

Steps to Being a Winning Parent

Parenting is hard enough; but being the parent of an athlete makes the job all the more challenging. You are a vital and important part of the coach-athlete-parent team. If you do your job correctly and play your position well, then your child will learn the sport faster, perform better, have fun and build self-confidence as a result. Her sports experience will serve as a positive model for her to follow as she approaches other challenges throughout life. Your child and her coach need you on the team. They can't win without you. The following is a list of useful guidelines and strategies for you to use to make you more skilled in the parenting an athlete game. Remember, no one wins unless everyone wins. We need you on the team.

STEP ONE

When defined the right way, competition is both good and healthy and teaches children a variety of important life skills. The word "compete" comes from the Latin words "com" and "petere" which mean "together" and "seeking" respectively. The true definition of competition is a seeking together where your opponent is your partner, not the enemy. The better she performs the more chance you have of having a peak performance. Sports are about learning to deal with challenges and obstacles. Without a worthy opponent, without any challenges sports would not be much fun. Model the attitude of "seeking together" for your child. Get to know the parents of your opponents, root their great performances, and cheer for the winner no matter who it is.

STEP TWO

Encourage your child to compete against herself. The ultimate goal of the sport experience is to challenge and continually improve. Unfortunately, judging improvement by winning and losing is both an unfair and inaccurate measure. Winning in sports is about doing the best you can do, separate from the outcome or the play of your opponent. Encourage them to compete against their own potential.

STEP THREE

Do not define success and failure in terms of winning and losing. One of the main purposes of the sports experience is skill acquisition and mastery. When a child performs to her potential and loses it is criminal to focus on the outcome and become critical. If a child plays her very best and loses, you need to help her feel like a winner. Similarly, when a child or team performs far below their potential but wins, this is not cause to feel like a winner. Help your child make this important separation between success and failure and winning and losing.

STEP FOUR

Be supportive, do not coach! Your role on the parent-coach-athlete team is as a Support player with a capital "S"! You need to be your child's best fan, unconditionally! Leave the coaching and instruction to the coach. Provide encouragement, support, empathy, transportation, money, help with fund-raisers, etc., but ...do not coach! Most parents that get into trouble with their children do so because they forget to remember the important position that they play. Coaching interferes with your role as a supporter and fan. The last thing your child needs and wants to hear from you after a disappointing performance or loss is what they technically or strategically wrong. Keep your role as a parent on the team separate from that as a coach.

STEP FIVE

Give your child the gift of failure. If you really want your child to be as happy and as successful as possible in everything that she does, teach her how to fail! The most successful people in and out of sports do two things differently than everyone else. First, they are more willing to take risks and therefore fail more frequently. Second, they use their failures in a positive way; as a source of motivation and feedback to improve. Our society is generally negative and teaches us that failure is bad. Fear of failure or humiliation causes one to be tentative and non-active. In fact, most performance blocks and poor performances are a direct result of the athlete being preoccupied with failing or messing up. You can't learn to walk without falling enough times. Teach your child how to view setbacks, mistakes, and risk-taking positively and you'll have given her the key to a lifetime of success. Failure is the perfect stepping stone to success.

STEP SIX

Stress process, not outcome. When athletes choke under pressure and perform far below their potential, a very common cause of this is a focus on the outcome of the performance. In any peak performance, the athlete is totally oblivious to the outcome and instead is completely absorbed in the here and now of the actual performance. An outcome focus will almost always distract and tighten up the athlete insuring a bad performance. So if you truly want your child to win, help get her focus away from how important the contest is and have her focus on the task at hand (the next pitch, the next swing, the next ground ball)

STEP SEVEN

Help make the sport fun for your child. It's a time proven principle of peak performance that the more fun an athlete is having, the more they will learn and the better they will perform. Fun must be present for peak performance to happen at every level of sports. When a child stops having fun and begins to dread practice or competition, it's time for you as a parent to become concerned! When the sport or game becomes too serious, athletes have a tendency to burn out and become susceptible to repetitive performance problems. Keep in mind that being in a highly competitive program does not mean that there is no room for fun.

STEP EIGHT

Communicate. Keep the lines of communication open between you and your child. Be open to her hurts, worries, fears, and victories. Remember after all, she is your little girl. Encourage her to talk about all she is involved in. Mom, you need to listen to her sports dreams and her fashion concerns. Dad, you need to listen to her concerns over what shoes to wear to the prom and to her questions about her throwing motion. No matter what it is, just communicate.

*Let the Ump ump,
Let the Coach coach,
Let the kids play, and
Let the parents cheer.*