



# The Role of the Parent in Sports

## Top 10 Parenting Do's

- 10. Reinforce with your child to be a good sport.** For example emphasize shaking hands after games no matter how bitter the contest, and never belittling someone to make yourself feel better.
- 9. Limit your conversations about sport.** Let them know you are interested, but also interested in all aspects of their lives!
- 8. Have realistic expectations for your child's success in sport.** Try to be objective when your child is not receiving playing time or starting; or they struggle with their performances. They are not mini-adults; they are maturing young people who make many mistakes as well as doing many great things (sometimes in the same day!).
- 7. Support the coach and don't try to coach your child!** Especially from the stands during a game. Coaching your child, unless you are a part of the coaching staff, makes it very easy to confuse and frustrate the child. It can undermine the coach and destroy coach-athlete trust.
- 6. Keep it fun.** Try not to take sport too seriously. You will ruin it for your child and they will feel pressure if you are too critical, controlling, or overbearing. Keep it light!
- 5. Push to follow through on commitments, work hard, and be a good person.** This is the time to challenge your child – when they want to take a short cut that does not show commitment to the team or the coach. Pushing, however, to win is not healthy and will only create issues between you and your child.
- 4. Have them play for their reasons, not yours.** Keep in mind that your child wants to be independent from you in some ways, and yet have your support. For certain, in sport let their goals drive the level of involvement. This will lead to less frustration and arguments.
- 3. Remain calm and composed during games.** Avoid yelling at officials. High school athletes find it very frustrating and embarrassing when parents yell at officials, or lose their composure in the stands. There is enough pressure on these kids to perform as it is. Your added pressure from reacting to mistakes they make, being critical and negative, and just too emotional create unneeded stress and take away from the fun of the game.
- 2. Support, support, support!** Support your child in many different ways. Listen to them when they need to be heard after a tough game or practice. Challenge them when they are exhibiting a bad attitude. Confirm what they are going through is normal in sport. Be empathetic. Never make them feel guilty about "your sacrifices" for them to play. There are some many more ways to support than just paying for them to play, transporting them, or giving them tactical advice.
- 1. Make your love and support unconditional and never contingent on performance.** The biggest issues between parents and their children often come when the parent makes the child feel like their encouragement and love is contingent on their performances. No matter how your son or daughter plays be encouraging, give them a hug, let them know you love them even if they go 0 for 5, have five big turnovers, or take bad penalties. The coach will get on them about their execution; the parent needs to play his or her role and support.



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## Top 10 Parenting Don'ts

**10. Focus the majority of conversations on the sport.** If your conversations with your child are dominated by their sport then they will recognize how important it is to you, even if you say it isn't. This creates pressure.

**9. Tell your child their opponent is not good and they should beat them.** Again, this sets up an expectation that you cannot fail. What happens when they get behind? The pressure heats up! Focus on effort, good decision making with tactics, improvement, fun, and being a good sport. Have them focus on his own game!

**8. Coach your child from the sidelines.** As much as you may know about the game allow the coach to do their job. Your coaching, unless well choreographed and based on what the coaching is saying, will only serve to confuse and frustrate your child. They will have a hard time trusting what the coach is telling them to do.

**7. Criticize your child or even give your analysis after the game.** Allow your child some space to get over the game, calm down, and enjoy the time with their team and reflecting on their performance. You want your child to learn lessons from sport, right? Well they will learn faster if you allow them to deal with it and then facilitate their ability to learn from the game and move on by asking questions and listening. Furthermore, your child knows when they have made a mistake. If not, the coach will instruct them – there is no need to pile on!

**6. Treat your child differently dependent upon whether he or she won or lost (or how they performed).** What message are we sending when after a win we go get ice cream and after a loss we go directly home? That when you lose you don't deserve a treat – again, cranking up the importance and the pressure unintentionally. Be careful how you respond to your child after a game. Follow your post-game plans if possible. Maybe the dinner won't be as happy after a bad performance, but you will be exhibiting to your child that their treatment and your support are not contingent upon their performance. Also, you will be teaching a good lesson about emotional control, learning to lose with class, and moving on from tough performances.

**5. Allow sport to dominate your child's life.** Why? It is good to have great passion and pursue lofty goals. No doubt. At the same time, you want your child to learn balance in life. They will someday have to juggle being a father/mother, husband/wife, employee, boss, etc. More immediately, it is healthy for your child to consider themselves more than athletes. They should see themselves as a good student, a son or daughter, a brother or sister, a friend... and treat these roles with the importance they deserve. Moreover, having other pursuits will allow them to deal with the frustrations of sport, especially when they can no longer play the sport that they love competitively.

**4. Control all decision making relating to sport.** Teenagers want to have some say in their lives. They are looking to take more control. As a sport parent you want to allow your child to make decisions about his or her commitment to playing sports including the routines they need to follow to prepare for games as well as take care of homework and studying. If you control everything they will resent you for it.



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### 3. Consider your child's sport an investment for which you should receive something in return.

With pay-to-play high school sport becoming ever more commonplace it is easy to fall into this trap. Parents make an investment in time, money, transportation as well as emotional investment. However, do your best to not make your child feel like they need to perform because of your investment. Let them know that you will happily do all of these things no matter how they perform.

**2. Exert pressure to win.** This is a no-brainer. When you, the parent, pressure to win you are creating an expectation that your child does not have complete control over. This expectation creates stress and negative emotion for the child. Again, focus on effort, sportsmanship, and things they can control. Then they can feel like a success in your eyes. Ultimately, that's what every child longs for.

**1. Put your interests ahead of your child's interests.** If your child is playing high school or middle school sport, be supportive. Go to games and encourage them. Listen to them discuss their triumphs and frustrations. And, always and always let them play for their own reasons not yours. Maybe you were an intense, driven athlete and maybe your child is not, and instead is happy with being a role player and spending time with his friends. It's his life let him live it. There is a fine line here. You want to teach your child to commit to a goal and pursue it with hard work and dedication. However, if your child has not shown the intense interest in a sport and has not for some time, save your self and your child the pain. Instead, push on striving academically – in a positive way, of course.