

**E313\_1**

**Physical activity: a family affair**

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## Introduction

For most athletes the journey to attaining expertise in sport frequently begins with an active childhood and taking an interest in sport from an early age. So what makes us sporty or active? Think back to your own early experiences of physical activity. Who played your first game of catch with you or taught you to ride your bike? The answer to these questions will most likely be a member of your family. There are many factors, psychological, social and biological, that shape who we are and what we do, and the family we are born into and grow up in is certainly one of these factors. This course aims to explore the effects that the family has on the amount and nature of physical activity a child participates in. The beliefs and behaviours of the family environment are the key psychosocial factors we investigate here.

This OpenLearn course is an adapted extract from the Open University course [E313 Exploring psychological aspects of athletic development](http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/course/e313.htm?utm_source=openlearn&utm_campaign=ol&utm_medium=ebook).

## Learning outcomes

After studying this course, you should be able to:

* summarise the main research evidence of family influence on a child’s level of physical activity participation
* relate expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1993; Eccles et al., 1983) to parental involvement in children’s sporting experience
* understand how gender and parental gender stereotypes may affect parents’ support of children’s participation in sport.

## 1 What is the modern-day family unit?

There have been many changes in the way that families function in recent years, in particular to living arrangements in the developed world. The family unit now takes many different forms to the 20th century Western society construct of two parents and two children living in the family home.

Celia Brackenridge (2006) acknowledges these changes in her definition of the term ‘parent’:

Start of Quote

Conventionally, the term ‘parent’ has been applied to the birth mother or father but it has become socially and politically diversified in recent years. Changes in demographic structures and patterns of family life mean that ‘parent’ is now applied to a wealth of living arrangements and adult responsibilities vis-à-vis children. For the purposes of this review ‘parent’ will be used as a generic term for any adult with de facto responsibility for the ongoing domestic care and welfare of the child but not to those ‘in loco parentis’ who take only a temporary or intermittent caring role.

(p. 1)

End of Quote

This is the definition of the parent we will use for this free course along with the term ‘sibling’, which can be applied to any children living in the family home whether or not they have the same biological parents.

## 2 Socialisation into sport and physical activity

In an academic review of developing participation, Sports Coach UK states that ‘with the family identified as the first point of socialisation into sport (and ultimately into society) it is clear this is a key and underpinning aspect to the entire sport experience of young people’ (Bailey et al., 2010, p. 79).

There are many factors that contribute to when, if, and how a family socialises children into sport and physical activity, such as the amount of family time available to spend together, socio-economic status, parental interest in sport and physical activity, and the family structure. We will discuss some of these factors in more detail later in the course, however the overarching principle indicated by the Sports Coach UK Review is that ‘those who have family members involved in sport are more likely to be involved themselves’ (Bailey et al., 2010, p. 79).

Start of Activity

**Activity 1 Pinsent talks family**

Allow about 20 minutes

Start of Question

Watch the video clip of Matthew Pinsent discussing his family. What role did Matthew’s family play in his introduction to sport and exercise? How do your experiences compare to Matthew’s? For example, consider the amount of time spent together as a family, socio-economic status, parental interest in their own and the children’s sporting activities. You may also consider the family structure or your own position in the family.

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

Matthew Pinsent on family influences

[View transcript - Matthew Pinsent on family influences](" \l "Session2_Transcript1)

Start of Figure



End of Figure

End of Media Content

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 1 Pinsent talks family](" \l "Session2_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 3 Are children becoming less active?

In an age of games consoles and internet chat rooms, the media has widely reported that modern-day children are becoming less active. Box 1 refers to a survey published by British Triathlon and Tata Steel (2011) that illustrates these concerns.

Start of Box

**Box 1 2011 Survey on children and physical activity**

In a 2011 survey conducted by British Triathlon and Tata Steel of 1,500 children aged six to fifteen, results found 10% cannot ride a bike, 15% cannot swim and 22% had never run a distance of 400m. One of the most interesting aspects was that a third of the children questioned said they did not own a bike, while three quarters (77%) had a games console. In the week before the poll was conducted in March 2011, just 46% had ridden their bikes and 34% had swum the length of a pool, but 73% had played a video game. 15% of the children said they had never played sport with their parents.

(BBC, 2011)

End of Box

The statistics in Box 1 imply that in many families physical activity may not be considered a priority. However, should we accept these statistics as being accurate or should we look more deeply into this survey to question the information we are presented with? The next activity will help you begin to formulate a critical approach to evaluating research.

Start of Activity

**Activity 2 Statistics: the bigger picture**

Allow about 30 minutes

Start of Question

Read the online article ‘[Bad news: are kids turning their backs on sports?](http://www.merseysideskeptics.org.uk/2011/05/bad-news-are-kids-turning-their-backs-on-sports/#more-1024)’ (Merseyside Skeptics Society, 2011). What point is the author trying to make about statistics?

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 2 Statistics: the bigger picture](" \l "Session3_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 4 Theoretical perspectives of participation

The majority of young children’s time is spent with family members, especially parents, and this is why the family is a vital social facilitator influencing the way a child thinks and behaves, and in particular the opportunities they are presented with. There are many groups and classes that young children can be introduced to but this is not a choice they are able to make themselves. It is the parents who decide whether they take their child to music classes, arts and crafts sessions or swimming lessons. It is the parents who decide whether the child is to stay indoors and watch television or be taken to the park for a more physical activity.

