Making a Difference

2012 Research Summary for the development and implementation of HIGH FIVE®

HIGH FIVE: A quality standard for children's sport and recreation
Founded by Parks and Recreation Ontario

The best way to play™
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Executive Summary

The purpose of this report is to provide the following:

1. **A history of the development and evolution of HIGH FIVE**
   HIGH FIVE was first conceived in 1994 by Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO), a not-for-profit organization representing the sector in Ontario. With the input of volunteers and practitioners representing a broad spectrum of different service organizations from across Ontario, PRO developed the necessary tools and resources for setting new and consistent standards of quality for programs across the province.

2. **Evidenced based research on the impact of HIGH FIVE**
   Numerous research projects have been commissioned by PRO to substantiate the effectiveness of HIGH FIVE Training and Resources.
   - 92% of HIGH FIVE organizations that set target scores for QUEST 1 were monitoring their achievement.
   - 88% of organizations reported that HIGH FIVE has improved the experiences of children in their programs.
   - 83% of organizations have identified and changed risk management practices due to QUEST 1 review.

3. **New cutting edge training**
   - HIGH FIVE Sport focuses on the social, emotional, and cognitive development and well-being of athletes. The training is based on research and has been designed to help coaches with top coaching dilemmas such as dealing with parents, keeping the child’s interest, ensuring fair play and an emotionally safe environment.
   - Healthy Minds for Healthy Children was developed as a resource for front line leaders and coaches to help foster their role in supporting children’s mental health by teaching them how to design quality programs in emotionally safe environments, being caring adults and effective listeners and helping children make solid friendships and good peer relationships.
The Evolution of HIGH FIVE

The origin of HIGH FIVE dates back to the early 1990s when the Ontario government proposed legislation that would impose regulations of the *Day Nurseries Act* on recreation and sport programs for children. This legislation sets out very specific rules, regulations and minimum standards that a childcare centre must abide by in order to be licensed and to ensure quality and safety.

Complying to such legislation would be very difficult for recreation and sport programs. There is so much variety in how and where sport and recreation programs operate that it is critical that any standards be flexible and responsive to these unique factors. Without this flexibility, opportunities for children to participate in recreation and sport programs would be extremely limited.

In response to the proposed change in legislation, Parks and Recreation Ontario created a Provincial Task Group to explore possible solutions. A number of important questions regarding quality assurance and healthy child development in recreation and sport were raised, which led to action steps that would eventually create the HIGH FIVE standard.

Parks and Recreation Ontario commissioned a study – *Quality Assurance in Children’s Recreation* – to determine the need for quality assurance standards for children’s recreation and sport and to answer questions in four key areas:

1) What is healthy child development; what are the determinants of healthy child development and what are the implications for recreation and sport?
2) What are the existing models for quality assurance and what would be appropriate for recreation and sport?
3) Are there existing tools available for measuring quality and are they appropriate for recreation and sport?
4) What is the field’s level of knowledge and commitment to healthy child development? What type of process or model would be user-friendly, easily applied and readily embraced by the field?
# HIGH FIVE Timelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year Range</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 – present</td>
<td>Launch of QUEST 1 Launch of HIGH FIVE Healthy Minds for Healthy Children Launch of HIGH FIVE Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)</td>
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The value of recreation for children is recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1989, to ensure the well-being and healthy development of children.

The CRC states that play and leisure are essential to healthy child development and encourages all governments to support recreation programs for children.

The Development of HIGH FIVE

The findings of The Quality Assurance in Children’s Recreation study (de Vaal and Associates, 1996) are significant to the development of HIGH FIVE, as they were used to both substantiate the need for HIGH FIVE and ultimately to develop the foundation upon which HIGH FIVE is based: the Principles of Healthy Child Development, Design Guidelines and Quality Framework.

Research supports need for HIGH FIVE

The study’s search for quality assurance tools and models found that there were no quality assurance tools or models in existence that would meet the needs of the recreation and sport sector. The findings also revealed that the recreation and sport sector recognized the importance and value of healthy child development and quality programming.

