

# **The 10 Commandments of Youth Sport Parenting; Set Children Up for Success Not Stress**

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Parents want to see their kids enjoying sports and doing well. Your style of involvement can play a highly positive or a highly negative role in influencing your child's motivation and enjoyment.

Common reasons for attrition in youth sports:

- Fear of failure
- Disapproval of parents
- Pressure to perform
- Psychological stress
- Lack of enjoyment
- Conflict with coaches
- Not getting to play

## **1. Know where your child is developmentally**

When children initially begin participating in sports it is about having **fun**, learning what sports they like and don't like, developing social skills, increasing health and fitness, learning physical skills, respecting authority figures, the challenge of competition, cooperation, sportsmanship, and dealing with winning and losing. The quickest way to take the fun out of sport is for adults to treat children as if they are varsity or professional athletes. As they get older children may then **choose** to specialize, raise their levels of competition, and work toward future sport goals.

## **2. Communicate with coaches**

Keeping the lines of communication open helps to support your child in achieving their goals. At the same time you must accept the coach's authority and therefore communicate your child's needs without undermining the coach's leadership.

## **3. Examine your own motivations**

Are you more attached to your child's participation than your child? Are you defining your self worth through the successes of your child, pushing them to have the experience you didn't or reliving your past sport glory days? Often parents expect that their child, if pushed, will obtain a college scholarship. Reality; 99% of youth athletes end their careers after High School. If you think pushing your child will get you out of paying college tuition, the odds are against you.

## **4. Use appropriate parent/spectator etiquette**

Be supportive and encouraging not critical. Don't coach or shout instructions from the stands. Pay attention to your language. Vulgarity is unacceptable. Aggressiveness from the stands embarrasses you and your child causing stress often resulting in taking the fun out of sport. Lastly, stay in the spectator area.

### **5. Set a good example**

Model good sportsmanship. How do you display attitudes around winning and losing? When too much emphasis is placed on winning one easily loses sight of the needs and interests of your child. Teach a good work ethic by supporting your child in getting to practices, trying their best, and working hard.

### **6. Find success in doing not outcome.**

Withholding approval unless your child wins creates unnecessary stress and standards impossible to live up to. Success is doing your best, learning and improving skills, accomplishing tasks, and overall enjoyment. Winning is not in ones control but amount of effort given is. One is never a loser when trying your best. Parents should be encouraging but also give accurate feedback as to their children's abilities and performance as they get older.

### **7. Keep your motivations and aspirations in line with your child.**

What are your child's goals? Do yours match theirs or do you have an alternative agenda? Children have the right to or not to participate in sports. It is perfectly acceptable for children to develop other outside interests. Sports are not for everyone.

### **8. Diversify activities.**

Childhood is a time to explore while figuring out likes and dislikes. Allow exploration of multiple activities as opposed to pushing specialization early on. Keep in mind that early sport specialization can result in repetitive motion injuries in developing bodies and early burnout.

### **9. Communicate with your child.**

Encourage participation but don't pressure. If your child does not appear to be enjoying themselves ask them why. Are they are having fun? Feeling too pressured? Do they like what they are doing or is something grabbing their interest? Are issues with the team or coach getting in the way of enjoyment?

### **10. FUN must be included in the top 3 reasons for participation for parents and kids.**

Sports should be fun for you and your child. Parents should derive pleasure watching their children develop, learn, and succeed. Cheering on the team or your child can be exciting, motivating, and an enjoyable experience for both of you.

When kids seem to no longer enjoy sports, counseling can aid in understanding where the fun went and help determine the role and importance of sports in their life. If as a parent you are feeling unsure how to best assist your young athlete in getting the most out of their experience, counseling can help clarify what your goals are and how to support your child or teen.