasons for wanting to be physically active each day but for whatever reason this doesn't materialise into action. The difference can be down to not having clear and effective goals to work towards, breaking down what can sometimes seem like mammoth tasks, into bitesize, realistic and achievable targets to reach.

Top Tip:

The success measures you put in place will shape the type of motivation developed.

Intrinsic vs Extrinsic Motivation

Sports are more often played for interest and enjoyment rather than for external rewards. Young people frequently report that their top reason for taking part is to have fun. Discuss with young people what they want to achieve through being involved and encourage them to set their own targets as this will further develop intrinsic motivation and help them to work towards achieving their personal best.

Criteria	Definition
Specific	Is it simple and easy to understand?
Measurable	How can it be measured so you know when you have achieved it?
Achievable	Is it challenging? Not too easy or too difficult.
Relevant	Is it important to you and your motivations?
Timely	Is it possible to complete in the timeframe?



Physical Competence

Developing the fundamental movement skills to perform movements safely is of the utmost importance in preparing young people for competition. There are many sports where this importance is heightened such as gymnastics, swimming and rugby. Achieving success by practicing the physical skills needed for competition in a particular sport can also help to boost confidence.

Developing fundamental movements skills

Fundamental movement skills serve as a foundation for children to develop more complex movements and sport specific skills. Children do not naturally develop these skills. If your identified group of young people need support to develop their fundamental skills:

Click here to see example videos of activities that could be used to help develop fundamental movement skills



Confidence

Confidence plays an important role in our ability to be successful in everyday life. Low confidence can restrict a young person's ability to approach situations where success is not guaranteed and can often manifest itself as a fear of failure. Being overconfident can also result in negative experiences when success is expected but not guaranteed. A big part of developing confidence is providing young people experiences in safe environments like the ones that they will be taking part in, building knowledge, and understanding and importantly always making a young person feel supported.

Top Tips

To help you build confidence in the young people you have selected for competition:

Have your young people experienced success in the past?

- > This should not be a pre-requisite to taking part but breaking down tasks into smaller achievable movements can help build confidence.
- > Achieving small successes can increase a young person's belief in their ability.
- > This could take place at school clubs, during the school day or at home.
- > Think about how you can create a safe environment to practice without the fear of being judged.

Have they watched others perform with success?

- > Watching others perform with success can help make tasks seem more achievable.
- > Are there photos or videos of the activity and the competition venue that could be shared with young people and parents/carers?

Are they encouraged?

- > Young people want a positive environment to play in.
- > Young people also want feedback to help them to improve.
- > Ensuring you support young people by verbally providing positive feedback will help to increase their confidence.
- > Is the environment and team culture you create one that is supportive of each other?

How can young people manage their emotions?

- > Taking part in sports competition can be an emotive experience.
- > How a young person perceives feedback can determine whether they associate getting 'butterflies in their stomach' as feelings of nerves or excitement.
- > You can support young people to recognise these feelings and associate them with positive feelings.

Top Tip:

Think about the experience you get when you go to a trampoline park and the induction that is provided. You get to learn the do's and don'ts, what is safe and the rules for taking part. Could you provide a similar experience prior to or on the day of competition for your young people?

Case study link



[LINK](#)

Knowledge & Understanding

Knowledge might be perceived as providing young people with all of the information they need prior to a competition. However, this extends to much more than just the logistical information of the equipment needed, the time it takes place and where you need to turn up. It includes building knowledge that will help to educate young people adopt life-long habits of being physically active. Helping young people to make sense of the knowledge you provide develops understanding which can support them to apply their knowledge in different competition settings.

Before attending sports competition, where possible ensure young people have:

- > Connected with teammates
- > Are familiar with the rules
- > Know the format
- > Know who else will be there
- > Have been given information about the experience
- > Had a mock experience
- > Planned for different scenarios
- > Seen a video of the venue

Top Tips for developing knowledge and understanding

- > The goals you help set for young people can involve developing knowledge and understanding, not just physical competence.
- > Could the start and end of your practice sessions involve time to learn and reflect on learning?
- > Having a 'what I learnt' post box for young people to add to at the end of each session might create a culture of learning
- > Use examples of how positive role models use their knowledge to their benefit in their sport

How competitions can support the development of physical literacy

In addition to preparing young people, competition can also be the catalyst and mechanism to develop the physical literacy of those young people who still may not feel ready to compete. Multi-skill festivals are designed to be young person led and celebrate a range of achievements; with the focus on the learning and development of the individual towards achieving their personal best.

