

How to be a good soccer parent!

1. Model positive behaviors.

Being a positive role model for your child sounds like it should be easy; however, even the most placid parent can get carried away in the heat of competition and within the ultra-competitive team environment created by overzealous club programs. Do not comment on every moment of your child's game; and when you feel the need to say something, make sure it is positive and encouraging. Don't talk badly about competitors, criticize teammates or officials, and do not openly second-guess the coach. There are enough uninformed critics in the stands hurling insults at kids playing a game, so instead set the example and model your behavior for other parents as much as your own child.

2. Stay in the now.

The increasing pressures on children to be successful in youth sports has programmed parents to be continually looking towards the next level, the next team, the next season, high school, college scholarships, and professional careers! By focusing on the future, parents are missing out on the most important game, the one being played today! If parents do not sit back and enjoy everything that goes along with their child being involved in a youth sports program, they will miss out on some of the most valuable and cherished shared memories their child will have of growing up.

3. Encourage risk-taking.

All kids should have the opportunity to participate in sports at a level that is commensurate with their ability and their level of commitment. All programs should have player development at the heart of their mission; however, higher-level programs demand more from the players and understandably they place more value on winning and losing. To achieve success, players must inevitably push themselves outside of their comfort zone and will take risks and make mistakes. Competition is inherently risky, and it takes a strong parent to continue to encourage their child to take risks and not fear failure as they push the bounds of their talents.

4. Help develop independence.

We frequently witness young athletes constantly trying to live up to the often-unrealistic expectations of their parents. For many, the over-investment by their parents in the youth sports environment leads players to believe that performance and often their success determines parental happiness and approval. In truth, a high-level player in any sport experiences enough pressure to perform well from their teammates, the coaching staff, and from themselves. They do not need the added pressure of an overzealous parent with good intentions! Encouraging a strong and independent self-image is extremely valuable and critical. There's no escaping the often-mean comments and difficult situations that will confront a competitive athlete. The sooner they learn to stand on their own and not always have parents to lean on or hide behind, the better.

5. Treat the coach as an ally, not an adversary.

If you treat the coach as an adversary, how do you think your athlete will treat him? You and the coach want the same thing: for your athlete: to be successful (though you might see different paths to making that happen). Once you know that the coach values your child not just as an athlete, but as a person, then step back and let him or her coach. You won't always agree with every decision, and your child may struggle at times; but instead of saying "what's wrong with this" try "what's good about this?" There is always learning to be had if you look closely enough. Working with your coach by keeping him or her informed, and respecting boundaries, actually gives your child the best chance of success.

6. Encourage academics.

Overall a little over **7%** of high school athletes (about 1 in 14) went on to play a varsity sport in college and less than 2% of high school athletes (1 in 54) went on to play at NCAA Division I schools. From all of the NCAA student athletes, only 2% went on to play professionally. Clearly an education is not a backup plan if athletics doesn't work out: it is the foundation from which your athlete will build a life upon, athletics or not.

7. Just love watching your kids play.

Sports goes by way too quickly, so enjoy every moment. Do so by simply saying "I love watching you play." It changes everything ([watch this video if you don't believe me](#)). If you have given your best, and you can say to yourself "I have done what I can while maintaining sanity, health and the well-being of my family and relationships," then by all means you are a successful sports parent. Stop looking at Facebook and comparing what your house looks like on the inside to what everyone else's house looks like on the outside. Simply take a step back, let the athletic journey belong to your child, and give your best effort. Just do your best, and have fun doing it. Not only will your kids notice it. They will love you for it!

8. Maintain patience.

An obvious tip, and is relevant across the entire spectrum of parenting, but when it comes to sports it is vital we do not go too hard on them too soon. This may have a negative effect on their initial impressions on a brand-new sport and may put them off putting in 100% effort and attention. Give them space and time to try the sport in their own way - offering minimal input. This will allow them to base their own opinion on the sport without any prejudice from you.

9. Push them when needed.

Similarly, for kids to develop according to their ability, it is a good idea to encourage them on to the next level. Maybe you see them resting on their laurels and you feel they need more. Speak to their coach, speak to your child and offer ideas to improve and to fulfil their potential. Know when to criticize and encourage. Building resilience within a child and teenager is a vital life-skill to develop. It boosts their ability to manage adversity and hardship. This runs true in sports participation. Kids need to expect criticism. It is an important building block in improving as a sports person and a human being. It is critical we as parents can appreciate when constructive criticism is necessary, when it can wait and how to deliver it. Maybe they have just played a bad game and have come off the field of play in a stinking mood. Their coach may have criticized the team. This may be a good time for us as sports parents to focus on the positives from the game. Maybe have a reflective chat when the adrenaline has worn off. Encouragement comes in many forms - it can be from the sideline of the game; it can be a simple chat in between games informing them of their ability. Encouragement boosts confidence and belief. Criticism creates an ability to adjust and reflect on self-performance.

10. Let them try different sports.

It may take many years and numerous attempts to find their real niche. It may be a sport you were not expecting them to enjoy. This is ok. It is their life. If you had your eyes set on them playing Football and they want to try Golf, let them. This ability to try different sports, may also set them up better for the real world to become open-minded in their everyday outlook.