

The Triathlon Parent's Training Manual

Triathlon Australia's national manager of coach development Wayne Goldsmith has put together his top 10 considerations for parents of aspiring triathletes.

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Someone once said: “Kids don’t come with instructions.” It’s tough being a parent at any time. Triathlon parents, that is the parents of kids who are training and racing in triathlon, have an even bigger set of challenges. There’s school. There’s dealing with the normal stresses and strains of kids growing up. There’s home life and all the usual problems and issues around being a kid and then there’s...swimming, riding, running, transitions, training, racing, recovery, stretching, gym work, finding and maintaining equipment, finding the right coach. Triathlon parents often have more things to think about and to deal with than your average parent.

So to help all you worn out, worried, and wondering triathlon parents, here’s the Triathlon Parent Training Manual.

1 Training

Triathlon is an endurance sport that demands a high level of commitment to training, preparation and recovery. The 10 million dollar question is, of course, how much triathlon training should my son or daughter be doing? There’s no hard and fast rule about training loads for kids; what’s perfect for one young triathlete may be far too much for another. As a guide, consider these three questions when thinking about how much training is appropriate for a young triathlete:

- *What level of triathlon are they preparing to race?* A young triathlete preparing to complete their first ever sprint distance triathlon, or TRYstars event, may not need to undertake very much training at all – maybe just one or two training sessions



per week and those sessions should be skills-based. A young triathlete preparing to compete in a longer race at state or national level will need to be involved in regular scheduled training in swim, bike and run.

• *How many years have they been in regular triathlon training?* Any triathlete in their first year of regular training should be conservative and careful about training too hard too often. We talk about a triathlete who is involved in regular training for one year as having a training age of one. Until triathletes have a training age of four or five, they should concentrate on developing skills, learning how to train effectively and efficiently, and on slowly

and gradually building strength and endurance.

• *How are their body and mind dealing with their current training load?* Young triathletes who complain of feeling excessively tired, fatigued and worn out are probably training too hard, too often. Increasing their training load when they feel like this is not recommended. When a young triathlete is involved in a balanced training program, it is normal and natural for them to feel a little tired, but their level of fatigue shouldn't impact on other important aspects of their life, such as school.

2 Diet and nutrition

Diet is an important part of

COACH'S CORNER

1 Triathlon parents can be a great asset to your coaching program. Engage with them, educate them and include them in your plans for their child's preparation and performance.

2 Think of triathlon parents as part of your team: a performance partnership consisting of you, your athlete and their parents. Each of you has a specific role to play in the athlete's preparation and performance.

- **Athlete's role:** to train, prepare, race and recover to the best of your ability every day.
- **Parent's role:** to love

your children unconditionally, support and encourage them in all they do and help them to develop the values and virtues of champions.

• **Coach's role:** to provide the environment and the opportunity for your athlete to realise their full potential.

3 Provide regular opportunities for open communication and engagement with the parents of your athletes. Keeping them informed about what's happening with their child's training and racing program is a great way to gain their support and build their trust in you as a coach.

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www.triathlon.org.au/Coaches/TA_National_Coaching_Programme.htm



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training and racing for every triathlete, be they six or 60 years of age. There are plenty of supplements and superfoods on the market promising miraculous improvements in performance but in the end, keep it simple.

A balanced diet with a focus on “natural state” food – that is, foods with minimal processing, packaging and prior preparation – is recommended. Plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, lean meat, fish and chicken and whole grain carbohydrates is perfect for young triathletes.

3 The right equipment

This is one area where triathlon parents need a lot of advice and direction.

Let's start with swimming. Goggles. Check. Cap. Check. Flippers (fins), paddles, kickboard and pullbuoy...check, check, check and check.

Running. They'll need good quality shoes, light, comfortable clothes to run in and a cap and sunglasses to be sun-smart.

Bike. This is where it gets a little complicated for the triathlon parent.

The best advice is to talk to your child's triathlon coach and then visit your local bike shop. The bike shop will be able to advise you on the best bike for your child and most importantly will ensure that the bike they choose fits them.

As a general rule, buy training and racing equipment that your child needs – not what they think they want. Far too many triathlon parents purchase bikes that cost thousands of dollars when all they really need is something safe, reasonably priced and appropriate for the level of triathlon their child is racing.

An expensive bike with the

latest wheels and the world's lightest frame does not improve braking, climbing, cornering, descending, gear changing, bunch riding or high-speed mounting and dismounting skills.

It is a far smarter and more economical plan to encourage young triathletes to improve the skills and techniques of triathlon training and racing, then invest in the best possible equipment when they get a bit older and can perhaps even contribute to buying the latest and greatest gear on the market.

4 Finding the right coach

There are many outstanding triathlon coaches in Australia. When it comes to finding a coach for a young triathlete, look for a coach who:

- Has a dedicated, specific junior triathlon program in place;
- Has a strong background in technical skills development for

swim, bike, run and transition;

- Is a currently accredited triathlon coach with Triathlon Australia. And remember, kids don't care how much coaches know. They want to know how much their coach cares. So, find a coach who offers a caring, supportive and engaging training environment for your child.

5 Rest and recovery

Training hard for triathlon is important. But just as important is rest and recovery. And sleep is the key recovery tool for kids. An average teenager needs around eight-to-10 hours sleep each night. A growing teenager needs a little more. And a growing teenager who is training and racing triathlon needs even more again.

As a guide, start with eight hours of sleep as the minimum requirement for your child, then

for every hour of training they do each day, add another 30 minutes of sleep. So, if they train for two hours during the day, encourage them to have nine hours sleep that night.

6 Growth and development

Kids grow, and as they do their bodies and minds will change. It is common that as kids grow, particularly during their teenage years, participation and competition in sport can become challenging. For example, during periods of rapid growth, kids may experience pain in their joints or find that their coordination, rhythm and timing have all been adversely affected. It is important that during these times, when sport goes from being fun to frustrating, that parents are patient, supportive and encouraging. Even the greatest triathletes have experienced the 'awkwards' – those times as a teenager when arms and legs seem to have minds of their own and efficient sporting movement becomes next to impossible. However, with patience, persistence and great parenting, everything soon returns to normal.



7 Behaviours of great triathlon parents

All parents love their children, and every parent wants nothing but the best for them.

But some parents have funny ways of showing this.

It would be great if every child won every event they entered. But realistically for most kids, triathlon, like every other sport, is about participating, learning from the experience, enjoying training and competition, making friends, developing new skills and discovering how great it is to be fit and healthy.

There are three golden rules when it comes to being a great triathlon parent:

- Love your child unconditionally – win, lose, draw – unconditionally.
- Provide them with the opportunity to realise their potential.
- Encourage them and support them in all that they do.

Above all, keep it in perspective: it's triathlon – a fun, exciting, wonderful sport that kids can enjoy with their friends and family.

8 Balancing triathlon, school and life

For kids it's simple: School first, everything else second. Next question.

9 Injuries and illness

It is normal for kids to get a little tired and even occasionally a little sore and tight when they are training and racing triathlon. What's not normal is for that tiredness, soreness and tightness to persist and worsen over time. A great habit for kids to adopt is a daily 'me' check. Every morning encourage them to ask themselves three questions:

- How tired do I feel today? They should rate their tiredness out of 10: 10 being very tired and exhausted and one being not tired at all.
- How sore and tight do I feel today? Again, rating their soreness and tightness out of 10.
- How cranky and moody do I feel today? Again using the one to 10 scoring scale.

If their personal ratings to



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