Click here to learn more about how multi-skill festivals can support the development of physical literacy



Individual Differences & Commonalities

With all of this information comes the important point that the preparation each individual requires may be different as their 'starting blocks' could be at varying points. This can only take place if some investment in time and information is provided to young people in advance. The process and preparation for competition is often more important than the event itself and definitely more important than the end result so please ensure you build time in to do this step properly with as many young people as possible to ensure they can maximise the benefits of competition.

TASK:

Key questions for consideration:		
1.	How do you currently help prepare young people for competitive sport experiences?	
2.	When does preparation start and how much time, focus and energy do you currently give to this?	
3.	What fundamental physical competencies will help support young people to achieve success?	
4.	How can you raise confidence levels of young people prior to competition to help alleviate anxieties?	
5.	Does your preparation include supporting young people to develop knowledge and understanding of the experience they are going into?	
6.	Who can support you in helping to prepare young people for competition and how do you empower them to do so?	
7.	What information would be helpful for young people and parents to support preparation whilst at home?	

STEP 5: Celebrate selection

INTRODUCTION:

After purposeful preparation, some young people may still not be or feel competition ready and that is ok. You may collectively decide to select or not select a young person for an upcoming competition, but the most important part is ensuring you listen to young people's concerns and continue to provide ongoing support and are transparent with all involved.

POSITIVE ACTION:

Celebrating selection is an important step for young people in reflecting on the successes they have already achieved on their 'road to competition'. At this point, it is helpful to remind yourself of why you are working with this group of young people and what outcomes you wanted to help develop. Being selected to represent their school can be a very special moment for a young person and the people that care about them. Be sure to make sure that you celebrate their involvement just as much as anybody else. Doing this will really help to keep a positive focus on the process and journey they have come on.

TOP TIP:

Understanding your young people might lead you to decide that celebrating selection is more of a personal reflection and kept within your target group and their support network such as families and tutors/class teachers. For others, utilising assemblies, class noticeboards, social media and other forms of communication could help to boost confidence and increase motivation.

All of the ways to prepare young people highlighted previously might not take place in a school setting and might require you to support young people and parents/carers to support preparation to take place at home that could include:

- > Consulting with young people to understand motivations and supporting the setting of SMART goals
- > Practicing skills to develop physical competence
- > Watching videos to build confidence
- > Sharing clear information on the intent of competition including logistical information such as the rules to help build knowledge and understanding

Key questions:

Does the information you send home to parents/carers include:

1. The selection criteria for the experience?
2. The outcomes and intention of the competition experience?
3. Why their child has been selected?
4. What they can do to support their child to prepare?

TASK:

Reflect on the information you currently send home prior to competition. In addition to the purpose of gaining consent for participation, how could you utilise this communication to help young people to prepare for competition at home?

Case study link



[LINK](#)

STEP 6: On the way to competition

INTRODUCTION:

Throughout this toolkit, you hopefully now see that the road to competition for a young person starts way before the day of competition, but what strategies can you put in place to support young people in the immediate build-up and what role are you best served playing?

Key Questions:

1. What support might individual young people need during the final build up to a competition?
2. What role are you best to play?
3. What would not be appropriate to include as part of preparation moments before the event?
4. How do you celebrate how far they have developed already and keep a focus on the process, not the outcome of the event itself?



STEP 6: On the way to competition

As a teacher, you take on many roles when it comes to supporting young people day to day and the same applies through competition. The moments before taking part in competition can be highly emotional and the pressure of taking part can be a real challenge. Here are some ideas that might support you to create a positive environment:

POSITIVE ACTIONS:

