



# SUCCESSFUL SPORTS PARENTING

## STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS



A parent's behavior on and off the field of play can determine whether a child has a positive experience participating in sport. Helping parents to be better role models, volunteers, and supporters is the goal of the Successful Sport Parenting CD-ROM, presented by USA Swimming and the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association.

Through improved partnerships the coach can be enhanced, sports environments for long participation and



education and communication, between the parent, club and culminating in nurturing children, while fostering life a healthy life style.

No matter which sport is surveyed, the general consensus is that the majority of parents are good athletic parents, promoting the values of the club and sport. However, some parents take all of the fun out of sport by the way they behave while watching their children.

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### We have all seen the parent who:

- Puts too much emphasis on winning rather than the fun of competition
- Yells abuse at players, officials or the coach
- Tries to coach and/or referee from the sideline
- Forces their child into a sport they don't want to play
- Constantly focuses on the negative, undermining the coach and players
- Criticizes their child's mistakes during the game
- Embarrasses their child on and off the field, making a scene leaving everyone uncomfortable

USA Swimming and the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association represent two national governing bodies with extensive national and international athletic success, while supporting large athletic development programs from the grassroots to the Olympics. With the support of additional sport governing bodies (, Successful Sport Parenting is designed to help all sport organizations promote good parent behavior so that parents can learn to be a positive influence on their child's sporting experience.

The information in this CD-ROM can be copied and used by clubs to help guide parents, coaches and clubs to promote the highest values of sport.

Dr. Alan Goldberg (Competitive Advantage) "If you [parent] do your job correctly and play YOUR position well, then your child will learn

faster, perform better, really have fun and have his self-esteem enhanced as a result. Her sport experience will serve as a positive model for her to follow as she approaches other challenges and obstacles throughout life."

## Sport & Children

### Why Children Participate...

• Enjoy / Fun	28%
• Fitness	15%
• Be with Friends	13%
• Compete	13%
• Improve	8%
• Meet New People	8%

### Why Children Drop Out...

• Takes too much time	18%
• Coach was negative	15%
• Enjoy other activities more	15%
• Lack of fun	8%
• It was boring	9%
• Parents' emphasis on winning	6%



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### What Kids May Gain...

#### Physical Benefits:

- Improve fitness, strength, flexibility, and coordination
- Improve general health
- Weight management
- Develop a wide range of motor skills
- Establish healthy behaviors that young people will carry throughout their lives

#### Social Benefits:

- Develop communication and interpersonal skills
- Develop leadership and co-operation skills
- Create lasting friendships
- Increase interest in accepting responsibilities
- Learn to deal with winning and losing
- Provide a vehicle for responsible risk-taking

#### Personal Benefits:

- Enjoyment factor – it's fun!!
- Improve self-esteem and confidence
- Improve ability to concentrate: potentially facilitating better academic performance
- Learn self-discipline, commitment and responsibility
- Learn organizational skills and how to share
- Learn how to deal with pressure and stress
- Encourage health related behaviors i.e. better eating habits, less likely to smoke

### What Parents May Gain ...

- Play a larger role in children's lives by sharing of their experiences.
- Appreciate that children are having fun, being active and healthy
- Healthy children may equal a reduction in medical costs
- Security in knowing where your children are, that they are being supervised and having fun
- Children who are involved in sport tend to stay in school longer and get better grades
- Assist in developing behaviors that will encourage life long health and well-being

### Parent Roles & Responsibilities

#### Parent "Do's" ...

- Provide love and support regardless of the sport outcome.
- Make your child responsible for his/her sport preparation (e.g., equipment ready, practice time, etc.)
- Have realistic expectations and keep success in perspective
- Expose child to many different sports and activities
- Hold your child accountable for poor behaviors during sporting events
- Provide an appropriate push when your child is reluctant or unmotivated
- Emphasize the importance of hard work.
- Provide transportation, financial, & logistical support
- Recognize and encourage your child when he or she does something right
- Show interest, enthusiasm, and support for your child and team
- Be in control of your emotions
- Thank the coaches, officials, and other volunteers who conducted the event
- Remain in the spectator area during competitions
- Help make sport fun

#### Parent "Don'ts" ...

- Criticize my child for his or her sport performance
- Critique your child immediately following the sporting event or during the car ride home
- Allow sport to dominate your child's life
- Exert pressure to win
- Treat your child differently dependent upon whether he or she won or lost
- Put your interests ahead of your child's in sport
- Getting too "caught up" in sport and making it over-important
- Belittle the opponent's talent or preparation
- Make all the decisions for your child
- Advise the coach on how to do the job
- Make insulting comments to athletes, parents, officials, or coaches of other teams
- Drink alcohol at sports events or come to one having drunk too much

### What Kids Want...

#### This is what kids have told us they want from their parents:

- Support and encouragement
- To let them know you are proud of them
- Watch them play
- Praise for their efforts
- Understand their sport and show an interest in being involved
- Have realistic expectations of their abilities

#### What kids don't want from their parents:

- To yell at them during or after the game
- Swearing
- Abuse of the referee or coach
- Being pushy and pressuring
- Being critical

#### What kids want from sport:

- Have fun
- Learn and improve
- Be with their friends

#### Other Resources:

- "Parents: Keeping the Fun in Sport"
- "How to be a Winning Parent: A Parent's and Coach's Guide for 'Winning' in the Youth Sports Game"

**"Parenting My Champion: Getting Started"**  
(From US Tennis Association, used with permission)



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### PARENT BEHAVIOR CHECKLIST

Rate on a 1 to 5 scale the questions below relative to your parenting of your child in sport. Think about how your child or your child's coach would rate you. When finished, total the ratings to assess how effective you are in being a youth sport parent.

