

TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR PARENTS WITH ATHLETIC CHILDREN

1. Make sure your children know that win or lose, scared or heroic, you love them, appreciate their efforts, and are not disappointed in them. This will allow them to do their best without a fear of failure. Be the person in their life they can look to for constant positive reinforcement.
2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic capability, their competitive attitude, sportsmanship and actual skill level.
3. Be helpful but don't coach them on the way to the rink, pool or track or on the way back or at breakfast, and so on. It's tough not to, but it's a lot tougher for the child to be inundated with advice, pep talks, and often critical instructions.
4. Teach them to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying", to be working to improve their skills and attitudes. Help them to develop the feel for competing, for trying hard, for having fun.
5. Try not to re-live your athletic life through your children in a way that creates pressure; you fumbled, too, you lost as well. You were frightened, you backed off at times, you were not always heroic. Don't pressure them because of your lost pride.
6. Don't compete with the coach. If the coach becomes an authority figure, it will run from enchantment to disenchantment, etc with your athlete.
7. Don't compare the skill, courage, or attitudes of your children with other members of the team, at least within hearing.
8. Get to know the coach so that you can be assured that the philosophy, attitudes, ethics, and knowledge are such that you are happy to have your child under this leadership.
9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate, both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate before over-reacting.
10. Make a point of understanding courage, and the fact that it is relative. Some us can climb mountains, and are afraid to fight. Some of us will fight, but turn to jelly if a bee approaches. Everyone is frightened in certain areas. Explain that courage is not the absence of fear, but a means of doing something in spite of fear or discomfort. The job of the parent of an athletic child is a tough one, and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. It is worth all the effort when you hear your youngster say, "My parents really helped, I was lucky, in this."

Allow Children to Face the Music

Growing up, I would often hear about the Three R's: reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic. Today I think more people need to teach our kids the Three C's: choices, consequences and commitment.

It gets frustrating to read letters to the editor from people who consistently criticize the poor education our students in the Valley are receiving. It must be very easy for people to look in from the outside and say what a terrible job educators are doing. Teachers would welcome these people into our schools so they could see for themselves how much has changed in our schools over the last five to 10 years.

Let's start with choices. When I began teaching in 1983, students were expected to make choices. Should they study, should they not? Should they do homework or should they go out with friends until the wee hours of the morning? Should they show up for tutoring in the morning or should they sleep an extra half-hour?

The whole idea of choices led to consequences, and students knew that they had to live with the consequences that went with their choices. If they chose to study, they could expect to earn a higher grade on an exam than if they chose not to study. If they chose to go out with friends rather than do homework, they knew they would earn a zero on the assignment they did not turn in. And if they chose to sleep in rather than attend tutoring, they accepted the fact that their grades would most likely remain low.

A very different trend has crept into our schools in the last few years. Of course students still make choices. Some choose to study, some choose not to. Some choose to go out with friends and blow off their homework while others wouldn't dream of earning a zero on a homework assignment. And some students sleep an extra 30 minutes while others attend tutoring regularly.

The difference is in the consequences. Today we see many parents who fight the consequences of their children's choices.

Their children choose not to study for a test and they fail it? "I demand a retest!" Their children choose not to complete their homework and earn a zero for it? "Give her an extra day!" Their children slept instead of attending tutoring? "He's been very tired lately, can't you do tutoring during lunch time?"

And then there is the question of commitment. When I was growing up, my parents had a very firm rule. If we made the decision at the beginning of the year to participate in an athletic team or in an extracurricular activity, it was a commitment. If we decided midway through the year that we were not enjoying it, too bad. We had to stick it out for the remainder of the year. If we did not want to participate the following year, we did not have to, but once we made a commitment, we kept it.

Commitment seems to be a dying word in our schools today. You don't want to be on that team any more? Quit! You are tired of meetings for the organization you joined? Quit! You forgot you had plans with friends when you committed yourself to doing community service on Saturday morning? Don't even let the sponsor know. It's no big deal!

We are doing our children an injustice when we forget the Three C's. If we do not allow our children to make choices and live with the consequences of those choices, how do we ever expect them to learn that with every choice comes a consequence? If we neglect to teach them to follow through on a commitment, how will they learn the importance of it?

Some parents are doing a great job of teaching the Three C's. More parents need to start. And our schools need to stand behind this important but often unrecognized part of the curriculum.

Note: Chris Ardis is a teacher for the McAllen school district in Texas. This article is being reprinted with the permission of Ms. Ardis and The Monitor in McAllen, Texas.

DODGE PRESENTS Parents' Guide To Youth Sports

Let Your Athlete Resolve Problems With Coaches

BY RICK WOLFF

Consider these dilemmas sports parents frequently face:

• "My son spent all summer working on his ball handling and passing, because he wanted to be the point guard on the basketball team. He really improved those skills, but the coach is playing him at forward, and my son seems lost on the court. I want to say something to the coach, but ..."

• "I think my daughter has been playing pretty well on the school softball team, but over the last couple of games, she has not been in the starting lineup. Maybe I should talk to the coach about it."

• "It's clear that this coach isn't motivating my kid. I don't want to intervene, but I've worked with my Johnny for a long time, and I know how to get the most out of him. I think I should tell the coach how to get through to my son."

On one hand, the parent knows he or she shouldn't interfere with what the coach is doing. Then again, if a parent thinks his or her child—and that child's athletic performances—would benefit most if the parent talked with the coach, why shouldn't he or she? Aren't parents obligated to do what's best for their youngsters?

You *will* be doing what's best for your child if you step aside and have your young athlete speak with the coach. That's the smartest, most beneficial approach for these types of situations. You might think more will be accomplished if you do the talking: "No kid can have as constructive a conversation as an adult can." But in the long run, the lessons your child learns by meeting with the coach outweigh those concerns.

Knowing how to speak up in a civilized manner when something isn't going your way is an important part of sports and life in general. At some point, your child must stand on her own two feet and not rely on her parents to take care of problems for her. If you want her to cope with challenges and conflicts, then handling a problem with a coach is a valuable early lesson.

Of course, for most kids in high school or junior high, having a one-to-one chat with a coach can be a most daunting task. It takes courage, diplomacy and, most of all, the ability to listen carefully to what the coach says. So she might need you to assist her as she prepares for the conversation. You can help her write an outline of the points she wants to make, and then let her rehearse her "presentation" with you. Encourage her to



Parents should push their children to approach coaches on their own when questions arise.

take a list of questions to the meeting, and tell her to listen carefully to the coach's responses. Those words are just as important as what the youngster says. (Coaches, be careful what you say, because many kids will only listen for praise and ignore constructive criticism.) At the end of the meeting, the athlete and coach should recap the discussion's key points to avoid any misunderstandings about what was said. For support, you can take your child to the meeting, but if you do, wait outside and let her have the conversation on her own.

What happens if the meeting doesn't go well, or if your child comes home confused by what the coach said or didn't say? Then you might want to make an appointment with the coach to follow up. (You can meet with the coach by yourself or with your child.) Be sensitive to the coach's position, and try to focus on just those issues that directly affect your son or daughter. Volunteering your opinions on the coach's game strategy or other players on the team is totally inappropriate.

Teaching your young athlete how to confront issues head-on will only help him or her in sports and beyond. Every athlete must deal with adversity at some point. Those who know how to confront it and cope with it are the ones who will succeed.

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