



Winter 2014

### Parenting Youth Athletes

More than ever before, young children are participating in some kind of an organized sport. Whether it is soccer, lacrosse, tennis or any other sport, young athletes are being driven to practice and competition sites almost every day of the week. The enormity of the commitment to keep up with today's sports schedule creates not only a lot of stress to parents, who need to manage almost always more than just one athletic child, but also frustrating to young athletes. As if it were not stressful enough, everybody wants to win. The child enters competitions to win; the parents want their child to play well. The child is elated when he/she wins, and so are the parents. However, when results undermine the child's perceived abilities, emotions become difficult to manage. The child shows frustration and anger. Parents blame coaches or referees. To top it all off, the drive back home is so uncomfortable that child and parent begin to seriously question the purpose of participating in sports.

At a young age, children participate in sports because their parents understand the positive benefits that come with being in an athletic environment. This is an opportunity to be engaged in a physical activity, socialize with friends, develop a hobby, and have fun. It is equally true that sport participation incorporates parallel teaching opportunities. It becomes an arena to develop and practice the management of tenacity, commitment, toughness and camaraderie. These traits are not only extremely useful to achieve peak performance, but also easily transferable for when the young athlete either reaches higher competitive status or ventures out in the business world.



Parents want the best for their children. They put a lot of effort helping them achieve their goals. Parenting with attention and love is certainly a responsible and caring role. Notwithstanding expressing these appropriate behaviors, parents still lose their cool and collected demeanor. They yell at coaches, referees, their children's teammates, and their own child. They scream from the bleachers, influence coaches' decisions, and even get into altercations with other parents. So, what happens that transforms

parents into behaving so emotionally?

As young athletes develop and show skillful sings, parents find it very tempting to envision the child's success. Parents envision Ivy League scholarships, competing in Division I, making it in the professional or Olympic team, fulfilling the parent's unfulfilled dream, etc. Somehow, the original reasons for participating in sports are put in the backburner and caring parents become overly emotionally enmeshed in the child's potential success. Inadvertently, parents focus on end results rather than teach the process to achieve goals.

It is unfortunate that parents are excluded from watching their own children at some sports events. It is clearly a lose/lose situation. Children need their parents; in fairness to them, they need parents who support and encourage them in a socially acceptable manner.

### Enhancing parent-sport child relationship

**1. Give the child time to decompress after a match.** Just like an adult would not be in a good mood to discuss his/her lousy day at work as soon as he/she gets home, the child equally needs time to digest what just happened. The child feels disappointed after a loss; maybe the coach and his/her teammates have already shared some words (hopefully kind ones) to him/her. The last thing the child needs is the parent taking on the "coach" role. The child is emotionally tuned out. Parent's persistence, either verbally or non-verbally, is a badly timely effort. It will be much more productive to make the child aware that the parent will be happy to listen to his/her experience when ready to share. It will foster understanding and compassion from the parent's perspective. On the other hand, the child will interpret it as having the freedom to share his/her experiences knowing he will be listened to.

**2. It was great watching you play.** Although many parents outwardly express their desire for their children to have fun, they become emotionally immersed in the child's game, especially when the stakes are high. It is really difficult to put emotions to the side, but so rewarding when able to do so. Win or lose, parents ought to treat their sport child the same; otherwise the child interprets his/her self-worth based on the parent's facial gesture. To avoid seeing the parent's angry expression, the child will push even more to win at the expense of not focusing on his/her game. At the end, the sport child will miss his/her opportunity to learn from his/her sport experience because he/she was more concerned with winning the parent's approval. There is a lot to learn from grandparents who remind their grandchild it was great watching them play.



**3. It is the child's experience to learn.**

Expressing anger and frustration for an apparent lack of effort, criticizing the coach or other players go nowhere in the child's eyes. It may be a short-term solution, but not the ideal manner in which to solve a

problem, much less to provide a teaching lesson for player development. Much is to be learned if the child is motivated to take control of his/her learning. His/her wins and losses are all theirs. Allow them to assume responsibility for improvement. If they have a passion for their game, they will figure it out how to get better. The more the child embraces his/her learning, the higher the self esteem. The child learns to manage his/her own progress and how to address the coach to improve his/her skills. These opportunities are priceless given that future professional environment, whether as an athlete or not, will require these personal qualities in order to get ahead. What better teaching ground than his/her own chosen sport!!

If you are interested in how you can learn to reach your goals, please visit my website

<http://sportsmentaledge.com/>.

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