1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

« NOT LIKE ME | | | | CHARACTERISTIC OF ME »

- 1. Do I emphasize the development of my child and having fun more than winning?
- 2. Do I have expectations that are realistic for my child as an athlete?
- 3. Do I rarely criticize my child for his/her sport?
- 4. Do I allow my child to be responsible for his sport preparation (meaning I do not do everything for my child including carrying bags, getting water, preparing equipment)?
- 5. Do I avoid trying to coach my child?
- 6. Do I provide love and support regardless of the performance outcome?
- 7. Do I emphasize the importance of hard work with my child?
- 8. Do I expose my child to different sports?
- 9. Do I keep success in perspective?
- 10. Do I display a positive and optimistic parenting style?
- 11. Do I avoid allowing my child's sport to dominate my child's entire life?
- 12. Do I hold my child accountable for poor or unsportsmanlike behaviors?
- 13. Do I appropriately push my child when he or she is lazy and does not work hard?
- 14. Do I encourage my child to seek out new challenges and opportunities?
- 15. Do I avoid exerting pressure to win?
- 16. Do I model an active lifestyle?
- 17. Do I emphasize core values like 'if you are going to do it, do it right'?
- 18. Do I provide transportation, financial, and logistical support?
- 19. Do I provide considerable encouragement by recognizing what my child does right?
- 20. Do I try to make the sport fun?
- 21. Do I avoid focusing the majority of our conversations at home on the child's sport?
- 22. Do I act calm and confident in my child as he or she competes?
- 23. Do I avoid considering my child's sport as an investment and that I should receive something in return?
- 24. Do I treat my child the same following wins and losses?
- 25. Do I provide my child ample opportunity and resources to be successful in his or her sport?
- 26. Do I allow my child some "say" in sport-related decisions?



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- 27. Do I attempt to keep my own interests in the sport secondary to my child's?
- 28. Do I avoid getting caught up in the sport and making it over-important?
- 29. Do I consider my child my son or daughter first, and an athlete second?
- 30. Do I avoid critiquing my child immediately following the competition or during the car ride home?

TOTAL SCORE \_\_\_\_\_

**150-150** Great job mom/dad! You are parenting your child's athletic participation very effectively. Keep doing what you're doing!

**120-134** You are very effective in parenting your child in sport. Find any items that you scored 3 or below and set a goal to improve.

**105-119** At times you are effective parenting your child in sport, but there are some behaviors that may be negatively influencing your child's experience. Review your ratings and then set a goal to improve scores below a 3.

**90-104** There is a good chance that you are negatively influencing your child's experience. Review your ratings and then read the sport parenting tips on the CD. This will help you develop ideas for improving your child's experience.

**89 AND BELOW** You are negatively influencing your child's experience. It is important that you think about your child's goals and why he or she participates in the sport. Reflect on your perspective of the sport and how it differs from a healthy perspective of developing the child and having fun. Please review the sport parenting tips on the CD, and set a goal every week to improve as a sport parent

## ARE YOU A PRESSURE PARENT?

The following survey has been taken from the Amateur Swimming Association of Great Britain. If you answer yes to one or more of these questions, you may be in danger of pressuring your child. It is important to remember that the parents' role is critical and should be supportive at all times to ensure a positive experience for your child.

- 1. Is winning more important to you than it is to your child?
- 2. When your child has a poor swim, is your disappointment, such as through body language or vocal tones, obvious?
- 3. Do you feel that you are the one to have to "psyche" your child up before competition?
- 4. Do you feel that winning is the only way your child can enjoy the sport?
- 5. Do you conduct "post mortems" immediately after competition or practice?
- 6. Do you feel that you have to force your child to go to practice?
- 7. Do you find yourself wanting to interfere with coaching and instructions during practice or competition thinking that you could do better?
- 8. Do you find yourself disliking your child's opponents?
- 9. Are your child's goals more important to you than they are to your child?
- 10. Do you provide material rewards for performance?

## Parents as Part of the Team...

"Be an involved parent, what can you do to support your child's sport and club? Become part of the team – volunteer. All sports require a significant number of volunteers (usually parents) in order for the sport to function and to host competitive events, no matter the level of play. It all begins by choosing a program (sport) to fit the child. The next step is to attend the parent meetings to understand how the club functions and what volunteer opportunities are available for parents. All sport organizations survive on the good will and spirit of those parents and supporters who love athletics and are motivated to provide children with a healthy sport experience"



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### Your Role on Your Team... Why is it always me?

