Scottish Gymnastics

Helping Young Gymnasts reach their potential

A PARENT'S GUIDE

A Parent's Role

At Scottish Gymnastics we have created a set of talent principles to help shape our performance activity and positively influence the development of coaches and gymnasts on a performance pathway.

These principles are evidence based and have been developed with a talent scientist along with input from coaches, parents and gymnasts. One of these key principles is "all skills and behaviours can be developed and require a consistent approach from gymnasts, coaches and parents throughout the pathway". We know young gymnasts will face a range of different challenges as they progress in the sport and we recognise your role as a supportive parent is vital in this process.

Understanding what to say and when to say it can have a huge impact on the gymnast's development.

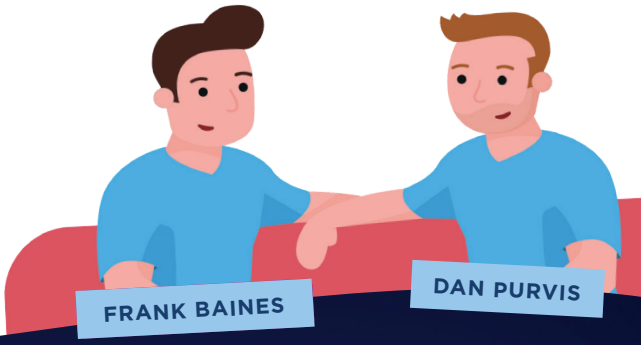
This guide has been designed along with the workshops to help parents in supporting their young gymnasts to maximise their potential.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

Scottish Gymnastics recognise to become an elite level gymnast, each individual needs to have the support of parents who have clarity on the following key themes:

1. **Understand what young gymnasts can go through during their development**
2. **Understand the development process**
3. **How to develop and reinforce the behaviours that are shown to be crucial to maximising potential**

Talent Principles



1. We commit to help all gymnasts, coaches and parents to develop a clear understanding of the development process and how they can improve.
2. Our competition structure is designed to provide opportunities for gymnasts and coaches to develop the skills they need to advance on the performance pathway.
3. Everyone develops at different rates and development takes time. We commit to work together to provide challenging opportunities for gymnasts and coaches to maximise their time on tasks and develop key skills throughout the pathway.
4. We recognise behaviours drive success and we strive to work throughout our system to develop athletes who consistently embrace challenges, overcome setbacks, listen and learn from feedback and take ownership of their own development.
5. All skills and behaviours can be developed and require a consistent approach from gymnasts, coaches and parents throughout the pathway.
6. The focus of our selection process is to provide appropriate challenges and support to gymnasts and coaches depending on their stage of development.
7. To ensure our gymnasts, coaches and staff are effectively prepared for performance we will review individual progress against key markers.

A video featuring Dan Purvis and Frank Baines can be found on the Scottish Gymnastics website which they discuss how adopting these principles has developed them as Gymnasts

Understanding What Young Gymnasts Go Through

Before we can help young gymnasts develop their skills and behaviours, it's important to understand what they could be going through every day. The statements below may be familiar to many parents and is not an exhaustive list. However, do we always assess the situation fully?

BEFORE TRAINING

Nervous about training because they are trying a new move and cannot do it

Training with a new group and not really spoke to anyone yet

Worried because they are arriving late and everyone looks at them

Finding training really challenging at the moment and lacking a bit of confidence

Worrying about fitting in their school homework

Struggling with new skills compared to others

Finding it too easy as they have been doing the same thing

Has been criticised by other gymnasts

Doesn't really want to do the conditioning work

Doesn't understand what the coach is asking, but scared to ask leading up to competitions

Feels anxious about competing

Not confident about competing new skills

Worried about competing at a level of competition they have not competed in before

Worried about the type of equipment the competition venue has

Worried about travelling and sharing a room with gymnasts they haven't shared with before

Start having issues with skills that were previously fine in the lead up to the competition

I'm nervous

AT COMPETITIONS

Feels confident but doesn't score well

Falls off the same apparatus at more than one competition

Feels really nervous before competing

Has previous experience of not performing well at that venue

Worried about letting their parents and coach down if they don't do well

Always worried about competing against a certain gymnast or club

Can't move on from mistakes on certain apparatus in competition

what if I dont win?

AT SCHOOL

Misses out on social activities

Struggles with the time and energy for school work

Pressure from friends who don't know why they are training lots

Feels really hungry after school just before training

Feels embarrassed when praised for their achievement by the teacher or head teacher

AT PATHWAY OR PERFORMANCE ACTIVITY

Doesn't know many other gymnasts

Doesn't get on well with everyone at training

Nervous because the standard of gymnasts is high

Always comparing their ability to others

Worried who they will be sharing a room with

Worried if they will look the fool or not

Worried about whether the coaches will like them

Worried about the food choices

Understanding The Development Process

Before we can help young gymnasts develop their skills and behaviours, it's important to understand what they could be going through every day. These may be familiar to many parents and is not an exhaustive list. However, do we always assess the situation fully?

