

# Helping You Navigate Your Journey Through Parenting

## How to be a Great Sports Parent for your Young Athlete



BY KIM DeMARCHI

August is here, so get ready! Back-to-School sports are in full swing... practices, open gyms, daily doubles, conditioning, evaluations, camps, and try outs for

teams and clubs. It's serious business in our community, and games haven't even started yet! I must admit that I get excited by watching my children get back into sports, seeing all the familiar faces, getting to meet new parents, finding out who the coach is, learning about their philosophy, putting all the practices and games on the calendar, seeing them in their uniform for their first game of the season. Sometimes, though, I wonder if we have gone too far when I hear and see how some parents behave 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 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 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. In my opinion, it's the best role out of all of them! Have fun with it; your child will appreciate it in just a couple of weeks! See you on the field and on the court!

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