These findings confirmed an urgent societal need for a quality standard for children’s recreation and sport programs.

The study’s main focus was a literature review of healthy child development and its relationship to recreation and sport programs. The findings revealed that child development consists of the following elements (Mussen, 1994):

- physical development;
- social development;
- cognitive development;
- emotional development;
- moral development; and
- self-development.

The chart on the following page describes these elements in further detail and how they translate to the needs of children and their relationship to recreation and sport. It is a clear demonstration of how recreation and sport are excellent vehicles for healthy child development.

“Before HIGH FIVE existed, the field was lacking a consistent, definitive standard for quality in children’s programs. Now, with the HIGH FIVE, we can easily articulate our focus on healthy child development. We take great comfort and pride in knowing that our service delivery approach is based on sound research and proven industry standards. It’s what’s best for the children in our programs and quite frankly... it has made life easier from an operational perspective.”

— Eugene Todd, Former Director of Parks, Recreation and Culture Municipality of Port Hope
How Recreation and Sport Supports Healthy Child Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Developmental Framework for the 6-12 Year Old</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developmental Element(*)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Physical Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase in height</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase in weight</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Increase in strength and endurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Change in proportions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Improved motor control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Maturing of the brain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sexual development</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Social Development
| Developing sense of industry | encouragement | Organized activities and games can help |
| Developing friends | learn social skills - tact, conflict | children learn social skills, learn to give and |
| Developing friendships | management | take |
| skills | communication. understanding other | |
| Developing groups | views | Recreation offers a forum for the |

Cognitive Development
| Shift to concrete operational thought based on personal experience | concrete examples | Progressive programs build on past |
| Enhanced ability to learn | discovery, exploration, creating | experience |
| Ability to take another's view | talk, think, test thinking | Programs tend to be hands on |
| Improved memory, attention and concentration | meaningful conversation | "Fun" component of recreation |
| | time and space to process information | |
| | humour | Opportunities for discovery, exploration |
| | new places, new experiences, venturing out | |

Emotional Development
| Becoming aware of emotions | feel good or positive about oneself | Group activities focused on interest |
| Understanding feelings | control behaviour | offer many opportunities for communication |
| Communication | deal with anxiety | Opportunity to succeed in activity |
| Developing ways to cope with feelings | sense of security | Sports a good forum to learn to control |

Moral Development
| development of a framework for decision-making | negotiate rules | Recreation and sport provide |
| peers play important role | learn conflict management | leadership opportunities - role |
| development of self control | role models | modelling |
| | role model behaviour | Leaders as role models |
| | experience as moral and social beings | Opportunities to negotiate within |
| | reinforcement of social and moral | peer group - setting rules, deciding |
| | behaviour | on activities, fair play |

Self-Development
| development of self-concept | Diverse, creative, varied experiences | Games, sports, recreation programs |
| development of self esteem | try on different roles | offer opportunity to try on different |
| | security | roles in non-threatening |
| | trusting relationships | environments |
| | reasonable limits and rules | Opportunities to learn through |
| | caring environments | success |
| | feel unique | Development of competencies |
| | positive reinforcement | Opportunities for leadership - responsibility |
| | role models - comparison to self | |
| | belonging and acceptance | |
| | sense of purpose and motivation | |
| | competence - opportunities to succeed | |
| | and accomplish things | |
| | independence | |
| | responsibility | |
| | respect for self and others | |

Mussen, 1994
Building the foundation of HIGH FIVE

Research revealed that the following determinants of healthy child development need to be incorporated into program design:

• adult relationships;
• peer relationships;
• physical activity;
• competence and achievement;
• meaningful participation; and
• opportunity for self definition.

With these determinants in mind, it was then necessary to translate the developmental needs of children and the determinants of healthy child development into behaviours or practices that could be assessed and measured.

To do so, the following Developmentally Appropriate Practices in School Aged Childcare (Albrecht, 1991) were reviewed and then reflected in HIGH FIVE's Principles of Healthy Child Development.