These decisions are informed by the parents’ own attitudes and beliefs, and it is these psychological factors that interest us most. Admittedly, social factors such as cost, local provision and proximity to amenities are also relevant; however, research in this area does indicate that the psychological climate created by parents influences a child’s participation in sport and physical activity, their experience of the activity and subsequently their continued participation (Partridge et al., 2008).

Activity 3 introduces you to the work of Jacquelynne Eccles. Eccles’ expectancy-value theory (Eccles et al., 1983; Eccles, 1993), which you will encounter in a moment, looks at parental influence on children’s motivation in achievement settings. Eccles’ theory is widely used in academic settings and has been applied to the sporting context to explain parental involvement.

Start of Activity

**Activity 3 Eccles’ expectancy-value theory**

Allow about 60 minutes

Start of Question

Read the article ‘[Theoretical perspectives: Eccles’ expectancy-value theory](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=14720)’ (Partridge et al., 2008). Then answer the following questions.

1. According to the expectancy-value theory, what are the different ways in which parents can influence their children’s participation in sport and physical activity?
2. In particular, what is the relevance of gender to this discussion? Note that the latest gender research presented in the chapter dates from 2005. Do you feel that this research is still applicable today?

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 3 Eccles’ expectancy-value theory](" \l "Session4_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 5 How important is the family environment?

Activity 3 illustrates the potential influence that parents have over their child’s recreational activities, and we must therefore consider what factors contribute to parental beliefs and motivations as regards physical activity. To help answer this question we can look at research into family characteristics. Bailey and Morley (2006, p. 20) reviewed a range of literature in this area and found that particular family characteristics strongly support participation in youth sport. These are:

* Parents achieved high standards within sport;
* Parents are of relatively high socio-economic status;
* Parents possess the ability and willingness to support the child financially;
* Parents are willing to dedicate large amounts of their own time to support the child’s participation in an activity;
* The parents own a car;
* The family size is relatively small;
* There are two parents;
* The child attends an independent school.

This research suggests that although the parents’ willingness to invest time in their child’s activities is a contributor, there are other factors that may be beyond the parents’ control, such as owning a car or being able to offer financial support. In addition, Porter (2000) found that parents are more supportive of activities that are easy to access, a safe play environment, good ‘drop-off’ arrangements and where activities are available to other members of the family, therefore convenience may also play a part. The point regarding family size is interesting; consider how this impacts on parents’ time and money if they have five children all wanting to participate in different activities, as opposed to those parents who can invest all their time and money in one child. Studies in developed nations generally indicate that elite athletes are more likely to come from middle- or upper-class families (Fraser-Thomas and Côté, 2006).

Activity 4 uses a case study to which we can apply Bailey and Morley’s findings. In the video we meet two boys who go on to compete at the Irish Dancing World Championships. We will return to this video and the story of the two boys throughout this study topic.

Start of Activity

**Activity 4 The Great Irish Dance Off**

Allow about 30 minutes

Start of Question

Watch the video clip ‘The Great Irish Dance Off’, which follows two Irish dancers on their journey to the World Championships, then answer the following questions.

1. Compare the family characteristics of the two dancers to the eight characteristics listed above. Do they support Bailey and Morley’s findings?
2. Do you feel that some of the eight criteria are more important than others? Go to the tutor group forum and rank the criteria you feel are the three most important, stating reasons for your answer.

Start of Media Content

Video content is not available in this format.

The Great Irish Dance Off

[View transcript - The Great Irish Dance Off](" \l "Session5_Transcript1)

Start of Figure



End of Figure

End of Media Content

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 4 The Great Irish Dance Off](" \l "Session5_Discussion1)

End of Activity

Certain sports appear to attract certain family characteristics. More than a third (37%) of British medal winners at the London 2012 Olympic Games were privately educated, with athletes from private schools dominating in rowing and equestrian events (Vasagar, 2012). However, Activity 4 illustrates that research can only tell part of a story and that there will always be exceptions to statistics such as these. Many athletes come from backgrounds in which family resources are limited. This suggests that although environmental factors can be influential, there are other contributing factors that are sometimes more important, such as attitudes and beliefs. It is to these psychological factors that we now turn.

## 6 Gender differences

Interestingly, John and Joe do not have any sisters but if they did would the girls receive the same level of family support? In a review article Gustafson and Rhodes (2006) reviewed 34 studies. Twenty-seven of these studies examined gender differences related to parental influence on a child’s physical activity levels. Activity 5 will help you to gain a fuller appreciation of the research in this area.

Start of Activity

**Activity 5 Parental support and gender**

Allow about 30 minutes

Start of Question

Read the abstract and Section 6 ‘Sex Relations’ of the article ‘[Parental correlates of physical activity in children and early adolescents](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=14730)’ (Gustafson and Rhodes, 2006) and answer the following questions.

1. What are the authors trying to do in writing this article?
2. What were the key findings from reviewing the existing research in this section of the article?
3. What do you notice about the proportions of different research designs that feature in this review?

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 5 Parental support and gender](" \l "Session6_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 7 Do active parents have active children?

Reinforcing the suggestion that active parents have active children, in an online interview Olympic triathlete Alistair Brownlee describes his childhood as extremely active. Both his mother and father were very sporty and involved both him and his brother (also an Olympic triathlete) in their active lifestyle, introducing them to running, swimming and cycling:

Start of Quote

Your parents control everything really. They control whether they take you swimming, or running, or take you out on your bike or whatever.

