

Parents Make the Difference

Keep in mind that, above all, the motivating factor for most children who enter an organized youth sports program is their desire to have fun. This is particularly true with young children, many of whom are newcomers to the youth sports scene.

With a supportive attitude and a fundamental understanding of the "basics" of ice hockey, everyone will come away from youth sports with a positive feeling.

IN THE STANDS

Parents can take the fun out of hockey by continually yelling or screaming from the stands. Parents should enjoy the game and applaud good plays. The stands are not the place from which parents should try to personally coach their kids. Kids often mirror the actions of their parents; if they see mom or dad losing their cool in the stands, they'll probably do the same on the ice.

CAR AND HOME

Some parents not only spoil the fun for their kids at the ice rink, but also in the car, believing this is the perfect place for instruction. Parents are responsible for supporting and respecting the coach's decisions and abilities. It is unfair to put children in a position of having to decide who to listen to - their parents or the coach. Avoid the first inclination to talk about the mistake on the ride home. Instead ask them if they had fun and what was their favorite part of the game. Find something you can compliment them on. Save the suggestions for later.

AT PRACTICE

Parents should remember that if a child wants to improve, he/she has to practice - not just play. Even if a child is not the "star" player for a team, practice stresses the importance of teamwork, establishing goals, discipline and learning to control your emotions, all of which are important lessons children can use both in and away from sports.

AT THE RINK

Hockey parents can help create a fun environment by making certain their children are wearing properly fitted equipment. Parents also need to stress fair play and risk management to help eliminate injuries.

INITIATION PROGRAM

The USA Hockey Initiation Program has been developed to make certain that a child's first experience with hockey is positive, safe and fun. Parents should avoid pressuring or placing unreasonable expectations on their children, particularly at the Initiation Program level. No matter what happens on the ice, children need your support, so always strive to be positive.

SUPPORT YOUR CHILD

There are many benefits that are derived from playing youth hockey. Boys and girls learn good sportsmanship and self-discipline. They learn to work together, how to sacrifice for the good of the team, how to enjoy winning and how to handle defeat. In the process, they also learn important lessons about physical fitness and personal health.

The degree to which your child benefits from his or her youth hockey experience is as much your responsibility as it is theirs. In order for your child to get the most out of a youth hockey program, it is important for you to show support and offer encouragement while maintaining a genuine interest in the team. Stay and watch practice and games so you can talk with them about it afterward.

ALWAYS BE POSITIVE

Parents serve as role models for their children, who often look to adults for advice, direction and approval. Never lose sight of the fact that you are a role model and strive to be positive. As a parent, one of the most important things you can do is show good sportsmanship at all times to coaches, referees, opponents and teammates.

Remember that your children are **PLAYING** hockey. It is important to allow them to establish their own goals and play the game for themselves. Be careful not to impose your own standards or objectives.

LET THE COACH COACH

Avoid placing an exaggerated emphasis on winning. A recent survey indicated that **72%** of children would rather play for a losing team than ride the bench for a winner. The most important aspect of your child's youth hockey experience is for them to have fun while developing physical and emotional skills that will serve them in life. A healthy, risk-free environment that emphasizes the importance of fair play, sportsmanship, teamwork and, most importantly, fun will be invaluable for your child as he or she continues to develop a positive self image.

POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT

The best way to help children achieve goals and reduce their natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. After all, no one feels good about making mistakes.

If your child does make a mistake - and they will (remember they are just kids) - keep in mind that mistakes are an important part of the overall learning process. Strive to be supportive and point out the things they do well. Make sure your child knows that, regardless of the outcome of a game, he or she is a winner.