

# Ask an Expert



**We are planning to get a dog. We have two children in elementary school. We have a large backyard and live in a neighborhood with walking trails. How should you decide on the type of dog to adopt?**

Picking an appropriate dog for your family depends a lot on the "personality" of your family.

Are you and your children "dog" people? Do you like dogs? What type of dog do you like? Are you and your children confident in handling a large dog, medium-sized dog or small dog? Do you like to go on walks? Is a dog park available?

Outwalking a medium to large dog is just about impossible for a person. The larger the dog, the more exercise it should get unless you want an overweight and understimulated dog.

Dogs can cause quite a bit of wear and tear on a yard, so is a pristine yard important to you or is the companionship of a dog more important to you?

The real question is: What type of dog can you maintain control of? Veterinarians who are experts in animals and handling animals become uncomfortable when clients cannot control their dog, large or small. Well-mannered dogs are a joy to their owners and everyone around them. Ill-mannered or out-of-control dogs cause stress in relationships, animals and humans. At worst, ill-mannered dogs are dangerous.

Before getting a dog, try one on for size. Spend some time with the type of dog you are interested in having. Pay close attention to the personality of the dog. Many good dogs are available. The most important aspect of enjoying a family dog is getting one that fits the personality of your family.

**Charles Stoltenow**, D.V.M., Extension Veterinarian  
Department of Animal Sciences, NDSU



**Sports are so competitive. I'm trying to find some noncompetitive activities for my son to encourage him to be active throughout his life. Do you have any ideas?**

That is a great question! Competitive activities do have benefits for some (not all) children; however, not every child enjoys competitive activities. Whether a competitive or noncompetitive activity, helping children develop, improve and refine gross motor skills, physical strength, social skills and self-esteem is important.

Teaching a lasting set of life skills and activities is more likely to influence children later in life. Some general lifelong activities include, but are not limited to, biking, hiking, kayaking, canoeing, swimming, archery, karate, running, walking, in-line skating, paintball, fishing, horseback riding, youth camps developed by fitness facilities, resistance training and group fitness classes (for example, yoga, kickboxing, aerobics, Pilates).

Another activity that is increasing in popularity is called Geocaching (pronounced: geo-cashing). According to the official Web site, Geocaching is a high-tech treasure hunting game played throughout the world by adventure seekers equipped with global positioning system devices. The basic idea is to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, outdoors and then share your experiences online. Geocaching is enjoyed by people from all age groups, with a strong sense of community and support for the environment. For more information on Geocaching, visit the official Web site, [www.geocaching.com/](http://www.geocaching.com/).

Regardless of the activity, research shows that active children are more likely to be active adults; therefore, getting kids active early in life is imperative.

**Kristen Hetland**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of Health, Nutrition and Exercise Sciences, NDSU

Reference: Corbin, C. (2006). *Lessons in Youth Activity*. Retrieved Nov. 20, 2009, from [www.acsm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home\\_Page&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5364](http://www.acsm.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home_Page&template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=5364)

## My daughter gets very upset when her team loses a game. How can I help her roll with the wins and the losses?

Competition can be both good and bad, and a certain amount of maturity is required to handle it. Children who are tee ball age may not be developmentally ready to handle competitive situations. The focus at this level should be on developing skills, having fun and exhibiting good sportsmanship. Oftentimes, children still continue to focus on winning and losing.

As you try to figure out what is motivating your daughter to be so upset, take a close look at how the coaches/parents are responding to the situation. Our society is extremely achievement focused, and many parents/coaches pressure their children at early ages to win and be the best at all costs.

If adults in your daughter's life are doing this, they may need to back off a little. Your daughter should try hard so she can feel proud of herself; but if she doesn't win, she needs to accept the loss, learn from her mistakes and have a good attitude about trying again.

Help her learn to balance the satisfaction of playing a game with the aspiration of winning. This may take several conversations, with you pointing out examples when others are too competitive or out of line. As parents and coaches, you are responsible for communicating what is and is not an acceptable response. Modeling the behavior you expect is the most positive and productive way to change her behavior.

**Joe Deutsch**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor  
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## Should kids perform resistance (weight) training?

Absolutely! Youth can gain many benefits from performing a properly designed and supervised resistance training program. The benefits include increased bone mineral density, increased strength, improved sports performance, weight control, enhanced self-esteem and a reduced risk of injuries.

Despite all the benefits, some people still believe youth should not be involved in resistance training. This belief usually is due to worry about the kids getting injured while resistance training. The main concern is damage to the growth plates of bones.

Although any physical activity carries some risk, the rate of injuries while resistance training is much lower than the risk from many common sports that young people participate in, such as football, hockey, basketball and soccer. In fact, resistance training leads to increased strength of not only the muscles but also the bones, ligaments and tendons, thus reducing the risk of injury during sports participation. The majority of the few injuries that occur during resistance training usually are due to improper and unsupervised resistance training, which results in improper technique, using too much weight and dropping or walking into weights.