(The Open University, 2011)

End of Quote

In a longitudinal study by Moore et al. (1991) and which used an accelerometer (electronic device which measures the amount and intensity of movement) to assess physical activity levels in 100 4- to 7-year-olds and their parents, it was found that children of active mothers were twice as likely to be active as children of inactive mothers. Similarly, children of active fathers were 3.5 more times as likely to be active as those with inactive fathers. When both parents were active, the children were 5.8 times as likely to be active as children of two inactive parents. The study revealed that possible mechanisms for the relationship between parents’ and child’s activity levels included:

* the parents’ serving as role models
* sharing of activities by family members
* enhancement and support by active parents of their child’s participation in physical activity
* genetically determined factors that predispose the child to increased levels of physical activity.

The final point is an interesting one: research conducted by Wolfarth et al. (2005) identified potential genes for physical activity behaviours and characteristics. If we look at Alistair Brownlee, his parents appear to have implemented the first three mechanisms identified by Moore et al. (1991), although it is difficult to comment on the last point. Referring back to the data on gender, some studies have also indicated that parental participation is particularly important for daughters (Fredericks and Eccles, 2004).

Start of Activity

**Activity 6 An evening with the Murrays**

Allow about 25 minutes

Start of Question

Listen to the following radio programme in which Andy Murray, his mother Judy and brother Jamie discuss family life and sport, then answer the following questions.

1. How can Eccles’ expectancy-value theory (discussed in Activity 3) be applied to Judy’s role in Andy and Jamie’s participation in tennis?
2. In what way did Judy act as a role model for Andy and Jamie?

Start of Media Content

Audio content is not available in this format.

An evening with the Murrays

[View transcript - An evening with the Murrays](" \l "Session7_Transcript1)

End of Media Content

End of Question

[View discussion - Activity 6 An evening with the Murrays](" \l "Session7_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 8 Putting the pieces together

So far in this course we have examined a broad range of factors that contribute to the family’s socialisation of children into physical activity. Inevitably we are unable to analyse every study and paper relating to this topic as there are simply so many. However, the next activity guides you to consider a key journal article in this area. It is a cross-sectional study comprising a range of questionnaires designed to ascertain the influence of parental socialisation and children’s psychological characteristics upon their attraction to physical activity. It also refers back to Eccles’ expectancy-value theory introduced in Activity 3.

Start of Activity

**Activity 7 Parental influences on physical activity**

Allow about 60 minutes

Start of Question

Read the article by Brustad (1993) entitled ‘[Who will go out and play? Parental and psychological influences on children’s attraction to physical activity](https://www.open.edu/openlearn/ocw/mod/resource/view.php?id=14721)’.

Then answer the following questions.

1. What limitations do you notice from the sample used?
2. Through what procedures was the parent data gathered? Do you think the research instruments used have any limitations?
3. To what extent did the results support the proposed model of relationships among parental influences and children’s attraction to physical activity?

End of Question

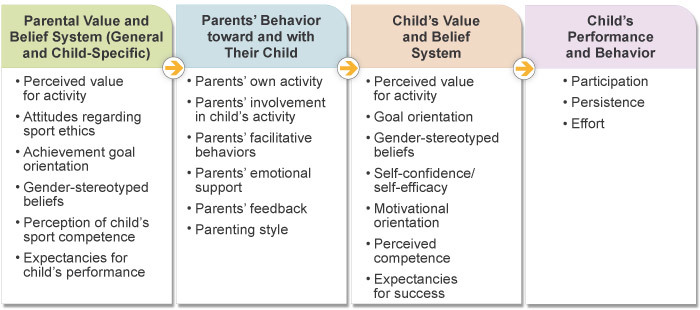
[View discussion - Activity 7 Parental influences on physical activity](" \l "Session8_Discussion1)

End of Activity

## 9 Beliefs and values

As we have learned, parents influence their child’s sporting experience in a variety of ways. Figure 1 below provides an illustration of the key features of Eccles’ expectancy-value theory and how parents’ values and beliefs influence behaviour towards their child, which in turn shapes the child’s own values and beliefs, and ultimately their performance and behaviour.

Start of Figure



Source: Horn, T. and Horn, J. (2007)

Figure 1

[View description - Figure 1](" \l "Session9_Description1)

End of Figure

## Conclusion

This free course has built on your own experience of socialisation into sport and explored the role of the family in this process. A number of social and psychological factors have been considered and it is important to acknowledge these do not exist in isolation but all work together to influence athletic development.

The main learning points of this course include the following:

* Families influence athletic development through providing opportunities for their children.
* More active parents are likely to have more active children. A study showed children of two active parents were 5.8 times as likely to be active as children of two inactive parents (Moore et al., 1991).
* Expectancy-value theory (Eccles, 1993; Eccles et al., 1983) states that if parents perceive sport to be an important achievement domain they will provide more frequent opportunities for their child to participate in sporting activities.
* Some studies indicate a ‘parental gender stereotype’ among parents as they are more likely to partake in sport and physical activity with their sons than their daughters and are more likely to take their sons to sporting events, although attitudes may have changed in more recent years.
* Certain family characteristics strongly support participation in youth sport. These include parents who achieved high standards within sport, are of relatively high socioeconomic status, support the child financially and dedicate time, and own a car, as well as there being two parents, a small family size, and children attending independent school.

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## Further reading

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**Text**

Activity 3, adapted from: Partridge, J.A., Brustad, R.J. and Stellino, M.B. (2008) ‘Social influence in sport’ in Horn, T.S. (ed) Advances in Sport Psychology, 3rd edn, Champaign, Human Kinetics, pp. 269–292. © 2008 Human Kinetics Publishers Inc.

