

# Parenting

Everyone loves their child and wants the best for them. The emotions that a parent feels when watching his/her child play in organized sports can range from pure joy and pride to anger and disappointment. I believe most parents don't realize how emotional they become when they get caught up in the moment of watching their child in a competitive environment. The majority of parents start their children in sports for a number of great reasons:

- An opportunity to spend time with their children.
- To help their children form friendships.
- To provide a safe supervised activity.
- Provide regular exercise.
- To develop skills and confidence.

That's only a few of many great reasons to get a child involved in youth athletics. Parents deeply love their children and have a strong emotional bond. They want to help their child when they fail and stick up for them if they believe their child isn't being treated fairly. The intentions are good, but that strong emotional bond can also lead to parents not behaving in a rational way.

## Check Your Behavior

Think your being supportive by yelling at the umpire when a call is made against your child? Do you think your child feels better when you approach the coach during a game and in front of his friends and ask why your son isn't playing more? Chances are your just embarrassing your child. It often doesn't take much for a child to be mortified by the behavior of his parents.

In addition to how you make your child feel when you can't control your emotions, think about the example you are setting. You wouldn't want your child to talk back or yell at the umpire. You also want them to be able to handle difficult situations without resorting to anger and yelling. If that's how you want your child to behave, then you need to be able to act in the same manner.

## Be a Good Sport

This really is a continuation of the point above. Some parent's want to blame loses on the coach or tell their kid that the reason they struck out was because the umpire blew the call. A better approach is to help the child deal with the disappointment and letting them know that it's not the end of the world if they strikeout or lose a big game. They need to know that umpires and coaches are trying their best and part of playing is that things aren't always going to go your way. It's easy to be a good sport when you win, but helping your child deal with disappointment and losing can be one of the most important lessons that a young athlete can learn.

## **Emphasize Effort and Attitude**

Let your child know that you are proud of the effort they give on the field. This can be done whether they played a good game or made a couple of errors and didn't get a hit. If you only compliment your child when he plays well, that's how he will judge himself also.

## **Appropriate Level of Competition**

Everyone wants to be successful if the level of competition is too difficult for your child, they will soon be discouraged and lose the desire to play. The number of options for youth athletics in most communities is plentiful. Find a level of competition that will allow your child to be successful while still being challenged.

## **It's Not You Out There**

The success of a child doing well in athletics can be exciting and intoxicating for the parent. The fantasy of what could possibly be can enter into the mind of parents of very young children. Maybe the parent was a good athlete and thinks, "if I only worked harder and was more dedicated, who knows what might have happened". It's easy to transfer your regrets into a plan of action for your talented child. Parents suddenly have a second chance to make it.

When this happens, it's time for the parent to take a hard look at what the child wants and adjust his/her actions to fit with the child's goals and desires. Statistically your child doesn't have much of a chance of playing at the professional level or even receiving an athletic scholarship to college. If they do, it should be their desire that allows them to achieve that level of success. It's not healthy for your child or the relationship you have with him if you try and push him in that direction.

## **Dealing with Coaches**

It would be much easier for parents to work well with a coach if they had the opportunity to choose the coach. For most parents there is no choice. You sign up your child and they are placed on a team with a volunteer coach. You may get lucky and get a very good coach who is organized, supportive, and does a great job teaching your child. Other times you won't be so lucky. How do you deal with the situation when you're not so lucky? Many parents take the view that even though the coach isn't good this year, it's just part of life and hopefully next year will be better. Other parents will wait until they are upset enough to have a talk with the coach about what they believe is wrong. I happen to disagree with both approaches and in the next few paragraphs I'll try to explain why and also provide some ideas on how to handle this difficult situation.

## **Get Involved Early On**

Get to the first couple practices. Are they organized? Is it a safe environment? How does the coach deal with the children? If things aren't going well right off the bat, they'll probably just get worse. Talk with league administrators right away. Voice your concerns and see if your child can be moved to another team before the next practice. The league wants to have the best coaches they can find. Waiting to give the league a poor post-season coach evaluation is just too late.

Find out right away what the coach's goals are for the season and how he's going to determine playing time. Some of the biggest problems arise when the parent's goals and the coach's goals don't match up. If the coach is all about winning and you just want your son to have fun, then try and get him moved to a different team. Playing time is another area that can be a major sticking point. Try to honestly evaluate your son's skill level against the rest of the team. If you think your son is in the middle to lower skill level and the coach is going to play the best players the majority of the season, you may be in for a long year. Again, if that is the case talk to the league and let them know the reasons why you want your son on a different team. If you wait until the games are started, chances are you're stuck for the season.

## **Remember How Difficult It Is To Coach**

Coaching is not an easy job. It's easy to criticize when standing on the sideline watching what is going on; it's another thing when you are actually coaching. Be aware of the difficult situation the coach is in. Believe me; it's difficult if not impossible to make everyone happy, especially the parents of thirteen young boys. The fact is that many coaches cite "dealing with parents" as the number one reason why they quit coaching. As a parent, try to help out as much as possible. Volunteer to help at practices and/or games. By helping out from the beginning you will have an opportunity to talk with the coach on a regular basis and develop a relationship. That relationship is important when providing feedback for things that are going good and maybe things you think could be improved. A coach isn't going to give much consideration to a complaint from a parent that he/she never sees at practice or during games.

## **I Was Misled**

This happens all the time. You talk to the coach and he says he's going to play all players equally. He says all the things you want to hear and then after the first couple losses, the less talented players begin to spend more and more time on the bench. It's easy at this point to wait and see what happens and to let your anger and disappointment grow. My advice is don't wait. By silently waiting and not saying anything, you are giving your approval to the change in philosophy. Talk to the coach in a private, non-threatening manner. Remind him of the conversation you had before the season and state your concern. Just as parents get emotionally caught up in the competition of their children, the same holds true for coaches. They can see the losses as a reflection of their coaching ability. It can be hard for a competitive coach to keep youth sports in perspective. By talking to him right when a problem begins to surface, you can often get things back on track.

If the coach refuses to change back to his original philosophy, then you have a few choices to make. I would let the league know exactly what's happening. It may not change anything, but then again it could. Find out where the other parents stand on this issue. If they are in agreement with you then try and talk to the coach as a group to voice your concerns. Try to determine the *effect* it's having on your child. Maybe your son likes practice and although he is disappointed that he's not playing more, he still wants to stick with it and keep playing. If that's the case you have at least voiced your opinion to the coach and the league. If on the other hand your son is miserable and doesn't like playing on the team, be willing to quit the team. Many parents want their kids to *stick* it out even if they are miserable. They figure it's a good life lesson. Well, if your son is really in a bad situation then be willing to take the pressure of quitting on your shoulders. Tell the coach that you are removing your child from the team. Tell the child that you don't want him to play for that coach any longer. By doing this, your child is not quitting, he is just *doing* what you want them to do. Fill that void with fun family activities that

you can play together. Chances are they really like baseball they will want to give it a try again next year.

There's no easy answer on how to handle a problem with the coach. You may be very upset with the coach, but try calm yourself and ask what would be best for your child. Remember that physical fitness and developing a love for sports is the most important aspect of youth athletics. If that can be better accomplished by playing whiffle ball in the backyard instead of playing for a really poor coach, then that's probably the best choice. Just don't forget that the decision shouldn't be made because of your unhappiness. Pulling a child off the team when he still wants to be on the team is not going to help him and your relationship with him.