



HOW TO BE A SUPPORTIVE PARENT

Youth programs cannot be successful without the support of parents. The following guidelines are for concerned parents as they strive to be supportive of their young athletes without being pushy.

- 1. Supportive parents** focus on mastering sport skills and strategies rather than competitive rankings. Sport mastery focuses on performance, which can be controlled by the athlete, while competitive ranking focuses primarily on winning and losing, an outcome, which is frequently outside the athlete's control. An overemphasis on competitive rank and an under emphasis on sport mastery is a primary cause of a dramatic dropout rate in competitive sports by 12 to 18 year olds.
- 2. Supportive parents** decrease the pressure to win. **Supportive parents** realize that sports create pressure to succeed. Additional pressure from the parent is likely to be counterproductive, particularly, in the long run. **Supportive parents** avoid making the outcome of the game bigger than life. As a game or a competition becomes blown out of proportion, a youngster's self-esteem can become tied to winning or losing. A child should not feel less valuable or less loved when a game is lost.
- 3. Supportive parents** believe that sport's primary value is the opportunity for self-development. The probability of achieving lasting fame and glory via sport is low. Many outstanding athletes never achieve professional status. However, their sports experiences have allowed them to develop life-long values and self-respect.
- 4. Supportive parents** understand the risks. Competition places the athlete on center stage. Anytime you attempt to succeed publicly, you risk failing where others can judge you. In the long run, competing is willingness to chance failure. Giving your best is what athletics is all about.
- 5. Supportive parents** communicate their true concerns directly with the coach. A positive working relationship is based upon clearly communicated mutual goals among parents, coaches and athletes. While a parent cannot control the behavior of a coach, they can communicate with the coach on a regular basis about the overall development of their child.
- 6. Supportive parents** understand and respect the difference between parental roles and coaching roles. Both parents and coaches need to understand their different roles in supporting the young athlete. While parents are ultimately responsible for their child's development, once they have chosen a program/coach they **must leave the coaching to the coach**. Even though **Supportive parents** often play sports with their child they avoid coaching "over the shoulder" of the coach and/or publicly questioning the coaching decisions.

7. **Supportive parents** control negative emotions and think positively. Few athletes wish to perform poorly. Negative reactions to poor performances only add to an athlete's pressures. **Supportive parents** realize that even the athlete who "chokes" is trying to succeed. In fact, part of the problem with many athletes is that they are trying too hard to succeed. Criticizing such athletes does little to enhance their performances.

8. **Supportive parents** avoid the use of fear. The use of punishment and withdrawal of love can pressure kids to perform better. Unfortunately, such strategies tend to trade short-term performance gains for long-term emotional risks to the youngster's health and well-being. **Supportive parents** recognize that a love for sport is rarely fostered by fear of the consequences of failure.

9. **Supportive parents** avoid criticizing. Nagging parents often confuse support with constantly reminding the children that they need to practice, condition more and concentrate. Overly involved parents frequently lose their objectivity. They are unable to provide critical emotional support, which children often need before and during highly competitive contests.

10. **Supportive parents** recognize and understand expressions of insecurity. Youngsters who express high anxiety, more often than not, have parents who are insensitive to their symptoms. When children are nervous, uncertain, or feeling pressure, insensitive parents may trivialize the child's fears or see such concerns as signs of weakness. **Supportive parents** realize that such expressions are normal and are a call for emotional support.

11. **Supportive parents** avoid the use of guilt. "We've done so much for you," or "The family's given so much for you, the least you could do is take advantage of what we've provided for you" are typical remarks of **UN-Supportive parents**. They use guilt to manipulate the child to perform the way the parent desires.

'Not-So Typical' Softball Parent

How to decide on a travel team:

- If possible, sub for the team a few times and watch team interactions:
Coaches/parents/players
- Find a team that will make your daughter compete for her spot.
- Find a coach that...
 - o is knowledgeable and knows how to teach the game.
 - o will push your daughter to be the best she can be.
 - o will encourage her when she's struggling.
 - o knows how to have fun.

How to talk to your daughter's coach about playing time:

- DON'T
- Teach your daughter how to have that discussion with her coach. It's all about her. She needs to learn how to communicate on her behalf and work to achieve 'her' goals.

What my daughter and I talk about after a game:

- Focus on the positive. How did she contribute? Did she have a good offensive/defensive day?
- Chances are she already knows what she did 'wrong'... she doesn't want to (or need to) hear about it again.
- She usually will talk about what skills she feels she needs to work on, then we make a plan to practice those.
- As a parent, be respectful of the coach – You may not agree with everything s/he says or does – but s/he deserves respect as the coach. If you find yourself disagreeing often, perhaps it's time to find a new team (i.e. see first paragraph above).
- When she 'complains', don't automatically jump to her or her teammates' defense. Make her understand accountability.

Most important things for athletes at this stage:

- Good friends – teammates that are supportive of one another on and off the field
- Having fun while working hard and learning
- Playing good competition
- Having supportive parents

List of do's and don'ts for parents:

- Everyone on the team is most likely a "good" player – No one wants to hear over and over how good *your* daughter is.
- Encourage parents to support the coaches' decisions on the field, whether you agree with them or not.
- Be a cheerleader for all of the girls, not just your own.
- Don't yell at umpires, players or coaches during the game.
- When parents thrive on drama and don't want to listen to reason.... sit on the other end of the bleachers.

Side notes:

- Let your daughter carry her own bag, pack her own water, and DO NOT go into the dugout during the game unless you are called upon *by the coach* to do so.