

# Recognition of talented children

Recommendations for Parents



## Background

The TALENT project emerges from a strategic collaboration between seven European countries, including Croatia, Italy, Greece, Malta, Cyprus, Serbia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Spearheaded by the Centre of Excellence of Split-Dalmatia County (CI SDZ), this project brings together a diverse consortium of universities, non-governmental organisations, and network organisations. This partnership leverages the unique strengths and experiences of each member to address the multifaceted challenges faced by young athletes pursuing dual careers in sports and academics.

Initiated on December 1st, 2022, and set to span over 30 months, the TALENT project is designed to foster a comprehensive approach to talent identification and development. By incorporating advanced educational techniques and innovative sports science technologies, the project aims to create a supportive ecosystem that facilitates the harmonious growth of young talents in both their educational pursuits and athletic endeavours.

This multinational collaboration is not just a pooling of resources but a fusion of cultural perspectives and expertise, which enriches the project's approach and enhances its applicability across different socio-economic contexts. The synergy of this diverse consortium is anticipated to set new standards in the detection and nurturing of sports talents, offering a model that can be adapted by other regions around the world.

## Purpose of the project

The primary goal of the TALENT project is to seamlessly integrate sports and education to support young athletes in managing dual careers effectively. This integration is crucial as the demands of maintaining high performance in both academics and athletics can place significant stress on young individuals, often leading to burnout or early dropout from one or both fields.

## Objectives of the project

- **Development** of methodologies for early talent identification
- **Adaptation** of educational programmes to meet the needs of athletes
- **Establishment** of a supportive environment that involves coaches, educators, and families.

## Purpose of the TALENT Recommendations

Through the developed online platform, these recommendations are targeting teachers, parents, coaches, sports clubs and decision makers to better understand what the needs of talented children are, in order to support their development and prevent drop-out from school or from sports.

## Introduction

As a parent, you are a pillar of support in your child's journey to balance sports and education. Managing a dual career for your child can be demanding, requiring emotional resilience and a strong support system. This booklet offers guidance on how to encourage your child's academic and athletic ambitions, establish open communication with teachers and coaches, and recognise early signs of stress or burnout. By understanding their unique challenges, you can help them go through this journey successfully and ensure they have a well-rounded future.

It is essential that you, as parents, understand that while your support can be instrumental in your child's success and confidence, certain parental behaviours can also hinder their growth. Your support should empower rather than pressure, fostering both ambition and independence. Finding the right balance between guidance and autonomy allows your child to build resilience, self-motivation and a healthy relationship with both sports and academics. By creating a positive and nurturing environment, you can help them reach their full potential and thrive both academically and athletically.

*Here are some ways in which you can effectively support your child's talent development while maintaining a healthy balance between sports and education:*

## 1. Understanding dual careers

A dual career refers to the pursuit of both sports and academic success simultaneously. Young athletes often face intense schedules, including training, competitions, travel, and schoolwork, which can lead to stress, exhaustion, and sometimes the difficult choice of prioritising one over the other. You can act as facilitators by providing structure, encouragement, and practical solutions to help your child excel in both domains. Your support in arranging and helping them follow their schedule is pivotal as well as making sure they follow a balanced nutrition schedule in between obligations.

## 2. Recognising talents

The second step is **recognising a child's talents**, which may appear in different ways—not just academically or athletically, but also creatively, socially, emotionally, or even spiritually. You should actively observe your child, listen to their interests, and pay attention to recurring patterns of enthusiasm and dedication. A child's natural curiosity and passion for certain activities often serve as early indicators of their hidden potential.

It is important to note that your positive involvement, as a parent, fosters self-confidence, resilience in competitive environments, and a deep commitment to one's talent. Creating a strong parent-child relationship also can enhance intrinsic motivation and the feeling of being supported and understood. But, if at any time you feel overwhelmed or unsure on how to provide this support to your child, seek help from professionals who can guide you to navigate your child's specific talent and emotions in order to create a more effective developmental environment.