- > **Be planned and organised** – Setting off in good time, knowing your route to competition and having all of your equipment ready will help create a calm environment. Controlling the controllables will help reduce the chance for unexpected challenges that you might face. Arriving in good time to a venue will allow young people to adapt to their surroundings and feel more confident and comfortable for when they perform.
- > **Be approachable** – It is absolutely normal for some young people despite all of your best efforts to suddenly feel nervous or experience a wave of emotions. Expect this to happen and be ready to support them in the way that they need. It is important for young people to know that you are there to support them, so ensure you provide opportunities to check in with them without restricting their freedom.
- > **Keep information short and sweet** – Through effective preparation, you shouldn't have to spend lots of time going over the rules of competition, strategies or detailed expectations from your group of young people. It might be helpful to keep your interactions with your young people to the core messages you want to get across, so they don't get lost. Instead of tactics for the competition, this might simply be to let young people know you are here to support them, remind them of all the successes they've made to get to this point and to keep a positive attitude.
- > **Keep the focus on the process, not the result** – All of your hard work to get to this point has been about providing your young people with the opportunity to develop and have a positive experience. As tempting as it might be, don't undo this hard work by getting sucked into an overly competitive state of mind. Remember, you are there to facilitate a positive experience for your young people which doesn't have to rely on whether or not they finish in first place.
- > **Keep it positive and FUN** – Young people take part in sports competitions primarily because they are fun. Making it fun and enjoyable is the most important part to ensure that they want to continue to take part in the future. Through listening to young people, you can help build in things they really enjoy to their experience. This might include playing their favourite music on the team bus or letting them lead their favourite warm-ups.

TASK:

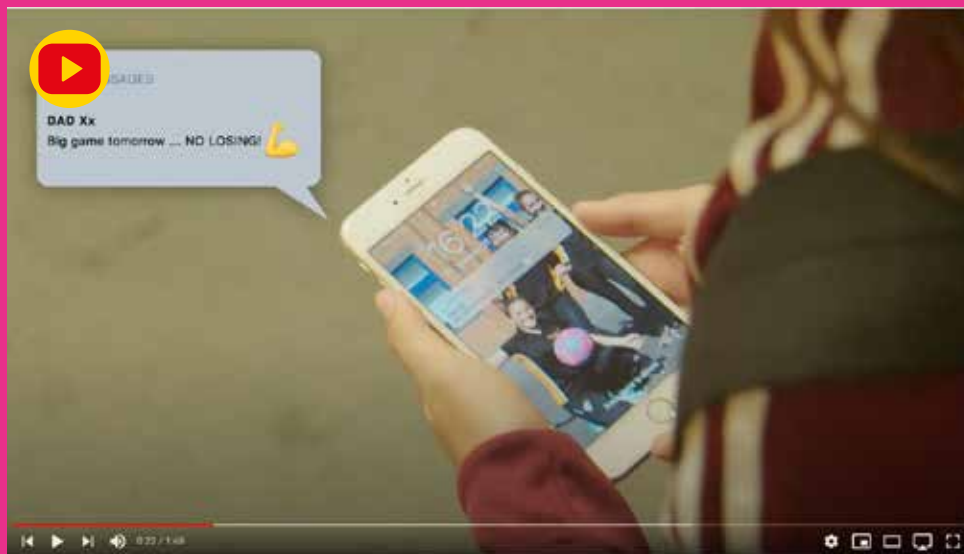
Warming up is an important part of preparing the **body** and **mind** for the competition ahead. Reflect what currently makes up your warm-up for young people. With the knowledge above, how might you extend your warm-up to meet young people's needs?

GO

(Support)

You've arrived and made it to the event itself and what a journey it has been to get here. Your young people will have already made many memories and had lots of fun along the way, and the competition itself is an extension of the experience they have.

To an extent, what happens over the period of time during competition is now out of your control but what we do know is that what is important and in your control is the support you provide to help young people to have fun. A supportive network can make such a big difference to whether a young person perceives an experience to be positive or negative.



STEP 7: During competition

INTRODUCTION:

Being consistent is key to ensuring that the intentions behind taking part in competition that have been communicated to your young people are lived out during the competition itself. If the motivations to take part for your young people are to develop new friendships, how important is the score or position they finish?

POSITIVE ACTION:

What is consistent from our research with young people are the contributors that make an experience fun. Whilst these contributors will influence the design of the competition, as a teacher you can reinforce these during competition by:

1. **Trying hard** – Taking part in competition that provides an appropriate level of challenge that isn't too easy (as to be boring) and isn't too difficult (as to be unachievable).

TOP TIP:

When observing your young people during the competition you might notice they are finding the level of challenge too easy or too difficult. Think about the role you can play in providing appropriate challenge when this happens. For example, this might be to create a team challenge to focus on how many successful passes they can make in their next game. Or you might set individuals their own focused challenges to work towards.

2. **Positive team dynamics** – Creating a sense of belonging within your own team and a positive relationship with others that you are competing against by demonstrating sportsmanship and positive values.

