

Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

Be an Awesome Sports Parent



BY: **KIM DEMARCHI**

Back-to-School sports are in full swing..... practices, open gyms, conditioning, evaluations, and try outs for teams and clubs. I must admit that I get excited too watching my children on the turf and court!

Sometimes, though, I wonder if we have gone too far when I hear and see how some parents act on the sidelines. Are we taking youth sports too seriously and at what cost? I can get just as caught up as the next parent. I believe our intentions are good, but curbing our enthusiasm might be beneficial to our child and our relationship.

It is not uncommon for some parents to get a little too involved in their child's sports. When should parents possibly detach from the situation?

- If you ever feel agony or ecstasy over your children in sports;
 - If you refer to your child's sports career.
 - If you are overly critical of the coach.
 - If you are telling your child to practice more and more.
- How might attachment present a problem?
- It makes the game about the parent, not the child.
 - The parent could be getting their needs met by their child's performance.
 - It can increase the anxiety of the child. They could feel they've either let the parent down or made the parent proud.
 - The child might feel fearful about making mistakes, and it might discourage them from taking risks or trying new things.

If you are feeling a little too much intensity around your child's sports, here are some tools to help you detach:

- Don't attend all the practices.
- Miss some games.
- Talk and socialize during games.
- Take some deep breaths.
- Walk away.
- Reflect on the positive goals you want for child.

- Challenge your own belief system about what you can and can't do for your child.
- Remind yourself that your child is not you.
- Try and come to terms with your OWN sports experiences.

Why do parents need to chill out on the cheering? Remember a time when your very young child was coloring in his/her coloring book. Hopefully, we weren't yelling, "Yeah!", "Stay in the lines!", "Grass is green, not purple!", "Can you go any faster?" Parents usually don't yell those things while their child is coloring because the focus would be on them, not on their child. It would become very external, instead of internal motivation. It would take all the creativity and imagination out of the entire experience. This is ALL true in sports too! We need to sensor what comes out of our mouths. Anything that needs to be taught - will be - at PRACTICE, almost never at the game. We want the kids to learn from the game itself.... NOT by us yelling at them during a game. Acknowledge that sports can be emotional for YOU. Be aware of YOUR hot buttons or blind spots. If you have a great deal of trouble not coaching from the sidelines, suck on a lollipop! Seriously, it works like magic!

A great tip that someone once shared with me is to remember that there are 4 roles in sports: the player, the coach, the official, and the fan. You only get to pick and be 1 of the roles. If you are the parent, that means you are a fan. You don't get to play; you don't get to coach; you don't get to referee. You only get to encourage as a fan.

No matter what happens on the field, win or lose, there are some ways you can show your child unconditional love after a game.

- Kids dread the car ride home!
 1. No sports talk on ride home. It's usually too soon.
 2. Choose the right time to talk/teach lessons.
 3. Take your child's lead on talking about the game.
- Accept your child no matter what their performance.
- Appreciate ALL effort and accomplishments in sports, as well as other areas.
- Teach your child that they can be valuable in other areas beyond sports.
- Don't squelch their dreams of being an NBA superstar. They'll figure it out in time.



- Challenge the high value that our society places on sports.
- Just as you are NOT your net worth or your dress size, your child is NOT their win/lose record!

A lot of parents today think that MORE and EARLIER are better, but it's not necessarily true. It is true that kids are starting at an earlier age, but do we really need to start "Budding Olympians" before they are even out of preschool? It seems more and more children are playing at the Classic, Club, Select, and Travel Team levels, and some year round. Some topics to contemplate:

- Early specialization - DELAY! (Performance in youth sports is NOT predictive of performance in sports later on. There was a study that looked at 5th grade All Star Baseball teams (the best, most promising, talented boys in the league). Only 25% of the boys played Varsity Baseball in high school. REMEMBER, Michael Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team!
- Don't have expectations of greatness. Be sure not to live out your fantasy through your child. "The toughest thing kids have to face is the unfulfilled lives of their parents."
- Be aware of the physical and psychological impact of specialized play.
- Overuse injuries.
- Defining self around "I'm a Classic soccer player" (whole identity).

- Don't specialize for the wrong reasons (ie: feeling like your kids will be at a disadvantage for high school soccer team).
- Burn out rate is high!
- Parents want status of having a "Star Athlete".
- Getting a college athletic scholarship is far slimmer than an academic one.

Parents sign their children up for sports for a plethora of reasons including: to have fun, to improve skills, to stay in shape, to do something they are good at, for the excitement of competition, to get exercise, to be a part of a team, to learn new skills, to win, to obtain a scholarship, or to make a career out of it. Keep perspective and remember your intentions of why you signed up YOUR child in the first place, and you will be on your way to being an awesome sports parent!

Kim DeMarchi, M.Ed., Certified Parent Educator and Certified Family Coach, is a Tualatin resident, married with 17 year old boy/girl twins, and has been an educator for more than two decades. Kim is trained and certified through Positive Discipline, as well as the International Network for Children and Families in a program called Redirecting Children's Behavior. Kim is active in supporting her local parenting community by providing



workshops, coaching families and writing articles for our newspaper. Kim is a monthly guest on KATU's Afternoon Live and AM Northwest. She also blogs twice a month for Knowledge Universe's KinderCare online community. Kim's goal for you is to help reduce conflict, foster mutual respect, and create deeper communication and connections with your loved ones. She can be reached through EmpoweredParenting.com.