

Dear Coach Cliff,

My children are ages 5 and 7 and seem to be interested in running. They watch me go for runs and are starting to ask me” when can we run with you, mom?”

Children and Running; credit to the ‘American Council on Exercise’

So, if your children have expressed an interest in running or a desire to participate in a foot race, don’t discourage them. Running is a great natural sport. The important thing is to let them start at a slow pace and run only if it’s fun and enjoyable. Do not force them to run too far or too fast.

Take a few precautions to get them started. Please check with a physician to rule out any physical limitations that may prevent your children from participating in a running program. Keep in mind that children’s bodies, although full of energy, are not capable of performing at the same level as an adults. Allow them to find their own form. Encourage them to run relaxed and have fun.

How far should they run? Children will, normally, gauge their own limitations but should only run as far as they are comfortable. I recommend that children, under the age of 14, should run no further than 1 or 2 miles at a time. Reason: Their bones are still growing and the growth cartilage at the ends of the bones is much softer than adult cartilage, thus more vulnerable to injury.

Don’t put pressure on your children to run. Encourage them to come with you on short runs, keep the pace slow enough that they can talk to you and stop when they are tired. A track venue is the best place to run with your children... no traffic to worry about and, after they are tired, you can still finish your workout still keeping an eye on your children.

Set attainable goals. For children, the goal of running is to stay in shape and have fun, with the greater emphasis on the fun. Running fast or winning an event is less important and may cause children to dislike exercise or abandon it altogether. Focus on their self-esteem by praising their efforts; allow them to feel a sense of pride when they are finished, they will remain active for life.

Happy Running

Coach Cliff