TOP TIP:

Ensure that all young people you take to competition have an equal level of playing time. Making this clear to young people and parents/carers prior to the competition will help them to create a sense of unity within your team.

3. **Positive coaching** – Providing young people with knowledge that helps them to be successful, delivered in a positive way.

TOP TIP:

Constant feedback to young people might become overwhelming during competition. Try to focus on the positive feedback you can provide to young people when they demonstrate not only technical ability, but also the values and outcomes that your competition is designed to develop.

“ The one thing that makes a sport competition fun is when it's not all about the winning (even though I want to win).

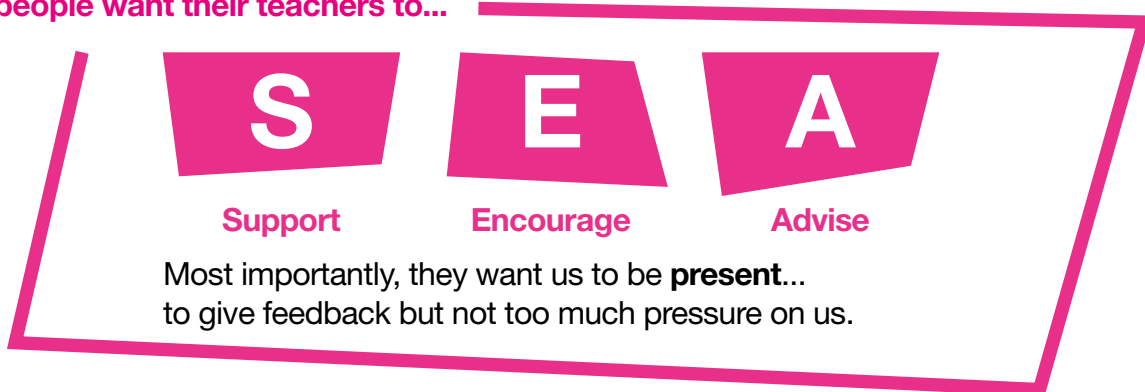
Primary age pupil

STEP 7: During competition

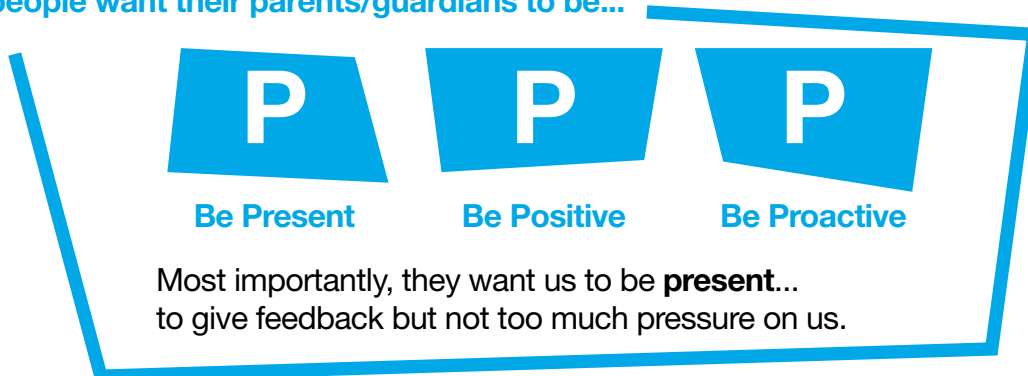
What do young people say?

Research with young people regarding the behaviours that provide a positive experience from teachers and parents/carers reinforced that every child is different, and a personalised approach is needed. In summary, our insight suggests:

Young people want their teachers to...



Young people want their parents/guardians to be...



TASK:

Reflect on the behaviours that you demonstrate to young people during competition. Does this match with what we know about what young people want from their support networks?

Key Questions:

1. What role will you play during competition to ensure the hard work pays off and the benefits sought are realised by all?
2. How will you ensure you are present?
3. How do you create a positive atmosphere with a strong focus on young people having fun?
4. How do you fulfil their individual needs?
5. How do you role model behaviours that are aligned to the purpose of competition?
6. How do you recognise others, such as other young people, coaches and officials?

Case study findings:

“ The environment and chosen behaviour of organisers, leaders, teachers, parents and other helpers must reflect the purpose of the competition throughout. If one of the outcomes sought is to develop pupil’s ability to self-referee and manage conflict or to focus on displaying School Games values rather than the result, then every interaction and communication must reinforce that.