• Provision of resourceful caring staff who understand their role in children’s lives
• Recognize increasing importance of peers
• Use of mixed age and same age groupings
• Self-selection of activities and experiences – flexible schedules
• Positive guidance and discipline techniques
• Environments arranged to accommodate individuals, small groups and large groups

In addition, the study helped to determine the four key elements that must be in place to meet the developmental needs of children, reflected in HIGH FIVE’s Quality Framework.

• Practitioners (organizers of children’s programs) must have an in-depth knowledge of the development of children.
• Practitioners must be able to both clearly understand and be able to assess the impact of all aspects of their program on children.
• Practitioners must adhere to principles of healthy child development in:
  – the design and development of programs and activities;
  – the delivery of programs and activities;
  – the hiring and training of staff; and
  – the selection of sites and environments.
• Practitioners should ensure significant emphasis on interactions between children and staff as recreation and sport leaders are perfectly situated to play this critical role.
Child development experts help design HIGH FIVE

With extensive research that supported a need for HIGH FIVE, PRO commissioned a group of healthy child development experts, including child psychologists and educators, to develop HIGH FIVE. Using the research findings, this group developed the foundation upon which HIGH FIVE is based: the Principles of Healthy Child Development, Design Guidelines and Quality Framework.

HIGH FIVE Principles of Healthy Child Development

Research determined that five principles of healthy child development are essential for quality programs: a caring adult, opportunity to make friends, participate, play, and master skills. These principles support quality experiences for children – the kind of experiences HIGH FIVE helps to deliver.

- **A Caring Adult**
  Caring, positive and supportive relationships with adults help children ages 6 to 12 develop positive social skills, self-esteem and self-confidence.

- **Friends**
  Friends help introduce children to the bigger world beyond their family. They share in humour, test loyalty, become a first audience and offer support and criticism.

- **Participation**
  Children need to make choices, have a voice, do things by and for themselves, have opportunities to participate and know that others want them to participate.

- **Play**
  Play allows children to shape their environment, use their imaginations, be creative, cooperate and have fun.

- **Mastery**
  Mastery means providing children with activities and tasks that make them feel they are special, important and succeeding.

HIGH FIVE Design Guidelines

- Programs are age-appropriate.
- Respect and support for the uniqueness and diversity of each child.
- Programs are physically and emotionally safe.

**A Caring Adult**

Program quality boils down to effective interactions between staff and youth and the environment the staff creates. If those interactions are lacking (e.g., adults are not interacting with children) or are of poor quality (e.g., the adults belittle or yell at youth), no program – research-based or not – can be effective. In fact, the program could be detrimental.

(Coughlin, 2005)
The **HIGH FIVE Quality Framework** identifies four areas of organizational effectiveness that are essential to the delivery of quality programs for children. Within each area, HIGH FIVE provides a support system of specialized training, innovative tools, resources and support to help organizations move toward the goal of quality assurance and accreditation.

Between 1996 and 1999, HIGH FIVE training, tools and resources were developed based on this foundation. Pilot testing took place with 39 demonstration sites to further refine the resources prior to the launch of HIGH FIVE in 2001.

**Quality Framework for Healthy Child Development**

*In sport and recreation*

- Providing training to build expertise and capacity of staff concerning healthy child development and quality programs for children
- Principles of Healthy Child Development
- HIGH FIVE® Sport
- Healthy Minds for Healthy Children
- QUEST 2
- QUEST 1
- HIGH FIVE® Trainer
- HIGH FIVE® Sport Trainer

**HIGH FIVE Accreditation**

The HIGH FIVE Accreditation Process was launched in 2006 and provides a systematic way to measure and improve program and service delivery within the four areas of the HIGH FIVE Quality Framework. Using HIGH FIVE Training, Resources and quality assessment Tools, Organizations work through five levels of the accreditation process according to their own priorities and timelines. HIGH FIVE Accreditation establishes the benchmark for excellence in children’s recreation and sport programming. It distinguishes those organizations that have reached the highest recognized levels of quality and safety in recreation and sport programs. Further information about HIGH FIVE Accreditation is available at www.highfive.org.
The Impact of HIGH FIVE

Since its launch in 2001, HIGH FIVE, in partnership with over 200 HIGH FIVE Registered Organizations across Canada, has positively affected the health and well-being of hundreds of thousands of Canadian children by helping to ensure they have positive experiences in sport and recreation programs.

