

How to help your child at sport without embarrassing them or yourself

by Michael Grose

Watching your child play sport is a test of character for any parent. It is also an activity that can bring out a parent's worst qualities.

Most parents are content to cheer their children on and offer well-meaning advice from the sidelines. However it seems that inside even the most mild-mannered person there is a monster lurking that emerges when their children are on the sports field. This monster makes a parent argue with officials and umpires, disagree with coaches, complain about other children's behaviour and drive their own children to the point of distraction.

The following guidelines may help you tame the monster within as well as make sport enjoyable and worthwhile for your child:

1. Don't allow sport to dominate your family-life or your child's life. Insist on a balance between different areas and encourage your child to vary his or her interests.
2. Encourage your child and take an interest but don't add pressure by being too involved. You don't want to make sport a source of stress for your child.
3. Focus your attention on performance, enjoyment and participation rather than on the results. Your child is learning, so winning is not the aim of the game at this stage. Yes, they do keep a score but you don't have to focus on that.
4. Your approval is very important to your child and he or she picks up clues by listening to your comments and observing your body language. Be positive with everything you say and do, except when children display poor sportsmanship.
5. Remember that sport teaches children many life lessons, such as how to work together, solve problems and also how to accept the disappointment of defeat. Sport is a great character-builder for children of all ages.
6. Get to know your child's coach and understand that his or her job is to teach skills, develop positive attitudes and promote personal development. Winning should be further down on their list of priorities as a coach.
7. Take an interest in other participants, not just your child. By removing the focus from your child you are more likely to keep a balanced view of sport.
8. Emphasise fun rather winning, learning rather perfection, teamwork rather than individual performance and remember that if you want your child to excel in a particular sport he or she must enjoy their participation. For many children that means they must get more from their sport than just trophies and ribbons to keep them participating over the long-term.

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Michael Grose is a leading parent educator, a trained teacher and author. For further ideas about raising confident kids and resilient teenagers visit www.parentingideas.com.au



Helping your child deal with discouraging people

By Michael Grose

Part of growing up and growing away from you means that children meet with many people who can be discouraging or negative toward them. Nitpickers, fault-finders and verbal bullies can be found in any playground. They exist in many families too.

Some kids have deflon-coated hides and can easily brush off criticism or discouragement. Most children, like adults, can be stung by discouragement. Receive enough of it and their self-esteem takes a dive and they begin to take fewer risks for fear of being criticised for making mistakes.

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'Helping your child deal with discouraging people.....' continued

As a parent you can help children deal with discouraging or disparaging experiences and remarks. Here are five ideas that may help you help children deal with discouragement:

- a. **Tell your children they don't have to agree!** If you are told often enough that you are inadequate in some way then it is hard not to agree with the assessment. Children can disagree quietly with a discouraging statement. It is a matter of being aware of their self-talk. When on the receiving end of discouragement they can say something like, "Nuh, I don't agree with that. I am a smart kid." Positive self-talk can help deflect criticism and lessen the personal hurt.
- b. **Show you understand how they feel.** Let them know that you know what it is like to be put down or discouraged. Children are able to draw strength when they know that their parents generally know how they feel about a situation. Above all, let children know that they will survive put downs and criticism and that things will get better. They always do.
- c. **Talk about the source of the discouragement so that children gain perspective.** Children often lose perspective so a reality check can help them realise that the sun will rise tomorrow or that the discouraging person needs help. Help them not take put downs personally. In effect, the problem lies with the discourager.
- d. **Give them some social skills needed to cope.** Some children are hard to ruffle with criticism. Their body language and verbal response is such that they deflect any criticism. Sometimes giving kids suitable comeback lines can help them deal with the criticism or discouragement they experience. Or even strong body language can help lessen the verbal stings.
- e. **Provide plenty of encouragement yourself.** The encouragement that a parent gives has a snowball effect that helps children deal with all sorts of difficulties. The constant encouragement and strong sense of belief by a significant adult (i.e. a parent or grandparent) can have an amazing affect on a child. It helps insulate them against negative stuff.

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What you should know about....television-viewing, video and computer games

by Andrew Fuller

There is growing evidence to suggest that any television-viewing for children under two impairs their ability to concentrate. As children develop, a small amount of television is positively associated with academic achievement. A nine year old shouldn't watch more than one and a half hours per day. A thirteen year old shouldn't watch more than one hour per day. Bad news for those of you with older children! At seventeen years of age optimal amount of TV viewing is half an hour per day.

Video games are incredibly popular and give a sense of great mastery, challenge and involvement. Boys particularly use video games in a social way. It is important to realise that the use of video and computer

games is not completely passive.

Too much playing of these games can be negative. These games can be so compelling they become addictive. While some games require intricate problem-solving, the skills learned on these games do not appear to readily transfer to other areas of life. Very few of the games require creative problem-solving or an opportunity to be an active participant in determining a story line.

Some exposure to computer games is good. Too much though can be toxic. While there is little evidence about the amount of time spent in front of computer games, it is a good idea to keep televisions and computers out of children's bedrooms.

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