

POSITIVE SPORTS PARENTING

Advice for parents of athletes

- *Make sure your child knows, win or lose, that you love them*, you appreciate their efforts and you're not disappointed in them. Parents love their children unconditionally, yet often their behavior conveys something else. Many young athletes say after a game parents sometimes make them feel as if their value as a person was tied to playing time or winning.
- *Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic capability*, competitive attitude, sportsmanship and actual skill level.
- *Be helpful but don't "coach"* on the way to the track, diamond or court, on the way home, at breakfast, and so on. And don't undermine the coach. Athletes need a single instructional voice during games. Kids who listen to their parents yelling instruction from the stands or even glancing at their parents for approval from the field are distracted and can't perform at a peak level. Second-guessing the coach on the ride home is just as insidious.
- *Know what is suitable to discuss with the coach*. The mental and physical treatment of your child is absolutely appropriate. So is seeking advice on ways to help your child improve. And if you are concerned about your child's behavior in the team setting, bring that up. Taboo topics: Playing time, team strategy, and discussing team members other than your child. And never approach a coach on game day to talk about your child, before, during or after a contest.
- *Teach them to enjoy the thrills of competition*, trying, working, improving their skills and attitudes...taking the physical and emotional bumps and coming back for more.
- *Don't compare* the skill, courage or attitudes of your child with other members of the team, at least not in front of them.
- *Always remember* that children tend to exaggerate both when praised and criticized. Temper your reactions to their tales of woe or heroics they bring home.
- *Don't overemphasize sports at the expense of sportsmanship*. The best athletes keep their emotions in check and perform at an even keel, win or lose. Parents showing displeasure during a contest are sending the wrong message. Encouragement is crucial, especially when things aren't going well.

- *Don't live your own athletic dream through your child.* Remember, you fumbled too; you lost as well as won; you were frightened; you backed off at times; and you weren't always heroic. Don't pressure them because of your pride. A sure sign is the parent taking credit when the child has done well. "We worked on that shot for weeks in the driveway," or "You did it just like I showed you."
- *Cheer everybody on the team, not just your child.* Parents should attend as many games as possible and be supportive, yet allow young athletes to find their own solutions. Don't feel the need to come to their rescue at every crisis. Continue to make positive comments even when the team is struggling.
- *Model appropriate behavior.* Children do as you do, not as you say. When a parent projects poise, control and confidence, the young athlete is likely to do the same.
- *Know your role.* Everyone at a game is either a player, a coach, an official or a spectator. Choose one of those roles at a time. Some adults have the false impression that by being in a crowd, they're anonymous. People behaving poorly cannot hide. Here's a clue: If your child seems embarrassed by you, clean up your act.
- *Be a good listener and a great encourager.* When your child is ready to talk about a game or has a question about the sport, be all ears. Then provide answers while being mindful of what you say. Above all, be positive.

Sometimes in your desire to help your child, best intentions can end up being counterproductive. A parent's "coaching job" is the toughest one of all and takes a lot of effort.