Activity 5 ‘Parental correlates of physical activity in children and early adolescents’ Sabrina L. Gustafson and Ryan E. Rhodes, University of Victoria, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.Sports Med (2006), vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 79–97. © 2006 Adis DataInformation BV.

Activity 7 Brustad, R.J., Who will go out and play? Parental and psychological influences on children’s attraction to physical activity’ in Pediatric Exercise Science (1993) Human Kinetics Vol 5 pp 210-223 © 1993 Human Kinetics Publishers Inc.

**Images**

Figure 1: Horn, T. and Horn, J. (2007) ‘Chapter 31: Attachment and well-being: The mediating effects of psychological needs satisfaction within the coach-athlete and parent-athlete relational contexts’ in Tenenbaum, G. and Eklund, R. (eds) Handbook of Sport Psychology, 3rd edn, Canada, Wiley & Sons.

**AV**

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## Solutions

## Activity 1 Pinsent talks family

#### Discussion

Matthew Pinsent describes neither of his parents as being sporty, other than his dad playing ‘the occasional game of squash’. However, he does describe them as always being physically active and encouraging an active lifestyle. The support described by Matthew is both material (parents drive him round, pay for kit) and attitudinal (they support his decisions and encourage him to be active). Matthew also felt that being the youngest of three siblings impacted on his physical condition (early development). The combination of all these factors contributed to his positive disposition to sport. You may have related some of these to your own situation.

[Back to - Activity 1 Pinsent talks family](" \l "Session2_Activity1)

## Activity 2 Statistics: the bigger picture

#### Discussion

The main point of this article is to stress that when faced with statistics, particularly those published by the media, it is important to question the source of such evidence, and the reliability and validity of data collection. Without having the full results available and viewing the precise data collection method, analysis proves difficult. Even when we are not in possession of the exact data, it is generally advisable to do some common-sense thinking about vested interests and alternative explanations, and the author does point out some ‘potential biases’.

[Back to - Activity 2 Statistics: the bigger picture](" \l "Session3_Activity1)

## Activity 3 Eccles’ expectancy-value theory

#### Discussion

1. If a parent values sport as an important achievement domain then they will provide more frequent opportunities for their child to participate in sporting activities. Similarly, parents who believe that their child is likely to do well and achieve success in sport or who perceive their child to be competent at sport are more likely to provide support opportunities in that activity or domain. Children within the same family can be provided with different opportunities as parents can often form different beliefs about siblings.
2. Research does indicate a ‘parental gender stereotype’, as parents are more likely to partake in sport and physical activity with their sons than their daughters, and are more likely to take their sons to sporting events. This can also be linked to parental beliefs of perceived competence, as often parents will view their sons as possessing a higher ability in sport. In addition, parents often attribute a higher value to participating in sport and physical activity for their sons than their daughters. As the latest research on gender cited by this article is dated 2005, it could be argued that with the progress of activities such as girls’ rugby and football, and with the Olympic medals won by female British athletes at the 2012 Olympic Games, that many of these stereotypical beliefs are starting to be re-shaped and that more recent research is needed.

Eccles’ theory explores the role of parents in providing opportunities for their children. In addition to Eccles’ work, Hellstedt (1987, 1995) looked at parental involvement in children’s sport participation, conceptualising involvement on a continuum from under-involved to over-involved. Hellstedt concluded that moderate parental involvement was in children’s best interest, emphasising fun and skills development. It is worth noting that neither theory considers the role that school sport may play in athletic development, and in some cases, even with minimal parental involvement or support, the school sport system may provide opportunities and support for athletic development.

[Back to - Activity 3 Eccles’ expectancy-value theory](" \l "Session4_Activity1)

## Activity 4 The Great Irish Dance Off

#### Discussion

1. John’s circumstances meet some but not all of the criteria. John has achieved high standards, although his coach states that, ‘If John was in his class four or five times a week like the rest of his competitors probably are then he would be unbeatable, unfortunately he is one of five, they’re all playing football and going in different directions, and Irish dancing is expensive’. Joe’s family appear to fit more of the criteria. They are from a higher socio-economic background, as his dad used to own a successful medical practice. He is an only child and the sole focus of his parent’s time and money; they even moved country to boost his chances of success. These differences in family circumstances are influential as John’s larger family means that he is given less chance to participate than Joe. It will be interesting to see what effect, if any, this has in terms of their success later on.
2. Although John’s family do not meet as many of the criteria as Joe’s family, the boys are equally successful. This would suggest that perhaps some factors are more predictive of participation than others. Through contributing to the tutor group forum and responding to other postings you should engage in an extended discussion around this topic.

[Back to - Activity 4 The Great Irish Dance Off](" \l "Session5_Activity1)

## Activity 5 Parental support and gender

#### Discussion

1. The aim of this article is to collate the existing research on parental influences on children’s physical activity behaviours in order to establish any gaps in the research and to identify the direction for future research. The overall aim of the research is to improve current child physical activity intervention programmes.
2. The majority of studies found a strong sex difference in physical activity levels, with boys tending to be more active and receiving more parental support. There is some evidence for a correlation between mother–daughter physical activity but mother–son correlations were not as consistent. There is a strong correlation between father and child physical activity, particularly between father and son, with only one of the studies not finding a relationship.
3. Twenty-two studies were cross-sectional and five longitudinal. Longitudinal research is valuable as it allows the researcher to view any changes to the population that occur over a period of time, however they are expensive. In addition, such studies are also exposed to subjects dropping out or withdrawing from the research. Interestingly, none of the studies reviewed used experimental designs.