## 3. Teaching prioritisation and goal setting

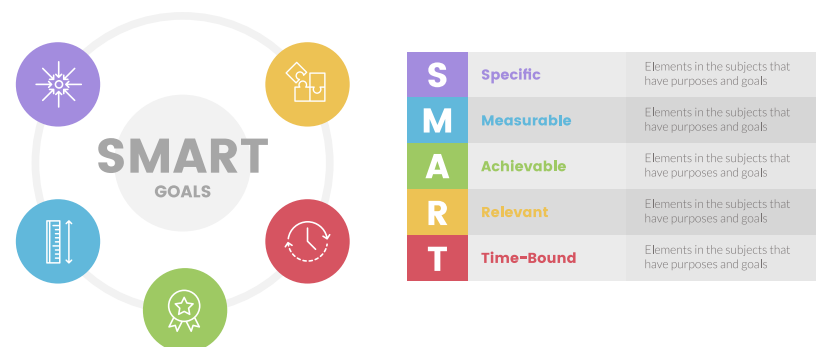
Your role is to encourage a developmental mindset by noting persistence and focus in achieving set goals. If your child declares that he or she cannot do something, emphasize the word “YET”, which indicates that it is only a current state that will change when energy is invested in the right way in the process of progress. Help your child establish short-term and long-term goals for both their academic and athletic pursuits. Encourage them to prioritise tasks effectively so they can stay on track without feeling overwhelmed.

Here are some ways you can do that:

**A. Encourage your child to set SMART goals<sup>1</sup>** (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound). These goals could be short-term (weekly or monthly) or long-term (yearly).

### SMART GOALS

The SMART in SMART goals stands for Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-Bound. A SMART goal is used to help guide goal setting and makes it easier to track progress.



<sup>1</sup> More information on S.M.A.R.T. goals here:  
[www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/\\_files/performance-appraisal/How+to+write+SMART+Goals+v2.pdf](http://www.ucop.edu/local-human-resources/_files/performance-appraisal/How+to+write+SMART+Goals+v2.pdf)

- B. **Encourage daily and weekly planning** by using planners or digital apps for their class schedule, training sessions, upcoming exams. Some tools you can use are a simple planner or apps such as Google Calendar, Trello or Notion.
- C. **Teach them how to prioritise** by helping them rank their tasks based on urgency and importance. In this way, your child will have a clear picture of their responsibilities and their tasks which could make them feel in control of their time.
- D. **Create a balance** between academics and sports by keeping an open communication with teachers and coaches and emphasise that rest and recovery for your child are as important in order to avoid physical exhaustion or fatigue.
- E. **Monitor and adjust goals** over time by regularly reviewing your child's set goals, celebrating small achievements to keep them motivated and feeling valued and encouraging flexibility.

#### 4. Encouragement and support

Once talents are identified, **encouragement and support** become essential. Providing children with the right resources—whether it's a musical instrument, books, or access to specialised training—can help them explore and refine their abilities. However, while recognition and praise can be strong motivators, they must be genuine and balanced to prevent overconfidence or dependency on external validation. Encouragement should foster intrinsic motivation rather than pressure to meet external expectations.

#### 5. Setting boundaries

At the same time, **setting boundaries** is necessary to maintain a well-rounded life. While pursuing excellence in a particular field is commendable, children also need time for social interactions, relaxation, and unstructured play. Learning to manage both success and failure is a crucial part of personal growth, and shielding children from setbacks can hinder their resilience. You, as parents, should embrace failure as a natural part of the learning process, helping your child develop problem-solving skills and perseverance rather than fear of making mistakes.



## 6. Communication with experts

Engaging with professionals can further support a child's development. **Communicating with experts**, such as teachers, coaches, or mentors for specific areas of interest, provides valuable insights into strengths and areas for improvement. However, this collaboration should be child-centred—forcing mentorship upon a child without considering their readiness or interest can lead to burnout rather than progress. Similarly, while teachers can offer important perspectives, their views should complement, not replace, a child's own experiences and preferences.