To assess the effectiveness of HIGH FIVE and its impact on Registered Organizations and the children these organizations serve, Parks and Recreation Ontario commissioned four research projects between 2003 and 2005.

1) **Phase 1 Evaluation** - Results of a Secondary Analysis of Selected Data Sets Related to the HIGH FIVE Program (Levy-Coughlin Partnership, 2003)
2) **Phase 2 Evaluation** - Results of Primary Research and Evaluation Related to HIGH FIVE (Levy-Coughlin Partnership, 2004)
3) **Benefits, Barriers and Quality in Children's Recreation and Sport** – A Literature Review (Levy-Coughlin, 2005)

This research revealed two key findings that substantiate the effectiveness of HIGH FIVE:

1) HIGH FIVE’s Principles, Design Guidelines and Quality Framework are effective in contributing to quality sport and recreation programs for children.
2) HIGH FIVE makes a positive impact in 3 key areas.
   1. planning;
   2. quality of care and children’s experience; and
   3. risk management.

HIGH FIVE Registered Organizations include municipal recreation departments, YMCA/YWCAs, Boys and Girls Clubs and a variety of other agencies providing services to children and youth.

These organizations are committed to providing quality recreation and sport programs for children by using the HIGH FIVE quality standard.

HIGH FIVE has also been integrated into the programs and services of many Affiliate Providers and Academic Institutions. These organizations are established leaders in providing training to those who work with children in the recreation and sport sectors.
1) **Improved Planning**

Over 92% of HIGH FIVE organizations that set target scores for QUEST 1 (a review of policies and procedures) were monitoring their achievement. This suggests that QUEST 1 is more than a one-time exercise and actually contributes to program planning over a longer period of time.

Almost every organization that set target scores for QUEST 2, based on results of the QUEST 2 exercise, reported that QUEST 2 improved their day-to-day practices and helped significantly with planning. As one organization explained, “It provides a real framework for us to talk about our programs and what we are doing.” Organizations reported that the results contributed to continuous improvements to programs over time.

2) **Improved Quality of Care and Children’s Experience**

Most (88%) HIGH FIVE organizations reported that HIGH FIVE has improved the experiences of children in their programs.

This impact appears to increase with the number of staff trained in Principles of Healthy Child Development (PHCD). In addition, a number of organizations provided evidence to back up this impact, such as: “fewer behaviour problems/incidents,” “positive parent comments,” “fewer incidents of negative behaviour documented in day camp.”

This positive experience for children was also supported in conclusions from the Nova Scotia evaluation: “Feedback from children validates the belief by leader and supervisors that the (HIGH FIVE) programs are child-centred. Evidence that the principles of a caring adult, participation, play and mastery are being attended to is clearly reflected in feedback on their experiences.”
The results clearly show that HIGH FIVE, particularly the training, is associated with quality care. Significant positive relationships were found between HIGH FIVE training and program assessment (QUEST 2) scores.

The findings show that participants who received Principles of Healthy Child Development (PHCD) training were more likely to have higher program assessment (QUEST 2) scores. It was also found that QUEST 2 scores increased over time. This relationship is significant as it demonstrates that HIGH FIVE training is associated with quality care.

3) **Increased Risk Management**
HIGH FIVE policies and procedures reviews (QUEST 1) have helped to identify and change risk management practices.

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Extent that QUEST 1 has helped risk management practices

- 83% Improved
- 17% No Change
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“HIGH FIVE ensures that children have positive experiences in our program from the moment they enter our facilities. It has given staff insight into the role they play in creating positive memories for these children.”

Tracey Burns-Gagnon, Halifax Regional Municipality
HIGH FIVE is making a difference!

When children play, they develop the physical, emotional, social and cognitive skills they need to succeed in life. The most common way children participate in organized play is through recreation and sport programs.

