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# THE CrossFit JOURNAL KIDS

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## Fun With a Purpose

Jeff Martin explains how the philosophy of the CrossFit Kids program sets young athletes up for a lifetime of success.

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March 2012

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BIG Fun! Anyone who has gone through a CrossFit Kids Trainer Course better have come away with the idea that kids classes need to be fun or that trainer will have failed in his or her primary purpose.

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From preschool to teens, fun is a must. We are trying to get kids to buy into the idea that fitness and fun are synonymous. When kids see the gym, they should think fun. When they see pull-up bars, they should think fun. Barbells—fun. When kids think of CrossFit, they should think fun. Our task in the program is to incorporate Hebbian theory (2) to allow for an auto-association of fitness with fun.

For a CrossFit Kids trainer, it is important to recognize the fact that fun changes over time. For the preschoolers and children, fun is the game. The first question they ask is “what game are we playing today?” The game is fun. For tweens and teens, competition becomes the fun. Learning new skills becomes the fun. Hanging with their friends becomes the fun. But every time they walk through the door, from preschoolers to teens, it’s fun. It has to be. That the kids think CrossFit Kids is fun is extremely important to the development of a lifelong love of fitness. Kids want to do the things they find fun. They ask to do them, and they are much more likely to stick with them.

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Because the program is fun, it also allows us to influence children’s view of nutrition. It’s not uncommon to see kids waiting for their parents and sharing almonds or macadamia nuts in groups. Tweens and teens drink Stronger Faster Healthier shakes after their WOD or compare notes on clean eating, the Zone and how their nutrition is affecting their performance. Essentially, what it comes down to is that fun isn’t just the game; it’s the community, the other kids.

In a properly run CrossFit Kids program, we find that children develop their own community. Kids begin coming to class because that is where their friends are. They begin to take on a CrossFitter’s point of view of the world. It’s not uncommon at CrossFit Kids Headquarters to find a group of 7-year-old girls styling in their Life AsRx WOD socks or T-shirt or pulling their hair back with Reebok CrossFit headbands. All of this is important—making the



Daneil Marks/CrossFit Kids

*The secret: if fitness is fun, kids will want to be fit.*

classes fun, developing community, making the box the social center of their world. There is a tangential benefit here, though, one of supreme importance to CrossFit Kids trainers: it buys us time. And time is everything when working with kids.

### **Movement Aged to Perfection**

This idea of time is important to us. Why? Because our job as CrossFit trainers is to teach human movement. It’s not to be a cheerleader while someone achieves a Fran PR (although chief congratulator might be in order). No, our job is to help people move better. Effective, efficient and safe! If we teach kids to move better, they will, of course, be able to move faster, go longer and move more weight, but the goal is always perfecting movement. Guess what this comes down to? Mechanics. We teach and focus on mechanics. Over and over and over. And that, my friends, takes time. Time over a long period and characterized by a young client’s consistent class attendance.

From the Level 1 Trainer Course, we learn that we cannot introduce intensity to clients until they have two basic capabilities: mechanics and consistency. This is absolutely critical when teaching kids. The idea of mechanics involves not only being able to perform the movement correctly but also safely. The concept of proper mechanics also embraces the notion that our clients, kids in this case, can understand the cues and corrections we may use in the course of a workout or class. The concept of consistency means that the individual can perform the movement in a mechanically sound manner with different loads over a variety of rep schemes. In CrossFit Kids, we add a third parameter: that our kids can perform the movement mechanically correctly over time—meaning that they execute the squat correctly over several months in several different classes using different rep schemes and light loads.



Danell Marks/CrossFit Kids

***Kids move differently as they grow, and you have to re-teach good movement throughout their development.***

Why do we need so much time? Because it is our experience that teaching kids is profoundly different than teaching adults (e.g., 3,4). Teaching the squat to adults can be complicated. Imagine teaching a child. How does the squat start? Where do you go to? How do you finish? Where do the feet go? What constitutes a rep? For the younger kids, the concept of a one-to-one relationship between a squat rep and a number is foreign. Very quickly this “simple” movement starts sounding complex, doesn’t it? And we haven’t even gotten to where the knees and hips need to be, midline stability, lumbar curve, thoracic extension or neutral head. It’s too much, too long and too involved.

CrossFit Kids trainers break these ideas down into very small, manageable pieces for kids. Just teaching where to put the feet can be skill work for kids, presented over and over in novel ways. We often hear that kids squat perfectly. Guess what? They don’t. At least they don’t with any consistency in a WOD. Squatting well with consistency takes time. Coach Greg Glassman has said that to develop a good squat could take seven years. Children will go through several growth spurts between the ages 7 and 18. They grow taller and wider, and their limbs change length in proportion to their bodies. Muscles get bigger and weight is gained; essentially, the child becomes a different person several times in his or her young life. You, as a CrossFit Kids trainer, have to teach each of these “new people” how to squat, and as Coach Glassman pointed out, it can take a long time.

Kids don’t necessarily retain information the way adults do. Every parent and teacher can attest that unless kids study and read over the summer, they re-enter school in the fall reading and doing math behind where they were at the start of the break (e.g., 1). Knowledge is perishable, and so are movement skills to youngsters. It is not uncommon in a CrossFit Preschool Class to see a youngster performing beautifully during skill and focus work, but, come the workout, every single rep is different from the last.

There are only 10 basic movements in CrossFit Kids, and these movements are broken down in simple progressions for trainers at the CrossFit Kids Trainer Course. A good CrossFit Kids program uses the various stages of progressions as skill work for its young clients, constantly introducing a piece of a movement in various unique ways, then linking those pieces into a whole movement. Over the years, CrossFit Kids has found that only through constant repetition are proper movement patterns cemented for a young client.



Danell Marks/CrossFit Kids

***If presented properly, fun activities set kids up for a lifetime of great movement.***

## Fun With a Purpose

Working with kids is like woodworking or sculpting. If you hurry the process, you will ruin the product. If you want the final product to be beautiful, you must take your time. The idea of mechanics first, consistency and having time with clients fits perfectly within the CrossFit Kids ideals and the continuum from CrossFit Preschool to adult main-page CrossFit.

CrossFit Preschool and CrossFit Kids classes focus on mechanics. The fun of the game allows us the opportunity to hone these mechanics over time, which is a component of consistency. As children mature, competition becomes part of the fun, which fosters intensity in the Teen/Advanced Class, where loads become heavier and technical understanding of the movement and trainer-client communication in terms of the language of correction become critical. The Teen/Advanced Class is gradually replaced by the adult class, and competition both with oneself and one's peers becomes essential to success.

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All this is why we need time. We get that time if our classes are fun—broad, inclusive, general (BIG) fun. But there is an important caveat. The easy part of running a CrossFit Kids program is making it fun for children who seem wired for fun. CrossFit Kids trainers earn their stripes by ensuring that fun is not silly or pointless. It has to be purposeful. If successfully pairing fitness and fun buys us time with the kids, we must always use that time to make kids move better, laying a foundation for excellent movement their whole lives.



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