Along with understanding what experiences gymnasts may have, it is important to have knowledge of the development process to help support during some of these experiences.The key things for parents and gymnasts to consider through the development process are:

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

It takes time and commitment, there are no shortcuts, and you need to want to be good

Effort alone is not enough – you need to spend time working on the right areas

It's a non-linear process and plateaux are common during all sport careers

It's important to understand how good you need to be in future to help shape the path to get there

Current performance is not a good way of predicting how good you could be in future

Failure can be a good learning mechanism and help develop resilience

People progress at different rates so don't assess your progress on how others are doing

All skills can be developed – you need a good plan in each area

Each gymnast needs to learn to drive their own plan

Behaviours and how you approach training and competition is as important as the technical skills in gymnastics

Competition is as a chance to learn how to be good in future NOT as a way of finding out how good you are now

Our behaviours impact on our performance

	Gymnasts who don't fulfill their potential	Gymnasts who reach their potential
EFFORT	Expect things to come easily	Work hard in the areas that are required and make the biggest difference
CHALLENGES	Avoid the challenges they struggle with	Embrace challenges with the mindset of 'not yet'
SETBACKS	Let setbacks confirm they are no good	See setback as part of the learning process and welcomes them
FEEDBACK	Ignore useful feedback and do what they have always done	Ask questions and use feedback to improve
OWNERSHIP	If things don't work, its often someone else's fault	Understand they have responsibility for what they do

Extensive research has been done in this field by Professor Carol Dweck from Stanford University, California. Her research has helped us understand the impact behaviour has on driving success in athletes across sports. Her research also shows the reasons or external factors for types of demonstrated behaviours shown by young gymnasts in different situations. Ultimately our behaviours impact how we perform.

Additional reading references on page 15

Carol S. Dweck

TO BRING THIS TO LIFE

We have added in examples we see regularly in Gymnasts.

What behaviours do we see in Gymnasts who don't fulfil their potential?

EFFORT

Finished sets early but make it look like they have done the same amount as everyone else in the group

Spend a lot of time in between drills and apparatus to get ready for the new set

CHALLENGES

Arrive late to sessions to avoid doing warm up and conditioning

Are always injured during a challenging practice

Give up after only a few attempts when trying new skills for the first time

SETBACKS

A lack of commitment to training as they have plateaued a bit in their performance and motivation seems to have dropped.

They aren't selected for a competition and decide to miss a few training sessions in the next few weeks

FEEDBACK

Work with the coach on a new technique and routine, perform it badly at a competition and refuse to do it again

OWNERSHIP

Didn't bring the correct equipment for training because their parents never packed it

Didn't turn up for a pre-training meeting because their coach never reminded them

What behaviours do we see in Gymnasts who reach their potential?

EFFORT

Be willing to do a little extra work in the session to make sure they are developing correctly

Understand that there are natural breaks during training, however as gymnasts you need to get as much from your session as possible

CHALLENGES

Understand the importance of looking after the body during warm ups and that you can't do certain skills in the sport if you are not physically prepared to do so

Accept that you need to work on your weaknesses and turn them into strengths

Understands that new skills are difficult to learn and will vary with every individual on how long it takes them to master it. Will continue to do and review during every session

SETBACKS

Accept that there will be times of plateau throughout their development and review why this has happened. If required, re-align the process goals for targets

Understand the reason why they haven't been selected. Discuss how these additional skills can be developed in training and focus on working harder on these elements.

Recovering from an injury and they are not achieving scores before the injury, help them to believe in the process with their coach to build up the difficulty in skills/routines again to achieve higher scores and a better performance

FEEDBACK

Stay committed to developing a technique as they know things take time and there will be failure along the way. Continually discuss with their coach the key areas to develop

OWNERSHIP

Are dedicated to making sure they have the correct items for training and pack their own kit

Are organised and communicate well with their parent and coach

Asking Great Questions

Now that we understand the importance of behaviours and the fact they can be changed, we need to think about our role as parents and how we can support their learning through asking great questions.

THE KEY

The key thing is to avoid the temptation of telling them what to do, or to adopt a coaching role!

Asking the questions will help find out what they currently understand about their own development and behaviours and shape how they can take more responsibility for their development. You will find questions that work for you and don't be afraid to use 'guided' questions to focus on key areas. Here are some examples of questions to use:

How did training go?

