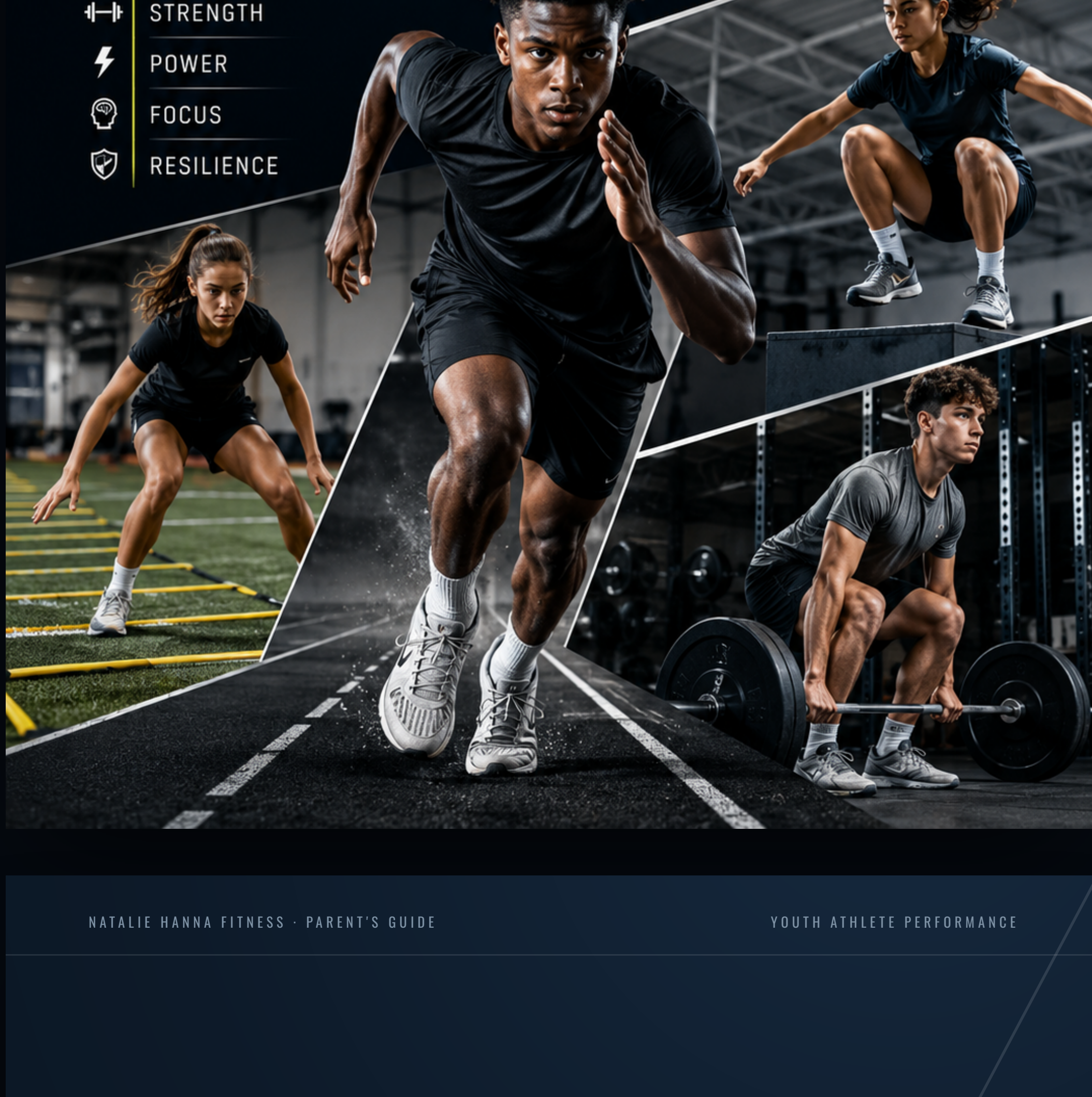


YOUTH ATHLETE PERFORMANCE GUIDE

A PARENT'S GUIDE
NATALIE HANNA FITNESS

- SPEED
- STRENGTH
- POWER
- FOCUS
- RESILIENCE



NATALIE HANNA FITNESS - PARENT'S GUIDE

YOUTH ATHLETE PERFORMANCE

A Parent's Guide to YOUTH ATHLETE PERFORMANCE

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES - PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE - SUPPORTING YOUR YOUNG ATHLETE

