

Braving Youth Sports

Common problems and how to handle them

Laura Pardo

Most parents are involved in some form of youth sports throughout their children's lives. From swim lessons to high school football, parents spend a great deal of time ensuring a good experience for their children. Unfortunately, some of those experiences end up quite the opposite of what was intended. Thus, parents should be aware of some common problems in youth sports and how to handle them.

Bad Attitude

Good sportsmanship is something that must be taught, and unfortunately, some team members have missed out on this valuable lesson. You should never tolerate

bad language or throwing equipment. Also, keep an eye out for children who verbally tear down their teammates. Any blatant disrespect or inattentiveness towards authority should be addressed as well.

What to do:

Talk to the coach when there is a concern about a particular player. A good coach can consistently emphasize and model good sportsmanship, which usually goes a long way in heading off problem behaviors. If one child's attitude turns into a mean-spirited jaunt with your child, give the coach a chance to deal directly with the offending child's parents before going

to them yourself. In conjunction, teach your child to ignore negative comments, or practice appropriate, de-escalating responses.

Most importantly, maintain an ongoing conversation with your children about good sportsmanship. Point out examples of how bad attitudes can be detrimental to his team's spirit and performance.

A Losing Season

Everyone loses a match, race or game at some point. However, a child can also be part of a team that does not win a game all season. Having a losing record year after year is also a possibility. These realities can be emotionally draining for some children,



and parents have a huge role to play in this.

What to do:

Children should be told that having fun and doing their absolute best is most important. If winning is overstated, then kids will have a harder time with losing. Usually if parents get angry, upset or sad then the child will emulate their reactions. Staying upbeat and offering encouragement will help tremendously. In addition, try to include other things in your child's life that they can regard as victories. However, if you are part of a season with no marked improvement, no matter how small, then maybe you should take a closer look at how the team is being managed and simply move on.

Tips for a Good Season

- Be prepared for extra costs. Ask what the total investment is over the course of the season.
- Avoid gossiping about problem coaching. Talk to the coach directly about any concerns.
- Accept only legitimate reasons for quitting, such as an injury.
- Help out the "team parent." There are always extra jobs to be handled.

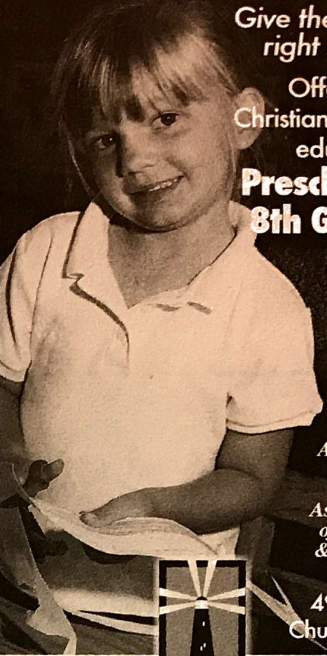
Inadequate Playing Time

All parents want their kids "in the game," but it might be your child who regularly sits on the sidelines. Fortunately, a little research, before making any commitments, can easily prevent such frustrations.

What to do:

Before signing up, check with coaches or instructors on current policies. Ask if equal playing time is an integral part of their game plan. If you want your child to simply learn new skills and play as much as possible, propose a recreational league or a camp. If your child desires a serious challenge, then consider a competitive league. Often, in competitive activities, kids have to earn their preferred position. Of course, only you and your child can decide what is best.

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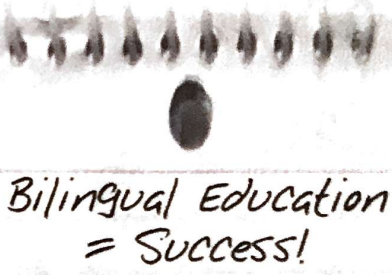
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Physical Fitness

Physical concerns include things like extreme fatigue, injuries and inability to keep up with peers. Many of these problems can be avoided all together with proper planning and attention. Still, most parents face issues in this area every season and need to be reminded of what actions to take.

What to do:

Always get a check-up before participating in strenuous activities. Establishing a conditioning routine prior to official practices is also a good idea. Keeping a child physically fit to join in sports should, first and foremost, be a family endeavor. Diet is a big consideration; fruits, vegetables and good protein sources are essential. Plenty of water before, during and after exercise is an absolute must. If injuries occur, allow plenty of time for healing. Missing one game is better than missing the whole season if an injury becomes worse.

Problem Coaches

Insisting on things such as reasonable practice times is rather easy, however, some problems definitely need more attention such as, an overly aggressive coach. Name calling, belittling and put-downs are obvious red flags, but also pay attention to any subtle comments that lower your child's self esteem. Openly comparing a "bad" player to a "good" player is an example of this.

What to do:

Don't accept mean-spirited talk as being "part of the game." If your child's coach displays unacceptable behavior, calmly discuss the problem and state that if it continues you will have to notify league officials, or go directly to the officials and make a formal complaint. If there are other parents with the same concerns, write one letter of explanation and have everyone involved sign it. Most sports leagues have a protocol in place and will respond accordingly. ♦

Laura Pardo is a writer and mother of three children. Laura and her family live in the San Diego neighborhood of San Carlos. She is gearing up for the fall soccer season.

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