What are you currently working on with your coach?

You said your coach has asked you to work a little harder, how's that going and how do you feel about it?

What did you find most challenging about your session?

How do you feel when you're struggling with a new skill?

We need to leave early for training tomorrow, when and what are you going to get ready?

What was your best and worst piece today?

You have a big competition tomorrow, what are the targets you have been asked to try and achieve this time?

I know you're disappointed, what did your coach say to you and suggest you need to work on?

If you're not comfortable speaking to your coach, who else can give you some advice?

What can I do to help you for your next session?

Scenarios

Now you have an understanding of the development process, some behaviours you may see and how you can ask questions to develop behaviours, it's important to practice these scenarios in case they crop up.

We have included some examples below of how to use questions to support your child in certain scenarios. There are no right or wrong answers but the key to the process is to avoid the temptation to tell.

A good process to remember in these situation is:

1. **Work out how the gymnast feels about what has happened**
2. Find out if they understand why it happened
3. **Work out a strategy for how they are going to deal with it in future**

SCENARIO 1

Your son or daughter came home and said they made a lot of mistakes in training today.

How did training go today?

I made a lot of mistakes and it's really annoying

What mistakes did you make? Was it on certain pieces of apparatus or certain skills?

Yeah it was mainly the new skills

Remember learning new skills is tough and takes time, did your coach give you feedback on your mistakes?

Yeah quite a few things

Brilliant, listen to your coach and take on board what they said and hopefully the next time you won't make as many mistakes

Yeah, we are going to work on some specific areas at my next training session.

That's great, I'm sure things will improve the more you work on them

SCENARIO 2

Your child has been attending training with the same group of gymnasts for the last few years but is the only one who hasn't passed the recent grade to move up a level.

How does that make you feel?

I'm a bit embarrassed about it because everyone else was moved up, I'm starting to think that I'm not very good at gymnastics.

What makes you think you're not very good at gymnastics?

Because the others are better than me

Let's look at what you've achieved in the last few months?

Yeah but not as much as I would have liked

So you have made some improvements which is good but remember all gymnasts develop at different rates. What do you think you can do differently to keep progressing?

Probably just work a bit harder on what I'm doing

What apparatus or moves do you feel you need to work harder on?

The coach has given me some feedback on the areas I need to develop and said I should achieve these skills soon

That's good then, I'm proud of how far you have come since the last competition and the effort you're putting in

More Scenarios

Have a look at these other scenarios below and think about how you can shape the discussion using great questions to help your child understand the situation and the development process.

SCENARIO 3

Your child has been trying a new skill at training for the last week and every day comes home saying they can't do it and now won't try it anymore.

SCENARIO 4

Your child has won their last couple of competitions easily. They have mentioned they feel they don't need to work very hard to win.

SCENARIO 5

A gymnast at the club has been selected for a performance pathway programme. Your child has beaten them previously but hasn't been selected and feels it's really unfair.

SCENARIO 6

Your child has been selected for a training camp. This is the first time they would have been away from home for a period of time on their own. They know this is good opportunity, however they don't want to go.

SCENARIO 7

Your child has a lot going on at the moment including lots of homework, a couple of parties and a big competition. They have asked to miss a few training sessions to see their friends.

The best way to develop asking great questions is to practice, reflect on how it went and then try again. This is a similar process to how coaches develop athletes. The more practice you have, the more asking questions becomes a habit and will help your child develop in gymnastics.

Don't try and solve any mistakes with skills or routines, let the coach do their job with your child. As a parent, you can support them and help them to understand when things aren't going as well as they hoped.

Additional Reading

If you are interested in this area please see below some additional reading which will provide more understanding of the development process.

Mindset
How you can fulfil your potential *by Carol S. Dweck*

Not in your genes
The real reason children are like their parents *by Oliver James*

The Gold Mine Effect
Crack the Secrets of High Performance *by Rasmus Ankersen*

The Genius in all of us
Why everything you've been told about genes, talent and intelligence is wrong *by David Shenk*

Grit
The Power of Passion and Perseverance *by Angela Duckworth*

Talent is overrated
What really separates world-class performers from everybody elsel *by Geoff Colvin*

The Talent Code
Unlocking the secret of skill in maths, art, music, sport and just about everything else *by Daniel Coyle*

The Sports Gene
Talent, Practice and the Truth about Success *by David Epstein*

Bounce
How Champions are made *by Matthew Syed*

Peak
Secrets from the new science of expertise *by Anders Ericsson and Robert Pool*

Caledonia House,
1 Redheughs Rigg,
Edinburgh EH12 9DQ

T: 0131 271 9750
E: info@scottishgymnastics.org
www.scottishgymnastics.org

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