This guide is for parents of young athletes – children who are already in sport, training with intent, or working seriously towards a goal. It covers what's happening physically at each stage of development, what good athletic support looks like, and how specialist fitness training works alongside the coaching your child is already receiving.

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01 STAGE ONE - UNDER 5 THE PLAY YEARS

Children under 5 are doing the most important fitness work of their lives through free play. Every climb, roll, jump and tumble builds neural pathways, balance and body awareness. Structured fitness sessions are not needed – and often counterproductive – at this stage.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Attention spans are short (10-15 minutes maximum)
- Gross motor skills – running, jumping, climbing – are rapidly maturing
- Spatial awareness develops through free exploration
- Competition and performance targets are not appropriate

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Unstructured outdoor play – climbing, rolling, kicking
- Animal walks: bear crawls, frog jumps, crab walks
- Water play and swimming – brilliant for full-body coordination
- Soft obstacle courses and follow-the-leader games
- Gymnastics or dance – great for body awareness and rhythm

A NOTE ON WORKING WITH UNDER-5S

My standard training age begins at 10, with children from 6 upwards considered on a case-by-case basis – particularly those identified as Gifted & Talented in sport who show advanced physical readiness. A parent or guardian consultation is part of how I work with every child I take on, at any age. The goal is always the same: keep it playful, pressure-free, and led by the child's curiosity.

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02 STAGE TWO - AGES 6-9 THE SKILL-HUNGRY YEARS

Between 6 and 9, children enter a window sports scientists call the 'skill-hungry years'. Their brains are primed to absorb new movement patterns. This is the ideal time to introduce the Athletic ABCs – Agility, Balance and Coordination – through play and multi-sport exploration.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Fine and gross motor skills become more refined
- Can follow multi-step instructions
- Motivation is high – they want to be good at things
- Not the time to specialise – the time to explore

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Multi-sport: swimming, gymnastics, football, tennis
- Skipping, hopping, throwing, catching, changing direction
- Short, game-based sessions (20-30 minutes maximum)
- Positive reinforcement on effort, not outcome

SPORT PERFORMANCE AT AGES 6-9

At this age the best physical preparation for any sport is general athletic development: balance, coordination, agility and body awareness through play. A child who moves well in every direction will be a more capable athlete in any sport they choose. Whether your child plays golf, football, tennis or gymnastics – leave technical coaching to their sport coach. My role is the physical foundation that makes technical coaching more effective.

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03 STAGE THREE - AGE 10+ LAYING THE ATHLETIC FOUNDATION

Age 10 is my standard starting point for structured junior training. From here, children can benefit from guided work focused on movement quality, stability and coordination – not heavy loads or performance metrics. For Gifted & Talented children showing advanced readiness, I assess on a case-by-case basis from age 6 upwards.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Strength and endurance begin to increase meaningfully
- Responds well to challenge and structured goals
- Body awareness improves – can feel and correct movement
- Growth spurts may begin – monitor training load carefully

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Bodyweight strength: squats, lunges, push-ups, planks
- Balance and stability: single-leg work, reaction games
- Speed and agility: ladder drills, short sprints, lateral movement
- Rotational power basics: medicine ball work, trunk stability

SPORT PERFORMANCE AT AGE 10+

From age 10, I work on the physical foundations that support sport performance: movement quality, strength, coordination, speed and physical resilience. These are athletic qualities, not technical coaching – build the body, the sport coach works with the skill. Whether your child plays golf, football, tennis or competes in athletics, an athlete with better physical foundations will progress faster and stay injury-free for longer.