[Back to - Activity 5 Parental support and gender](" \l "Session6_Activity1)

## Activity 6 An evening with the Murrays

#### Discussion

1. Expectancy-value theory states that if a parent values sport as an important achievement domain then they will provide more frequent opportunities for their child to participate in sport activities. Judy came from a sporting family herself and grew up playing sport, therefore she valued sport as a domain and wanted her children to value and enjoy it too, and so provided lots of opportunities for them. This didn’t always involve organised sport and could be simply playing games with them in the house and garden to get them active.
2. Judy Murray modelled a sporting environment for the boys, encouraging them to experience a range of activities. The Murrays lived close to a tennis club and Judy was a volunteer coach there so the boys got used to being around tennis. This could be seen as role modelling. We could take this a step further and look at sibling relationships with Jamie also acting as a role model for Andy.

[Back to - Activity 6 An evening with the Murrays](" \l "Session7_Activity1)

## Activity 7 Parental influences on physical activity

#### Discussion

1. You may have questioned why approximately 95% of the children in the study were Caucasian and from an upper middle-class background. Therefore, can we apply the results of this study to the general population?
2. The parental data was gathered using questionnaires. These were sent home to parents in a letter. Only one of each set of parents was asked to complete the questionnaire and so this does not necessarily reflect the other parents’ attitudes. The majority of questionnaires were completed by mothers. For measures of physical fitness the researchers were reliant upon the parents’ own assessment rather than a physical test. One PE teacher lost a sample of the parental questionnaires and so out of 231 children only 81 parental questionnaires were obtained, reducing the sample size considerably.
3. The paper concluded that parental influences, children’s gender and children’s self-perception characteristics are all important in shaping a child’s attraction to physical activity.

[Back to - Activity 7 Parental influences on physical activity](" \l "Session8_Activity1)

# Figure 1

## Description

This is a simplified flow diagram, made up of four text-filled boxes linked by three arrows from left to right.

The boxes contain the following text. [Left-hand box, header:] ‘Parental Value and Belief System (General and Child-Specific)’. [Followed by the following items as bullet points:] ‘Perceived value for activity; Attitudes regarding sport ethics; Achievement goal orientation; Gender-stereotyped beliefs; Perception of child’s sport competence; Expectancies for child’s performance.’

[Box second from left, header:] ‘Parents’ Behavior toward and with Their Child’. [Followed by the following items as bullet points:] ‘Parents’ own activity; Parents’ involvement in child’s activity; Parents’ facilitative behaviors; Parents’ emotional support; Parents’ feedback; Parenting style.’

[Box second from right, header:] ‘Child’s Value and Belief System’. [Followed by the following items as bullet points:] ‘Perceived value for activity; Goal orientation; Gender-stereotyped beliefs; Self-confidence/self-efficacy; Motivational orientation; Perceived competence; Expectancies for success.’

[Right-hand box, header:] ‘Child’s Performance and Behavior’. [Followed by the following items as bullet points:] ‘Participation; Persistence; Effort.’

[Back to - Figure 1](" \l "Session9_Figure1)

# Matthew Pinsent on family influences

## Transcript

MATTHEW PINSENT

I was the youngest of three. I had two older sisters who were nothing but lovely to me. I don't want to say they beat me up or anything. And I think part of my ingredients was wanting to catch up with them when I was growing up. So playing their games and joining in with them and keeping up with them speed wise. Or, whatever it might have been, I think I developed physically a bit sooner than I might have done.

And my parents were always there as both a support to my chosen sport-- whether it was driving me around occasionally or paying for stuff. Junior sports is expensive. But also my parents, I think, had the influence on me that I was quite respectful of the sport and my opposition and my teammates and all that. And that was more important as I went higher up, never to forget. I shouldn't be saying things that my mum would be ashamed about or whatever. That was always quite a good barometer of what was good or bad.

My parents were not sporty at all. My dad would play the occasional game of squash. My mum-- hard to think of my mum in a sporting environment at all, really. Perfectly active, but not sporty. I don't think she owns a bit of sports kit.

I think they encouraged me to try things that I could be good at and didn't judge me for the sacrifices that it would make. Even though it was obviously impacting on my future career choices, they never once said, don't be doing that. That's a bad thing to do. Or it's too risky or whatever.

Matthew Pinsent video and transcript © The Open University

[Back to - Matthew Pinsent on family influences](" \l "Session2_MediaContent1)

# The Great Irish Dance Off

## Transcript

JOHN

I'm John, and I'm 10. And I've got five brothers. And I'm the only one who dances. And this year I'm going for Worlds for my very first time. Stepbrother's called Lee. And my brothers are-- the oldest is Dean. Ashley. And then it's me. And then it's Thomas. And then it's James. I like dancing 10 out of 10. And football about 2 out of 10.

JOHN'S MOTHER

We're not Irish. We don't know Irish dancing. And we went to a Feis. And we walked in. And it was like a Shirley Temple convention, wasn't it? There was teenagers and youngsters then that got the wigs on and really brown legs. Really made up faces. And then these wigs and it was like-- you just find yourself staring at people for a very long time, thinking, I'm glad I've got a boy.

JOHN CAREY

Point two, three, four. Squeeze and point. Tent your legs. Darcy, you're not pointing toes to the back. Ellie, you're not pointing toes to the back! Faye, you're not even listening! One, two, three!

