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The Sport Parent



As children become more and more actively involved in sports (and the like), it's very important to know as a parent what type of support and foundation you should provide to your child. Sports are a test of muscle, mind and heart, so creating a positive and supportive environment for your young athlete to grow and foster in is imperative. It can be an overwhelming task sometimes, but hopefully through this newsletter you will come away with some helpful tips and support.

Who's all involved in creating a positive sporting environment?

The heart of the team is of course the athletes themselves. Together these peers share a very unique experience of the ups and downs of training and competition. When the team works well it creates a safe environment for the children to grow up in, learning the value of trust and support. If this is true, the wins and losses will become lessons, while the camaraderie and excitement of the game will be remembered more than the score will. It takes a group that will work together toward a common goal, a team.

Next in the sporting environment comes the coach. The coach is typically a constant, teaching, and guiding aspect of the athletes sporting career. The officials and referees are the "guardians of the game", being the rational force that keeps emotions in bounds and fair play at the top of their lists. These officials help to keep the game safe and keep constant awareness that these youth sports are "just a game". Also another important part of this sporting environment are the volunteers and staff who labor in the background and typically go unnoticed for all of their hard work and dedication.

The most essential part of the sporting environment is however, the parent. The parent has the clearest impact on the youth athlete. Typically, most parents are able to provide positive and constructive support for their young athlete, but occasionally there are examples of sporting parenting gone wrong. While it is true that competitive sports prove to be a challenge for the athlete, it also is a struggle for the parents. Sitting back watching helplessly as your child plays can be a struggle for many parents. This is a difficult task given the

emotional intensity of sport and the sense of responsibility that the parents carry for the well-being of their child. The most important support for a parent to provide a young athlete is that the children know that no matter win, lose, or draw you value them just the same. Although some youth may prove that they can succeed regardless of their parent's behavior either good or bad, but many athletes path to success is paved by their parents good efforts.

Being a Champion Parent

Photo provided by Marcus PR, Marriottsville, Maryland



The following are tips that will help you, as a parent, to help encourage and grow your child's talent in an athletic aspect. Working with your youth athlete is, like parenting, an ongoing task. The major task is providing these young athletes with a moral compass to help guide them both on and off the field. This must start by setting a good example, as well as emphasizing and practicing the following:

1. Support your youth athlete by providing a safe, sensible opportunity to train and compete, and grow from the experience of sport.
2. Establish an ongoing dialogue with the coach so that you understand his or her philosophy and remain aware of your youth athlete's strengths and weaknesses - athletically and psychologically.
3. Provide unconditional emotional support as your youth athlete rides the ups and downs of the competitive experience, and help him or her learn the lessons of winning and losing.
4. Avoid coaching, that is, avoid giving specific instructions or critique of the technical or tactical aspects of sport.
5. Accept - even as you are bewildered by - your youth athlete's varying demonstrations of composure and distress, maturity and neediness in the competitive environment.
6. Talk candidly with your youth athlete about the role you should play as a parent at competitions. Be prepared to keep your distance.
7. Work actively to manage your own anxieties and frustrations as you watch your youth athlete compete. Be sure to set these aside before you interact afterwards.
8. Show composure in the face of stress, and let this serve as a model to your youth athlete. He or she is watching.

Contact Us


Hours: Monday – Friday, 8:30-5:00pm. Evening hours are available on a limited basis.

(540) 989-6605 or 800-699-9396

Nights and weekends call RESPOND:

(540) 776-1100 or 800-541-9992

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9. Identify mutual expectations for your youth athlete's commitment to training and competition as you make successive commitments to support his or her sport activities financially and logistically.
 10. Guide your youth athlete in balancing sport, school, family and other responsibilities.

*Information for this newsletter was written by Dr. John Heil, who is a clinician here at Psychological Health-Roanoke.