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04 STAGE FOUR - AGES 13-16 STRENGTH, POWER & SPORT-SPECIFIC DEVELOPMENT

As adolescence arrives, structured training can look more like traditional athletic preparation. Real strength, power and sport-specific fitness are now achievable – but the long-term lens remains essential. Overtraining and early specialisation risks increase at this stage.

WHAT'S HAPPENING

- Significant strength gains possible (especially post-puberty)
- Coordination and motor learning remain highly responsive
- Mental resilience and competitive drive begin to emerge
- Overtraining and burnout risk increases with specialisation

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS

- Progressive resistance training with proper coaching
- Rotational power: medicine ball throws, cable rotations
- Speed, agility and reactive drills
- Cardiovascular conditioning: sport-based, not just running
- Recovery: sleep, nutrition and rest days are part of the plan

SPORT PERFORMANCE AT AGES 13-16

This is where physical training directly supports performance in sport. I focus on building the physical attributes that generate power, speed and athletic output – posterior chain strength, rotational power, single-leg stability and reactive ability. How those qualities translate into sporting performance is for the sport coach. The two roles work best when they work together.

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SUPPORTING DEVELOPMENT HOW TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD AT HOME

You don't need equipment, a gym membership or a coaching qualification to make a difference. The habits you build at home have more impact than any training session.

MOVEMENT HABITS

- Walk or cycle instead of driving where possible
- Limit sedentary screen time to create space for active play
- Join in – children move more when parents move with them

NUTRITION

- Keep it simple: real food, regular meals, plenty of water
- Pre-activity snacks: banana, oat bar, or toast with nut butter
- Hydration first – remind children to drink before they feel thirsty
- Avoid using food as reward or punishment around sport

SLEEP

- Sleep is the most important recovery tool available
- Ages 6-12: aim for 9-11 hours per night
- Ages 13-18: aim for 8-10 hours per night
- Good sleep habits are athletic habits

MINDSET

- Focus on effort: 'I noticed how hard you worked today'
- Let them struggle productively – resilience is built, not given
- Let them have fun – enjoyment is what keeps them in sport
- Follow their lead on which sports they love

SUPPORTING YOUR YOUNG ATHLETE AT HOME

- Encourage multi-sport play – variety builds the physical foundation that transfers into every sport.
- Prioritise sleep and nutrition – these are the foundations of physical performance.
- Let them enjoy their sport – pressure at a young age is the fastest route to burnout.
- Physical preparation and technical coaching are two separate things – trust both specialists.

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WORKING TOGETHER WHY WORK WITH A YOUTH PERFORMANCE SPECIALIST?

Every child is different. There is no universal programme, no fixed timeline and no checklist that applies to every young athlete. That is exactly why specialist support matters – and why the first step is always an individual assessment, never a generic plan.

Working with Natalie means you and your child are at the centre of attention. Parents and guardians are close partners throughout – communication is open, the approach is tailored, and no two programmes look the same.

WHAT SPECIALIST SUPPORT LOOKS LIKE

- An individual assessment before any programme begins – no assumptions, no shortcuts
- A programme built around your child specifically, not a generic age-group template
- Close, ongoing partnership with you as the parent or guardian
- Coordination with your child's other coaches where relevant – golf pro, school sport, physio
- A long-term view: building athletes who are healthy, confident and still loving movement at 25

WHO I WORK WITH

- Junior athletes from age 10 as standard
- Gifted & Talented children from age 6, assessed individually
- Parents of younger children seeking guidance on age-appropriate activity and development
- If you are unsure where your child fits, or whether now is the right time – start with a conversation

*"The best thing you can do for your young athlete isn't find the best coach or the best programme. It's to cultivate a genuine love of movement – one that lasts a lifetime. The strength, power and skill will come. **FIRST, LET THEM PLAY.**"*

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