Below we provide some strategies which you, as parents, can use to maintain strong and productive communication with your child's coaches and/or mentors:

- A. Share** your child's goals from the beginning
- B. Make sure** to regularly check in with your child's coaches and mentors to understand expectations, challenges and areas of improvement.
- C. Collaborate and communicate** with your child's teachers to enable maintaining their academic progress.
- D. Advocate** for flexible learning arrangement wherever possible (either at school or at sports) to achieve a balanced approach to both.
- E. Be respectful** to the coaches' and mentors' approach and engage in discussions with a problem-solving mindset instead of blaming one side.

## 7. Providing psychological support

Beyond academic and skill development, **psychological support** is equally important. Fostering self-confidence helps children believe in their abilities, but you should be mindful of not instilling arrogance or an inflated sense of superiority. Talent development can also be stressful, and excessive pressure or unrealistic expectations can lead to anxiety and mental health struggles. This means that your role is to be present and included but not the main actor and in charge of the talent development process.

As a parent, you need to develop active listening skills in which you affirm compassion and attention through statements while listening, recognizing and encouraging the child's speech and avoid a corrective style that will result in defensiveness in children. You should also avoid giving advice to your children immediately after the competitions and avoid criticising them all together. Always opt for the encouragement and positive statements, e.g. "I always enjoy watching you play".

Establishing a balanced daily routine that accommodates schoolwork, training, rest, and recreation ensures they do not feel overwhelmed. Additionally, helping them develop time management skills can prevent overload and exhaustion, promoting a healthy balance between their commitments. By maintaining a stress-free and emotionally supportive home atmosphere, you can provide the reassurance and guidance they need to thrive both academically and athletically. However, if you notice that your child is anxious, remind them of techniques that can be used to manage anxiety (slow rhythmic breathing, positive self-talk, changing posture, accepting anxiety as a normal human emotion that can help us be more successful in sports).

## 8. Preparing for transitions and future planning

Dual careers often come with changes—shifting between competitive levels, academic stages, or career pathways. Guide your child in exploring future options, whether in professional sports, higher education, or alternative career paths. Having a long-term vision can reduce anxiety about the future.

Here are some ways you can do that:

- A. Discuss **long-term goals** early: Start having conversations with your child about their long-term academic interests and potential career paths beyond sports. This will encourage them to think whether they would like to pursue professional athletics or continue sports recreationally. **Goals focusing on results** in any activity should be further broken down into several process goals, as we never have control over the result, but we do have control over our thoughts and activities, so process goals should be related to them).
- B. Support the child's **emotional readiness** for transitions: Some student-athletes may face emotional challenges when they change school setting or move from amateur to professional sports. You could reassure your child that their worth is not solely tied to their athletic or academic success, encouraging their resilience and adaptability.
- C. Teach your child to make decisions and be **independent**: Encourage them to research and weigh their options, teach them how to handle setbacks and make informed decisions and let them take responsibility for their choices.

## 9. Negative impact of parental involvement

However, while parental involvement is essential, it can also have **negative consequences** if not managed thoughtfully. Overbearing or “helicopter” parenting<sup>2</sup> can suppress independence, creativity, and self-discovery. Some parents unconsciously project their own unfulfilled ambitions onto their children, pushing them toward achievements they once desired rather than respecting the child's own aspirations. Be aware that constant comparisons with peers can further damage self-worth, leading to feelings of inadequacy rather than motivation.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, you serve as guides in your child's journey of talent development. By recognising abilities, providing the right level of support, fostering resilience, and respecting individuality, you can help your child grow into a confident, well-rounded individual who pursues their passions with enthusiasm and balance.

Further information can be found on the project's website

[www.talent-edu.eu](http://www.talent-edu.eu)

<sup>2</sup> More information on “helicopter” parenting here: [www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/what-is-helicopter-parenting/](http://www.parents.com/parenting/better-parenting/what-is-helicopter-parenting/)



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