When thinking about resistance or weight training, most people think of machines, dumbbells, barbells and weight plates. However, resistance can be provided by a youth's own body weight. For many kids, using their own body weight, such as during push-ups and pull-ups, will provide enough resistance. If weight plates or dumbbells are being used as resistance, youth should use a weight with which they can complete six to 15 repetitions. Resistance training can be completed by youth two to three days per week on nonconsecutive days.

The youth's maturity, interest and enthusiasm should be taken into consideration when getting a young person started with resistance training. Resistance training is a lifetime activity; therefore, it should be fun so that youth will want to continue the activity throughout their life. The benefits will lead to an improved quality of life for decades to come.

**Bryan Christensen**, Ph.D., Associate Professor  
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## My 13-year-old daughter wants to participate in a 5K run with me. Neither of us has run more than one mile at a time. How should we prepare?

You have a number of things to consider when preparing for your first 5K. Some key questions are: Do you want to run the entire distance (as opposed to taking periodic walking breaks)? Do you want to achieve a certain time? How much time do you have to train? How long until the actual event?

The ideal length of time to prepare for a 5K is no less than 12 weeks, three to five days each week. If you can run one mile, we will use that as your starting point. Assuming that running a mile takes you about 12 minutes, you can anticipate a 5K time of 30 to 40 minutes. (Five kilometers is 3.125 miles; 12 minutes times 3.125 miles is 37.5 minutes.)

If possible, you may want to do some or all of your training at the time of day you will be running the race. Some people find that training in the evenings, then being prepared for an 8 a.m. race, is quite challenging.

For an event of this duration, special hydration needs usually are not necessary unless you live somewhere particularly hot and humid. Otherwise, drinking water before and after each training session is sufficient. You do not need to use any type of “energy” food during a training session or the race.

So, for a weekly plan, the idea is to gradually increase the total amount of time running, using one-minute walking breaks throughout. Most people will find that on the day of the race, given the excitement and adrenaline, completing the entire distance without walking will be quite possible.

A word of caution, however, is that most novice racers start out far too quickly, which can make the last mile quite a challenge. During your training sessions, make sure to run an even pace throughout, which should help on race day. A heart rate monitor, although not necessary, can be a good tool to keep you from starting too quickly. Use the monitor during all of your training runs to get a good sense of what your heart rate should be normally during a run. Then on race day, make sure not to exceed this, especially in the first mile.

**Gary Liguori**, Ph.D., Assistant Professor  
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### Here is a weekly plan to prepare for the race:

- Weeks one and two - total running time: 15 minutes (three to five times each week); (run three minutes, walk one minute) x 5
- Weeks three and four - total running time: 20 minutes (three to five times each week); (run five minutes, walk one minute) x 4
- Weeks five and six - total running time: 24 minutes (three to five times each week); (run eight minutes, walk one minute) x 3
- Weeks seven and eight - total running time: 30 minutes (three to five times each week); (run 10 minutes, walk one minute) x 3
- Weeks nine and 10 - total running time: 30 minutes (three to five times each week); (run 15 minutes, walk one minute) x 2
- Weeks 11 and 12 - total running time: 40 minutes (three to five times each week); (run 20 minutes, walk one minute) x 2; no running for two days prior to race

**We live next to a park with some old playground equipment. I'm wondering if it's safe for my kids to play on. What should I look for?**

This is a very good question for every parent to ask. A safety review of the playground area by an adult often can prevent a trip to the hospital emergency room.

The most important part of the playground area to evaluate is the surface under the equipment. Almost eight of every 10 playground-related injuries are caused by falls. The surface should be at least 9 to 12 inches of loose material. Wood chips, pea gravel and sand are commonly used materials. However, sand and other materials can compact and lose their energy-absorbing properties. Some playgrounds now use shredded rubber or poured soft surfaces.

The one important detail to be concerned about is the surface onto which children could fall from the equipment. The surface is designed to use shock-absorbing materials and prevent or minimize injury when a fall occurs, but children's active play often can displace this portion of the surface area. The surface material should be redistributed to the fall areas regularly.

In addition to falls, parents should examine their child's clothing for strings that can cause a child to become entangled on a bolt that may be too long or in a joint in the equipment.

Entrapments, impalement and tripping hazards also are potential hazards and should be reviewed. Generally, the safety of the design of the equipment improves if the equipment was purchased from and installed by a reputable contractor and has been updated.

Community residents should contact their park board or school if they are concerned about a public playground's safety. Upgrading playground equipment and site always is a positive community activity and source of community pride.

Further information on playground safety can be found at: [www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/fitness/fn1374color.pdf](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/pubs/yf/fitness/fn1374color.pdf).

**Thomas C. Barnhart**, Ph.D., Professor  
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Reference: Tinsworth, D.K., and McDonald, J.E. (2001). Special Study: Injuries and Deaths Associated with Children's Playground Equipment. U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission: Washington, D.C.

**Here are some other ways to make playgrounds safer:**

- Inspect and replace the "S" hooks on chains used with swings when needed because they are subject to wear.
- Have adults supervise play activities.
- Separate age groups (toddler vs. school age) and use appropriately-sized equipment.
- Avoid older slides without a transition platform at the top of the ladder.



**Get your calcium-rich foods**

- Go low-fat or fat-free
- If you don't or can't consume milk, choose lactose-free products or other calcium sources