Research has shown that quality play experiences for children incorporate five principles of healthy child development: a caring adult, opportunities to make friends, participate, play and master skills. When consciously and consistently integrated into program design and delivery, these principles shape quality recreation experiences for children ages 6 to 12.

HIGH FIVE’s specialized training, practical tools and resources help service providers integrate healthy child development into quality play experiences for children.

A growing number of HIGH FIVE Registered Organizations, and the thousands of children they serve across Canada, are reaping the benefits of the HIGH FIVE child-centered approach to quality recreation and sport programs.

“HIGH FIVE is an absolutely phenomenal program that provides great information and learning opportunities on healthy child development for leaders, parents and coaches in our communities. I would recommend this training as a necessity for anyone working with children in a recreation or sport setting.”

Erin Neville-Gillis, Cape Breton District Health Authority, Nova Scotia
HIGH FIVE Sport

In 2008, HIGH FIVE collaborated with child psychiatrists and researchers at the Offord Centre for Child Studies to carry out an evidence-based review of the research literature regarding child and youth participation in competitive and elite athletics.

Study after study show that fun is the number one reason why children participate in recreation and sport activities.

True Sport, Canada’s national organization for fair and ethical sport, surveyed over 1,000 households. Results concluded that Canadians believe that:
- “Sport has a positive influence on youth”.
- “Sport is overly-focused on competition to the detriment of promoting key values such as respect, accessibility, fairness and integrity and trust.”

Recreation and sport activities make an important contribution to how children develop:
- Physically
- Emotionally
- Socially
- Intellectually

When the needs of adults come before the needs of children, some of the benefits of sport and recreation can be lost.

Research shows there are many benefits to physical activity. But, the physical activity experience must be a positive one. Otherwise, the benefits get lost.

HIGH FIVE believes that competition can be either beneficial or detrimental to children. Whether it will be good or bad depends on many factors:
- The developmental readiness of the child
- The support and attitudes of the parents/guardians
- The environment created by the coach, club or league

By promoting the HIGH FIVE Principles for healthy child development, coaches can aim to make sport and competition a better place for all children.

“Even at the highest levels, like at the very echelon of sport, what you’ll discover is if one team is playing at it and laughing and having fun, they’re going to be more successful than somebody who’s working at it. We forget that the word “play” means joyful, exuberant, spontaneity and we’ve got to bring that back into children’s play environments.”

- Dr. Peter Jensen, Sport Psychology Expert, Canadian Olympic Team
Healthy Minds for Healthy Children

The Healthy Minds for Healthy Children project builds on Parks and Recreation Ontario’s existing expertise in healthy child development with an online tutorial and accompanying resource to help those working with children positively influence their mental health.

Developed with expertise from Dr. Stanley Kutcher and Dr. Wayne Hammond, this new training offers engagement strategies for nurturing resiliency in children and provides insights into common mental health distress or disorders that children could be experiencing.

HIGH FIVE training helps nurture children’s mental health by teaching leaders and coaches how to:
- Design quality programs in emotionally safe environments
- Be caring adults and effective listeners
- Help children make solid friendships and good peer relationships

Participants including front line leaders, coaches, managers and supervisors from recreation, sport, education and public health sectors participated in the pilot testing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>After completing this training I am now much more aware of the critical role I play in helping children engage in activities.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>4%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This online training is a good way to learn how to overcome challenges I may encounter when I meet children who may have mental health distress, such as worry, or a mental health disorder, such as anxiety.</th>
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<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
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<td>2%</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>This training will help those working with children in sport and recreation positively influence their mental health.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
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<tr>
<td>58%</td>
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<tr>
<th>The learning activities in the training were valuable.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“1 out of 5 children are suffering from a mental health disorder.”
- Dr. Stanley Kutcher, Sun Life Financial Chair in Adolescent Mental Health, Dalhousie University and the IWK Health Centre, *Healthcare Quarterly, 2011*
Research Materials and Resources


3. Leitch, Dr. K.K. 2007. *Reaching for the Top: A Report by the Advisor on Healthy Children and Youth*