JOHN

There's quite a lot of people who tease me and call me names. But I just ignore them and walk away. Because they don't know what they're talking about.

JOHN'S FATHER

It's not as bad as it used to be. It used to be terrible out there. People would be-- John says, he's called me gay and that lot. We used to say, just take no notice. Just go and show them what you can do.

JOHN'S MOTHER

As a parent, you want to go out there and you want to say to them, don't call him gay. Michael Flatley's not gay. But then you have to stop yourself because...

JOHN'S FATHER

That's Monday. I tend to go out there and throw wobblies.

JOHN CAREY

Lift! Lift! Put your elbows in! Step, two, three! Two, two, three! Three, two, three, and four! Hop and jump! Hop! Jump!

JOHN

It's the rhythm and the music. And the shoes. I like the shoes.

JOHN CAREY

One, two, three, four, tuck, kick, down!

When he first learned his sevens, which is one of the first things you learn, he was up on his toes like this. And I was like, oh god. He's going to be good.

Go! Stretch and one, two! Up, kick, down! Watch your arms John!

If John was at class four or five times a week like the rest of his competition probably are, then I'm sure he would be pretty much unbeatable. But unfortunately, one of five, they're all playing football, going in different directions. And dancing is expensive.

JOHN'S MOTHER

My wages basically pay for John's dancing. I go away and freeze and everything come weekends with the TA. And at the back of me mind, I'm thinking, this is for John.

JOHN CAREY

Up is down. Up is down. Now tense your body. And kick, two, three. And up and a one, two, stretch. Now right up! Push! Kick down. That's better. And you're up, upper back, upper stamp, up. Three clicks. One, two. Straight legs. Stretch. Push. Up! Kick down. Stamp point, stamp point. Tense. Pull in here. Five, six, seven.

When he hits it, and when he's on form, I think he's probably unbeatable.

And a one, two, stretch, two, three, four. And a one, two, stretch, two, three, push! Now really stretch it out, out, out! Yeah, that was better.

JOHN

I've been making silly mistakes in stopping, but hopefully this year it will all go.

JOHN CAREY

He just tends to forget things and do something silly, or just stop eight bars before the end. And I'll say, what were you thinking? I don't know. I forgot.

Right. Who's next? Mitch?

JOHN'S MOTHER

How are your blisters?

JOHN

They're OK.

JOHN'S MOTHER

Have you still got your plasters on.

JOHN

Yeah.

JOHN CAREY

It is frustrating, because he could be so good. I think he's got the potential to win Worlds, definitely. He's a completely different dancer to Joe. He has to have something for a long time. And when it's polished, and when he knows it, and it's drilled right, it looks great. But then he might forget it anyway. Whereas Joe, even on his worst day, will never forget it. He'll never, ever stop.

JOHN

I'd like to dance like Joe Bitter. He's strong. He's confident. And I just love the way he dances.

JOHN CAREY

Stretch it out and three, four, up and down. And stretch, push, up, and down. Pull it back. Leg up. Shoulders back. Stretch. Stretch, two, three, four, up, and down. Stamp down. One, two, three, four, up and down. Stretch. Push up and down. Pull that back leg up!

And stretch. Stretch, two, three, four, up, and down. Push cross, cross, cross. Arms back. Arms, two, three, four. And a one, two, stretch. Push up! Kick them down. Stamp point. Point. Stretch those legs out. Feet, feet, feet. Kick em, kick em, one, two. Stretch, two, three, four, up. Shoulders John. Up, kick, and down, and stop there.

JOHN

John's my best dance teacher ever. He's really good at dancing as well. And he shouts. Not a lot, but he shouts. But not loud-- not that loud.

JOHN CAREY

Get the feet turned down, the toes pointed. Your heels will automatically hit. That's better. Now let's do it without the dodgy head. Two, three, go. Treble up and toe hop and step kick, kick, and down.

I am quite hard on him, but he can take it. He never cracks. He's very mm-hmm, OK, mm-hmm.

Getting strong on these treble backs. Treble and back, step, treble and down, treble and down, showing me the inside of your ankle, all the time. Arms tight. Five, six, seven, go. Bang, bang! Treble and back, step, treble-- no, come on. That's just step downs.

Now, let's concentrate. Treble and back, step, treble and cross, cross. Heel and toe, sharp, two, three, treble and toe, back. Treble up and back, stretch. Stretch it out, two, three. Push, push, push it right up. Now for the back. Treble and toe up and step, kick, kick, and down.

JOHN

If I don't come in the top 10 or a recall, I won't. It'll be OK. But it'll just show me that I haven't danced my best.

JOHN CAREY

Nowadays, because so many people want to win, there's a lot of people that probably don't have a lot of natural talent, but have just worked so damn hard at it that they're actually winning, because they're so technically correct. So people with natural talent now have to put the work in. There's no room for error now. You have to be foot perfect.

Out. In. Down. Right, left, right, right, out, in, down.

When I was growing up, Riverdance and Lord of the Dance didn't exist. So no one really knew about it. in England.

From there, you go out.

So I didn't really tell anybody at school that I did it. And then after I won the world championships, I think, I was on the news. And so I went in to school the next day, and I was walking around the corridor. It was like, I saw you on the news last night. And I was like, did you? It's like, I didn't know you did that dancing. I was like, oh, yeah, yeah..