Will Swaites, Youth Sport Trust Learning Academy

STEP 8: Reflecting on the competition experience

INTRODUCTION:

Reflection helps young people to embed the positive outcomes that can come from appropriate competition. It is important to ask questions on the successes that they had and also the challenges they faced, always in a positive manner.

At a younger age, young people are more resilient in attributing their success to the effort they put in as opposed to what position they finish, but as young people get older, your role in helping them to attribute success or failure not based on result becomes more important.

POSITIVE ACTION:

When does reflection take place?

For a young person, reflection will begin during competition, immediately after and in the days coming and in the days following competition. They will be reflecting on what they enjoyed, what they didn't enjoy, what they think they did well, and what they think they did not so well.

Key Questions:

1. How do you support accurate reflection on what personal and collective achievements have been made?
2. How do you ensure you choose the right moment for this?
3. How do you support different individuals to take useful learning from the experience?
4. How do you celebrate success and learning?

Top Tips to support effective reflection

- > **Celebrate success** – Your definition of success here will reinforce the outcomes that young people associate with the competition. You may choose to celebrate the behaviours and values demonstrated by your young people, their attitude to each other and other teams. If you choose to celebrate only the result of the competition, then this is what young people will associate with success, not necessarily all of the great outcomes that you want.
- > **Choose your timing** – Your post-event team talk immediately after competition might not be the best time to include lots of detailed information and reflective questions. For some young people, at this moment in time they may simply want to spend this time celebrating their successes and keep having fun. There is no exact time that reflection should take place but make a judgement on what you believe your young people need at the time and use the opportunity of immediately after, the journey home and the days coming to support young people to reflect at a time that is right for them.
- > **Choose your questions** – Supporting reflection is a two-way process between you and your young people and asking effective questions can be a great way to stimulate positive thoughts on all of the great successes they have achieved. Choosing the right questions to ask is important. If your intention for competition was to provide an enjoyable experience, then maybe an appropriate first question to ask might be did you enjoy yourselves?
- > **Keep it consistent** – Build in opportunities to reflect prior to competition so it becomes more of a habit that you and your young people can practice together. This will make the experience feel more comfortable and an organic part of the process.



STEP 8: Reflecting on the competition experience



TASK:

You will play a significant role in helping young people reflect on a positive experience of competition, but there are also others such as parents/carers, young leaders and young people themselves who can support this process. Consider all of these groups and think about ways in which you could support them to provide meaningful and helpful reflection during and post competition.

Case study link



STEP 9: What next?

INTRODUCTION:

It is about supporting and should not be seen as having a hard end point for the young people that you are working with. The 'road to competition' is about supporting a young person to experience the life-changing benefits that can come from playing and taking part. You may choose to build on the momentum that the competition experience has stimulated for your young people and this is a great way to help support their long-term engagement in being physically active in the future.

POSITIVE ACTION:

Finding appropriate exit routes:

Key Questions:

1. How do you build on the experience provided and keep inspiring young people to continue their development?
2. What do you do in school to capitalise on and disseminate the learning and development?
3. What role does goal setting play in your follow up support to individual young people?
4. How do you signpost to and support the transition to participation in the community setting?

TASK:

Think of the competitions that currently take place for young people in your school and consider what support is currently provided post competition to encourage continued participation.

Summary

A negative first experience of competition can have a long lasting cognitive and emotional impact on young people that results in them avoiding competition for a very long time and hence missing out on the personal growth and development opportunities that come from it.

This toolkit has been designed to help you reflect and consider how you can improve the competition experiences that you provide the young people in your school. It may feel like there is a lot to consider and there simply isn't enough time to do every step on this road to competition.

Therefore, could you:

- > Take one piece of learning from each of the steps and implement it into your approach?
- > Narrow your focus on certain steps on the **Road to Competition** that would most benefit the young people you work with?
- > Have a greater impact by entering less competitions but ensuring more and different young people feel ready and able to participate?
- > Engage young leaders to help you to support other young people on their **Road to Competition**.

Remember, your local **School Games Organiser** is there to support you to provide positive experiences of competition for your young people in your area.

We would love to hear your stories about how you select, prepare and support more and different young people to their first positive experience of competition. **#ReframeCompetition**

