

How to properly approach a L.E.A.P. Event: A Guide for Parents

After 10 years of existence, the L.E.A.P. Program is now a well-established and well-understood program that has stood the test of time. If you are new to the Program, it is important to **explain the psychological aspects** that underline a young child's participation in the L.E.A.P. program.

As you know, in gymnastics, **coaches and parents are the most important people in a child's Support System**. If the philosophy of the L.E.A.P. Program is not clearly understood by the adults that surround the child, it is possible that this can adversely affect a little gymnast's experience in this Program. Let's look at the Program more closely.

a) **BASIC THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT THE L.E.A.P. PROGRAM**

Children between the ages of 6 and 10 years need events, which are tailored to their age, where they can shine and show their progress. The L.E.A.P. Program is designed for ALL levels of Developmental (or Pre-Competitive) gymnasts, regardless of the category each child ends up competing in down the road.

The L.E.A.P. Program is comprised of two (2) components: **PHYSICAL ABILITIES & SKILLS** at four (4) progressive levels: **Copper, Bronze, Silver & Gold**. Each gymnast must achieve a certain percentage in each component in order to be awarded the prestigious L.E.A.P. PIN for each level. Gymnastics is an INDIVIDUAL SPORT, so the rate of progress of each gymnast must be considered one gymnast at a time. Comparisons are futile.

- **PHYSICAL ABILITY:** This component is made up of a series of exercises intended to assess the physical qualities of each gymnast. Each exercise assesses performance in the areas of strength, power, flexibility, and endurance. Each gymnast is awarded points on the basis of her performance for each exercise. The result is in the form of a mark on 100 (i.e. a percentage mark).

- **SKILLS:** This component is made up of a series of core gymnastics skills intended to assess the quality of each gymnast's skill development. Each gymnast is assessed on all four events (vault, uneven bars, beam and floor). Each gymnast is awarded points on the basis of her performance for each skill on each event. The result is in the form of a mark on 100 (i.e. a percentage mark).

The L.E.A.P. Program Award System is comprehensive and well structured. At the end of each L.E.A.P. event, each participating gymnast is awarded a Certificate and a Ribbon, and in the event a gymnast reaches the passing mark in both components of her level, she is awarded the prestigious L.E.A.P. PIN!

A child can pass as many levels during one "gymnastics year" as her age allows, in accordance to the rules.



“GYMMY the Frog” (the official L.E.A.P. program mascot) visits with some young gymnasts at the 10th Anniversary L.E.A.P. Event in June, 2007, held in Edmonton.

b) WHAT THE L.E.A.P. PROGRAM IS NOT

* The L.E.A.P. Program is **NOT designed as a Preparation Program for young female gymnasts**. It is only an Evaluation Tool, which gives some direction in the areas of physical abilities and skills.

* The L.E.A.P. Program is **NOT a Coaching Development Program**. Although it does help coaches in their understanding of a gymnast's preparation, **it does NOT pretend to instruct coaches HOW to coach**.

Because we are dealing with very young children (as young as 6 years old in a lot of cases), one has to remember that **children at that age understand things in a concrete way, and NOT in the abstract**. The Certificates and Ribbons are given to ALL children who participate in a L.E.A.P. Event as a concrete recognition for their efforts.

The color of the Ribbon received by each gymnast corresponds to a certain percentage attained in each test. L.E.A.P. tests should not be stressful for the kids or for the coaches. A well-run L.E.A.P. Event makes the experience that much more fun for the kids.

c) ADVICE FOR PARENTS

1. **Arrive on time** at your child's L.E.A.P. Event.
2. Make sure your child is **dressed and groomed** according to the coach's instructions.
3. **Support your child NO MATTER WHAT the final result**. Praise your child's effort more than the end result (good or bad). At that age, mistakes are going to happen...it is part of learning this difficult sport.

4. **Do not compare** the percentage mark obtained by your child to percentages achieved in school. There is no link whatsoever between the two. You can re-test a level in L.E.A.P., but you can't in school!
5. **Do not put expectations** in your child's mind (high or low) as to goals prior to a test. Those things should be left to the gymnast and to her coach. **Goal-setting** is a technical matter and **should be done by the coach and the athlete. Don't COACH your child** in the car, on the way to gym, in the parking lot or at home. Leave this to the coaches!
6. **Do not compare** your child's results with those of another child. It's entirely irrelevant to do so, because gymnastics is an individual sport! Kids come up with their own analysis and with time, they discover that all that matters is how they do, not how others do. Remember that children can only control THEIR OWN gymnastics, not the gymnastics of other children. **Comparing one child to another is a sure ingredient for failure.**
7. **Ask the coach** for his/her analysis of your child's performance. The coach is the technical expert that you trust in the first place.
8. **Leave the TECHNICAL stuff to the coaches** and evaluators and **enjoy** your child's participation in gymnastics. The L.E.A.P. Testing Sheets are very detailed and clearly reveal where the child is doing well and where the child needs to improve. What often seems to be a mistake to a spectator can in fact be of no consequence in the L.E.A.P. program. There are many examples of this and unless you know the program inside and out, it is truly difficult to judge the performance.
9. **ONE single test is not the end of the world** (good or bad). Gymnastics is a difficult sport and as such, progress needs to be assessed over a long period of time.
10. **Stay away from the technicalities of the sport;** leave that to the coaches. Don't ask for a copy of the Testing Sheets and don't talk to evaluators about their evaluation. **Don't become an expert; just be a parent.** Experience has CLEARLY shown that parents who become so-called "experts" in their child's gymnastics are setting themselves & their child up for confrontation, frustration and ultimately a negative gymnastics experience.