JOE

I don't really talk about Irish dancing outside Irish dancing-- my mates from Irish dancing. It's just normally like football and American football.

JOHN CAREY

Working your arms, yes? Of course. Off you go.

Cross, over, over, over. Bring your arms back. Straighten this out. Tighten the hip. No gaps. Cross, cross, cross. The back foot, out more, out more Bring this arm in tighter. Cross. Treble, up and treble. Fast ones. Back foot. Left foot out. Left foot out.

He just has a complete understanding of every kind of rhythm that I throw at him. Even from a very, very young age, I was always giving him stuff way harder than other people his age.

One, two, three. Cross, cross, cross, cross. That's better. Good. Do that bit again. Up, kick, kick and toe. Right up, right back.

JOE'S MOTHER

Joe's desire to pursue dance was phenomenal. It was living and breathing dance for him. I-- it was like a snowball that I couldn't stop.

JOHN CAREY

Up. Kick. Kick and kick and toe. Cross! Back and cross. It wasn't too bad. This one's a little bit better.

Up, kick, kick and toe. Feet. And kick, kick, kick, and treble and back. That's better. Good. That looked much better.

JOE'S MOTHER

There was just that intensity about him. It's been seven hours in the living room, with the carpets rolled up and the furniture moved. And that reel would play over and over.

JOHN CAREY

[GIVING THE BEAT] And stop!

JOE'S FATHER

When he started out, he was like everybody else. Hop, two, three. But he won the first 17 events he entered. And he found out he was pretty good at this.

JOE'S MOTHER

We're a lot alike, Joe and I. So I think that there was a point in time when I realised I had to help him manage himself without being-- I couldn't push him. Let's put it that way. But in my own way, I orchestrated things, no doubt.

JOHN CAREY

I had heard rumours that this California boy was thinking about moving to England to dance. And I just thought it was a little bit crazy. But then dancing has grown so much that people take it so seriously. Even if there's no money involved, it is quite prestigious. And people want that world title.

JOE'S MOTHER

We are a little mad. So you hear about families who up and move to Florida when they have a good tennis player.

JOE'S FATHER

I had a very successful medical practise. I pretty much gave that up. I lived in a wonderful neighbourhood of 5 and 6 million pound houses. The weather here is certainly nothing compared to California.

JOE

I know, yeah and it's always raining in this country. God.

JOHN CAREY

Five, six, seven, heads! Move, two, three, four, five.

When Joe first arrived from America he was maybe spoiled. He was this amazing talent from when he was young, and everybody just told him how amazing he was all the time. It was like, you're brilliant, you're brilliant, you're brilliant.

And he was. He was very talented. And then he came to our class. And it was like, this is wrong. This is wrong. You're not doing this. You're not doing this. And I think it was a huge shock to his system. And I don't think he liked it very much.

And catch-- no, no, no, no, no.

JOE'S MOTHER

John Carey's just an amazing dancer and teacher, choreographer, you name it. He's won the Worlds eight times. And he's an incredible inspiration.

JOHN CAREY

Move! Move! Move!

JOE

I definitely have an ego in Irish dancing. When you're at the top, it's hard not to. When he tells me something, sometimes I'm a little iffy with my listening.

JOE'S MOTHER

It's interesting to see John and Joe dance together. Because I see this look in Joe's eyes, like yeah, I know you're better than me. And, give me time.

JOE

I just want to be one of the best's that ever danced. As good as John Carey is. I want to be known for doing the rhythm and having the set dance. And people will be like, oh, Joe Bitter, I remember him. He used to do those amazing set dances.

The Great Irish Dance Off video and transcript © Bankside Films

[Back to - The Great Irish Dance Off](" \l "Session5_MediaContent1)

# An evening with the Murrays

## Transcript

**Jonathan Overend:**

So welcome back inside the grand gallery here at the National Museum of Scotland, our special guests Andy Murray, Jamie Murray, Judy Murray and anyone else called Murray is freely invited to join in as well, you meet the entry criteria. Matthew Syed alongside me for a little bit of variety. And for this part of the programme we’re going to start talking about the role of the family in sport, the introduction of kids to sport, the retention of them as the talent grows, the encouragement and support required from parents like Judy Murray sitting alongside me here. And to this end Judy, a couple of years ago you had a bit of a brainwave based on what you used to do with Andy and Jamie. Tell us about that.

**Judy Murray:**

Yeah, well we … I think because I’d been going a fair number of school visits trying to introduce tennis to kids in probably primary threes and primary fours. And I was becoming more and more aware that it seemed to me that less and less kids were co-ordinated when you actually tried to introduce them to, to playing tennis, and also that probably more than I’d been aware of before were a little bit overweight. But I know that there probably isn’t enough physical education or physical activity in schools now. And I know that the things that kids tend to play with that are cool and trendy are things where you sit down and you look at some sort of screen and play your games that way, and I started thinking back to a lot of the games that we kind of dreamed up playing together when the boys were growing up. And they’re all very, very simple, but we’d find literally anything that was lying around the house and create some kind of game out of it. And I started to sort of jot them down, and when I spoke with RBS about it who have sponsored the boys for a long, long time now and been very instrumental in their career. They came in to help us at time when we really needed some help with, when, you know, when Andy was going to Spain to train. And they were really keen to help to bring it to life. And we set up a website which you can download all the information and all the games free of charge. You can send for a free booklet. For me, I came from a sporty family. I grew up playing games with my brothers and my mum and dad, and I love sport, and I wanted my kids to enjoy sport. So for me to play with them in the garden or in the house with balls and balloons and, you know, anything that we could find was just pretty much like second nature. But I’m aware that, you know, parents have less time these days. And not everybody has that kind of sporty background. So to give ideas was great.

