Members of the National Strength and Conditioning Association (NSCA) present up-to-date information on athletic strength training, conditioning, injury prevention and research findings. Over the years, NSCA members have gained valuable insights from individuals in various professions, including athletic trainers, physical therapists, researchers, physicians, educators and coaches at the professional, college and high school levels. In order to more completely fulfill the NSCA mission, these specialists should share their knowledge and experience in strength and conditioning with children at the junior high level and below.

It is during the middle and junior high school years, in particular, that many students are introduced to organized athletic activities including football, basketball, volleyball, wrestling and track. During these years coaches emphasize fundamental skills and strive to inspire young athletes to continue their education and participate in athletics. At the high school level, however, athletes are generally assumed to have learned the fundamentals of sport. Coaches often dedicate their time to teaching fundamentals. Strength and conditioning education is only beginning in many high schools, often taught by those with little expertise and no professional credentials.

Children who are not introduced to organized sports until after middle school and junior high lack the strength and conditioning education and experience which may preclude their involvement in physical activities. Given the current information on the benefits of physical activity and exercise, more people are striving to maintain a higher level of physical fitness. Many who have very little or no education in strength and conditioning principles perpetuate numerous fallacies related to physical fitness.

Most middle school and junior high students and younger children, are aware of the many of recreational and competitive physical activities available to them, such as skiing, tennis, swimming, volleyball and dancing. Many children are deeply influenced by their experiences in these activities and the accompanying social aura. However, children discouraged from participating or “turned-off” by traditional competitive and recreational sports may find an interest in physical activity for health and fitness reasons. Properly educating children in the principles of strength and conditioning may have a significant influence on their decision to pursue athletics and a healthy lifestyle in school and as adults.

From an educator's point of view, promoting physical fitness at an early age may produce higher self-esteem, a positive attitude and result in greater academic achievement. Emphasizing the intellectual aspect of strength and conditioning and its relationship to other academic areas including science, math, social studies and home economics will enhance an education. As an alternative, educators at the middle and junior high school level may wish to design a curriculum for a separate comprehensive course in strength and conditioning. Such a
course may also serve to discourage drug and alcohol abuse.

Typically, serious academic and athletic interests are first discovered by students, and initially promoted by parents and educators at the middle school and junior high levels. This is a topic that should be given special consideration by the NSCA regarding pre-pubescent education and training.

Several practical matters must be considered when teaching strength and conditioning principles to pre-pubescents, particularly financial and physical education. Most middle schools and junior highs lack the facilities to accommodate a hands-on approach to strength and conditioning education. This fact, along with the NSCA position on pre-pubescent training, may require members to take an expository approach, involving scientific principles, practical considerations, social aspects and other diversified topics. NSCA members working with children become educators and have tremendous flexibility in curriculum design and implementation to best suit the individual school. Although many schools are without a rigorous hands-on practical program, a limited hands-on program may be possible.

NSCA members, and especially the C.S.C.S., are needed to communicate the NSCA mission not only in high schools but among middle school and junior high students and other pre-pubescent children. The role of the NSCA member at this level, then is not one of rigorous program implementation, but an academic approach to the NSCA mission. Getting kids interested in strength and conditioning at an early age can promote not only specific sporting activities, but a general athletic and healthy lifestyle. This education can also enhance self-esteem and result in a host of other positive benefits. NSCA members and the C.S.C.S. must always strive to remain independent of specific sports, especially those which are highly competitive, and maintain a rapport with all students. Remember, many of the youngsters you work with are future NSCA members.

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