

## Supporting your child in golf

### **1** Starting to play

There is no specific age as to when to start playing golf but it is important that your child has good physical fundamentals, such as body coordination, hand-eye coordination and basic skills such as running, jumping, balance, etc.

You should encourage physical activity from an early age and it is important that a young child is involved in more than one physical activity. As **Jack Nicklaus** said

*“You see kids specialize in golf. I think that is idiotic. To play all sports is great. I played everything. I think that kids should be playing everything, doing everything. Eventually, if you want to specialize in something, that’s fine. But go out and enjoy, and be happy to play other things.”<sup>1</sup>*

In recent research Canadian PGA Henry Brunton stated, “parents should guard against early specialization in golf and over exposure to organized competition. This can lead to burn-out and overuse injury issues in later stages”<sup>2</sup>.

At this stage you should:

- Bring them to the local golf centre for a quality coaching session; check that the teacher is a member of the PGA, who has completed child protection training and undergone appropriate recruitment procedures, (<http://www.pga.org>)
- Check that the environment is safe, the equipment is the appropriate size and weight and the activities are suitable for the age of your child
- Stay and observe a little of the lesson to make sure your child is enjoying it but don’t interfere unnecessarily with the coaching



### **2** Committing to golf

After a series of lessons your child may want to join the local club. You should ensure that:

- The club is child friendly – there is a junior co-ordinator, a junior committee, and/or a junior room, junior coaching and junior competition days
- They have a child protection policy, including a code of conduct for juniors and adults
- The adults working with your child have completed child protection training and appropriate police checks
- Junior activities, coaching and competitions are appropriately supervised
- There is an induction night for new members which explains the rules and regulations of the club, including when your child will have unsupervised access to the course
- There are appropriate arrangements in place if travel to tournaments is involved
- There is someone to talk to if you have a concern

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Brunton, page 20

<sup>2</sup> Brunton, Henry. The Development of Expertise for Elite Competitive Golfers, Paper submitted to the Canadian PGA, 2007



At this stage you should:

- Buy your child some suitable equipment (your local PGA pro will help you with this)
- Attend some coaching sessions to ensure the child is enjoying them
- Be there to lend support after competitions by asking about the game and not just about the score
- Take your child out golfing in ‘non-organised’ activities – variety and modified competitions can keep the golfer motivated
- Be prepared to travel to away matches with other clubs
- Identify ways in which you can contribute to the club (supervision, travel, etc)
- Inform the club of any necessary information in relation to your child (injuries, medical conditions, etc.)

As any golfer knows, it is often a long process before significant progress is made, from being able to play a full hole on the golf course to obtaining a handicap and playing in club competitions. Some young golfers may express frustration in this regard. Your role as a parent is to support and understand the difficulty of the game for beginners.

### **Progressing to a competitive level**

After some time your child may progress to the point where they may be chosen for a training squad for further coaching or selected tournaments, e.g. playing for their county, province or country. At this point they will have to travel for additional coaching and may be asked to participate in tournaments that might not be supervised by the club. Your child will be dependant on numerous adults at this stage, club coach, squad coach, team manager, team physio, etc.

You and your child will need to be happy with the relationship between the adult and the young player. Player and coach may not always agree but you and your child should at least feel that they have your child’s best interest at heart. You should be involved in the setting of goals that the coach sets with your child. Be confident that they are putting the needs of your child first and not their desire to win.

At this point there may be increased financial demands associated with your child’s participation.



The following are some things for you to consider as a parent of a talented golfer. You should:

- Observe coaching sessions, ensure that your child is enjoying the extra sessions and keep note of how extra sessions may be affecting them. Your child will be anxious to do what is demanded of them but may not recognise signs of burn-out from excessive training<sup>3</sup>
- Focus on their improvements and not on individual results or outcomes

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<sup>3</sup> Did Tracy Austin’s parents realise while she was on her rise to success that she would be retired by 21 due to repeated, painful injuries?

- Keep a balanced approach towards golf; don't let it define your child
- Travel with your child to open tournaments
- Ensure the competitive experience is a positive one, which builds self-confidence and independence and is not focused solely on the result
- Familiarise yourself with your child's mentors; ensure coaches have up-to-date qualifications and have signed a code of conduct
- Pay attention to your child's non-golfing activities as well as their golfing results

It is important to allow the child to develop their own independence within golf and to learn to take responsibility for their own performance, on and off the course. This can start at an early age, for example:

#### 8-11 year olds

- Get their gear ready the night before
- Pack their bag, water bottle, rain gear, etc.
- Learn basic rules

#### 12-14 year olds

- Look after their own equipment
- Warm-up properly
- Develop a drinking routine on course
- Develop a nutritional routine including healthy snacks

#### 15-18 year olds

- Review their own performance using statistic sheets, etc
- Arrange their own coaching lessons outside of group sessions
- Send in tournament entries themselves
- Develop quality practice routine(s)
- Review courses before tournaments and arrange practice rounds
- Find their own effective pre-tournament routine
- Evaluate their own performance and make necessary adjustments consulting with support, such as coach, physio, etc.

While assisting your child with the pre-tournament tasks it is important to prepare the golfer to be able to perform independently as you will not always be with them. In building up independence you will also build up self-confidence.

*“Golf is a long-term developmental sport. The development of an elite golfer is paced more like a marathon than a sprint. Adults need to be careful not to predict who the eventual adult champions will be in the early stages of development when players are learning the basics of the sport and their bodies and minds are far from full maturation”<sup>4</sup>*

**Watch the magic helmet clip - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rWjBvcfhRX0>**

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<sup>4</sup> Bruton, as cited above