- Leaders 2%
- Doers 5-10%
- Do Somethings 15-20%
- Belongers 68-78%

#### Other Resources:

- "How Can You Help Your Child's Team"

## PARENT EDUCATION

#### Education...

The parent tips presented here are just that, brief ideas to help parents better understand their athletes and how parents could act around their children, both on game day and away from the club.

#### Game Day Tips for Parents...

#### Before the Game:

- Tell your child you love them regardless of outcome.
- You don't need to tell your child that winning doesn't matter because they know it has some meaning. Instead, help them to develop a healthy competitive attitude for trying hard and having fun.
- Tell your child to "go for it, give it your best shot and have fun".

#### During the game:

- Don't yell instructions at your child during the game. The coach has given them instructions and their teammates are also calling out to them; too much input is confusing.
- Cheer and acknowledge good play by both teams.
- Never criticize a mistake, only make motivational comments.
- Respect the decisions made by the officials. Your child will learn to respect authority by seeing you do the same.

#### After the game:

- Thank the officials and the coach
- Thank the other team for a good game
- Congratulate your child and their teammates on their efforts
- Compliment individual players on good plays they made during the game.
- Focus on the way your child played rather than winning or losing.
- If your child is upset with losing, help them not to focus on the outcome.

#### During the car ride home:

- Point out a good play your child made during the game.
- Avoid criticizing or correcting mistakes
- Ask questions like:
  - Did you have fun?
  - Did you give it your best effort?
  - What did you learn from the game?
  - What was the best play you made and how did it feel?
- Remember it is more important to be a good person than be a good anything else.

#### Other Resources:

"Parenting my Champion: Developing Talent: Recommended Guidelines for Successful Sport Parenting"

Parents are encouraged to review all the materials presented in the "Parents" section of the CD, as well as those areas devoted specifically to the club and coach. Within the Parent's Section of the CD there are categories focused on Growth and Development, Physical Well-being, Competition and Training, and Balance and Support. Each one contains a wealth of detailed information, as well as examples from a variety of sports and clubs.

## PARENT ETIQUETTE

#### On Etiquette...

The negative behavior of a small minority of parents has resulted in the adoption of "Parent Code of Conduct" by a wide variety of sport governing bodies. Both USA Swimming and the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association have athlete, coach, official, and volunteer codes of conduct contained within their rules and regulations governing their respective sports. A sampling of parental codes of conduct is presented here, as well as in PDF format. In addition, a brief, bullet point summary of how parents should deal with coaches and officials is presented.

### Parent Etiquette in Sport...

Remember the Golden Rule — treat opposing players, coaches and officials the way you'd like to be treated.

#### Dealing with Coaches:

- Parents should avoid asking a coach to clarify a decision during the course of a game. Support the coach in public, in front of other parents and fans.
- If a parent wishes to seek clarification or have a discussion with a coach after the game, then the following guidelines should be applied:
  - Allow high emotions to subside before engaging in any discussion.
  - Listen.
  - Avoid interrupting.
  - Clarify the issue.
  - Obtain closure.
  - Leave the door open for future discussion.
- Parents should leave the coaching to the coaches. Players should be able to hear the coach's instructions, from coaches only, during play, half time and practice sessions.
- Parents should find opportunities to recognise the effort their child's coach puts into developing their children and the sport.
- Avoid speaking negatively about the coach, especially in front of your child.



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## Dealing with officials

- Parents should not question the decision of an official during the course of a game. If a parent needs to seek clarification they should approach the team coach or manager and apply similar guidelines to those above.
- It is never appropriate to question or abuse officials during or after a game.
  - Remember that officials are doing the best they can.
  - In most instances, officials have received training and have a better understanding of the rules.
  - Officials make mistakes, as do players. Even officials aren't perfect.
  - Officials may have a different view of the game to those of spectators and so may see something that you cannot, or vice versa.
  - Most officials are volunteers who give up their time to do the job. In fact, many officials are out there because nobody else will offer to do it.
- Your child may be asked to officiate in the future. How would you feel if they were abused for making a mistake? Officials deserve your respect and support.
- Remember, without officials there would be no game. Abusing officials will not change the outcome of the game but it will lead to fewer and less qualified officials.

**Parents are role models for their children – your children will reflect your attitude towards coaches and officials. Have you ever offered to officiate or coach?**

Other Resources:

## **“USSA Code of Conduct” 10 Commandments for Sport Parents**

- I. Thou shall not impose thy ambitions on thy child.
- II. Thou shall be supportive no matter what.
- III. Thou shall not coach thy child.
- IV. Thou shall only have positive things to say at a competition.
- V. Thou shall acknowledge thy child's fears.
- VI. Thou shall not criticize the officials.
- VII. Thou shall honor thy child's coach.
- VIII. Thou shall be loyal and supportive of thy team.
- IX. Thy child shall have goals besides winning.
- X. Thou shall not expect thy child to become an Olympian.