**Jonathan Overend:**

So give us an example. What sort of thing are we talking about?

**Judy Murray:**

Well yeah, one of the games that’s in the book that’s probably the easiest to explain is called Jumping the River where a couple of pieces of rope or skipping rope, and you set them may be a foot or so apart and there’s your river. You chuck a couple of toy sharks in it, and suddenly you’ve got shark-infested waters to jump over. And it becomes a bit more exciting jumping over this rope. So you can jump over it, hop over it, run over it and once you’ve jumped you just widen the ropes to make it bigger and bigger. Maybe you’ve got a tape measure, so you measure how far they have jumped. Maybe you stick a hoop at the other side so you’re jumping over the shark-infested waters and you’re landing in a boat or something. And then, you create a little story out of it and …

**Jonathan Overend:**

With the aim of developing at this stage, hand-eye co-ordination, balance, that sort of thing?

**Judy Murray:**

Well, with something like that, you know, even something as simple as leg strength. You know, jumping from a standing jump, dynamic balance, yes. And when you start to add in something that you’re throwing then it becomes tracking and receiving skills, yes, passing and catching, But the great thing about it is that the kids are learning these things and developing these things without even realising that they are, because they’re just playing.

**Jonathan Overend:**

Do you remember any of this, Jamie or is this all news to you?

**Jamie Murray:**

No a bit of a bit of jumping the river, always good on a Saturday night (laughter). We, I mean, we did lots of things. I mean, we, you know, we made stuff up ourselves between us and we were always sort of, we were very active as kids. You know, in our house we were living in at the time, in our hall we had sort of an archway and a door. So we had balloons, and we would try to score and pass one another and stuff and. I mean it’s just simple stuff that we made up.

**Andy Murray:**

As Jamie was saying it was always a killer when the balloon hit the radiator and burst and that. And that was the end of it, yeah.

**Jamie:**

That was the end of it yeah. But I mean it’s just loads of things that at the time, you know, we were just having fun playing with. But in reality we were probably learning a whole bunch of sort of skills that would then help us when we started to take up different sports.

**Jonathan Overend:**

And in terms of like the co-ordination aspect of it, Judy, all this was happening presumably before you introduced a tennis racket and balls to the house, was it?

**Judy Murray:**

Yeah. Well I think, I mean, doing all of these things you’re doing them as a parent. It’s not, I wasn’t a tennis coach at that point. I didn’t become a tennis coach until much later. So the boys would play as much mini cricket and mini golf, mini rugby, mini football as mini tennis. But yeah, they did have little mini tennis rackets from a young age. And we had swing ball in the garden. And I often look back at that swing ball in the garden and I remember quite clearly really that Andy was better at swing ball than me when he was about four, which was quite sad because I was an international tennis player. And the ball, I could miss it so many times and he would just stand there and give it this one. And even now when I watch him and he’s one of the best returners of serve in the world, and I wonder whether that had anything to do with it.

**Andy Murray:**

It didn’t. (It’s a good story.)

**Jonathan Overend:**

And they don’t make swing ball like they used to. I can tell you that from experience, my five-year-old broke one the other week. Matthew Syed’s here.

**Matthew Syed:**

It’s fascinating because I think there’s a mythology that has grown up around sport that either you’ve got it or you haven’t. You’ve either got hand eye co-ordination, agility, speed, instincts or you haven’t. And if you haven’t, you’re never going to get them. And this is terribly destructive because the reality is as Judy has articulated if you practice, if you do the right things, these are competencies that can be developed over time. The anatomy, the brain changes, the physicality changes if you’re learning in an effective way. And if you have an inspirational parent or coach who encourages and nurtures the motivation and the mindset that leads to learning, then almost everybody has the capacity to become an expert in almost any physical skill. And, and it’s great to see it in a family like this.

**Jonathan Overend:**

Because like you said Judy, you weren’t a tennis coach at that point. You were just trying to get your boys active. So, I mean, sometimes the image of you, you know, is betrayed as this sort of wanna be production line of two boys. You always had it in your mind that they were going to be world-beating tennis champions, but that couldn’t be further from the truth.

**Judy Murray:**

No, it absolutely wasn’t. I mean, when they were young they played every sport under the sun. They tried everything. And this is the whole thing about set for sport is that, you know, we kind of aimed at parents of kids aged between three and eight, because I reckon that by the time they were about seven and eight they had a better idea themselves of which sports they were going to enjoy.

I mean, I can remember taking them to mini rugby, and Jamie didn’t like mini rugby because he got dirty. And Andy wasn’t so keen on mini rugby after he, you know, went the first couple of times and then they played a little game and he ran after the ball as all kids do at that age, you know, there’s like twelve of them playing, they all run after the same ball, so they’re all in a heap and he gets the ball and runs, and he’s a very quick little runner, and he runs and he scores the try at the other end of the thing. And then somebody tells him he’s run in the wrong direction. And so he’s actually not getting his try and he didn’t want to go back after that, so.

But you know, they, they tried everything, but we lived close to the tennis club and I was doing a little, a little bit of coaching on a voluntary basis over there just for something to do, and they kind of got used to being around the tennis club.

An Evening with the Murrays –BBC radio 5 programme © BBC

[Back to - An evening with the Murrays](" \l "Session7_MediaContent1)