

For the Parents



Sport can provide an incredible learning environment for young people to develop skills such as resilience, teamwork and perseverance as well as brilliant social opportunities for them to make friends while they grow and develop. The word 'can' is important here, the reality is that for young people to really benefit from sport, they need adults to help them contextualise and learn from these experiences.

Coaches, siblings and peers play an important part in influencing children's perceptions and experiences of sport, however parents play an integral role in helping a young person navigate their sporting journey.

Your Role as a Parent

Parental behaviours and engagement when it comes to sport as well as parenting style and attitudes in general can positively or negatively influence a child's sporting experience. As a parent you play a vital role in initiating and sustaining your child's sports participation and mindset towards sport overall. This ranges from supporting your child in practical ways – from washing their kit to being their personal cheerleader or taxi driver – to providing emotional support and guidance as they deal with the highs and lows that come with sport.

If you have the time and capacity, try to get involved by becoming a coach or volunteer within the club - this gives you a better understanding of what's going on and demonstrates your interest and support in your child's chosen sport. Even if you don't have expertise in that particular sport there are always means of getting involved outside of coaching (treasurer, organising lifts, helping with the website etc.) If you don't have the time - think about how you might show your interest and support in other ways, for example supporting them at games, preparing healthy food for them post-game etc.

Parental participation in sport increases the likelihood of your child's involvement in sport. If you play and are involved in a team or sport yourself, your child is more likely to stay involved in sport - so get out and lace up those runners! However, even when parents are less active, consistent encouragement can still support a child's participation in sport. Parental support plays an important role in developing their child's belief in their own physical activity and sporting competence particularly in childhood and early adolescents.

Helping Your Child Reach Their Potential

With the highs and lows that come with sport, your role is to help your child navigate the challenges that come their way. A good starting place is to understand how you can tailor your praise and feedback to best support your child to develop a growth mindset. Your praise and encouragement should focus on their effort and hard work. Remember that your child is an individual and no one else will have exactly the same sporting journey, so try to avoid comparing them to their peers or siblings and instead focus on your own child's progress and improvements.

Children that rely on 'natural talent' can often become unmotivated and disengage unless skills come easily to them. On the other hand children that are late bloomers might become discouraged if compared to their peers and run the risk of dropping out before realising their potential! It's important to help your child understand the connection between winning and their actions. Losing or making mistakes should be framed as learning opportunities - a chance for them to identify what they did well and to reflect on what they could do better next time or what skill they might need to practise.

Give your child the opportunity to self-assess by asking questions such as:

- Did that go as you expected?
- What was your highlight of the game?
- What did you find difficult?

Parents provide key emotional support – especially in learning how to deal with winning and losing when children often model the behaviour of their parents. They also learn to enjoy participating in sport and what makes a good sportsperson from their parents. When you are on the sideline, try to model the behaviour you would wish to see in your child. It can be hard not to react to a perceived injustice on the pitch, track or court but it's important to keep your own emotions in check. Be mindful when watching sports on TV, your child will pick up on what you say about the team or athlete you support winning or losing. Parents should also actively help their child understand the benefits of sport. This can help build intrinsic motivation. Recognising the huge range of benefits of sports will help your child (and you) keep winning and losing in perspective.

Knowing When to 'Push' or 'Let Go'

Every parent wants to be supportive and encouraging of their child's sporting journey, however it can be hard to know when to give your child that extra push or when to let go if they say they want to give up or drop out. It's important to examine your own relationship with sport, as we can often project our own hopes and expectations onto our children without realising. Focus on what your child wants to get out of sport and try not to make assumptions, talk to your child to ensure you and your child have the same goals and expectations for sport. Remember these goals may change over time so frequent conversations are a must! Sometimes it's good to stick things out, especially if your child has made a commitment to a team or another person - overcoming challenges helps build resilience. On the other hand, if you have had the conversation

and the sport is still not for your child it's also okay to let them drop it - this helps them learn how to set healthy boundaries. Quite often there can be another solution between quitting and continuing on the current path. Again, it comes back to opening the conversation up and finding out why they may or may not want to keep going.

The reasons young people might want to quit sports vary. One reason might be that they might not be immediately good at the sport and would rather give up than continue trying. Or it could be that they love playing sports, but they don't love competing. Or, they really enjoy training but lots of their friends have dropped out. It could also be the case that they feel overwhelmed if they are involved in lots of activities and they're finding it hard to fit it all in. Your child may not be able to or want to immediately explain why they want to give up - this is really normal. Try starting this conversation after some time has passed and they're in a relaxed mood. Start from a place of curiosity — the important thing is they feel supported, not judged, for how they are feeling. You could ask them questions such as:

- You mentioned wanting to quit basketball last week, you used to love going to training - how come you aren't enjoying it as much anymore?
- I've noticed a shift in your excitement for athletics and racing. You used to be buzzing for these big events! What has changed for you?
- Training isn't always easy, but you don't seem very enthusiastic about going to soccer lately, is there anything I can do to help?

Depending on their reasons, the solution might be more nuanced than simply quitting. At the end of the day, if the sport helps develop your child's confidence, it's probably worth sticking with, but if it's tearing that down, it might be time to find another activity or different sport. Try to include them as much as possible in finding a solution, the more ownership they feel over the decision, the more likely they are to see something through.

Resilience

Your child will experience many different challenges throughout their sporting lives. As a parent your job is to help them contextualise and learn from these experiences. It can be helpful to remind yourself (and your child) that resilience does not come from sticking with something that is hard and you hate. Resilience comes from an understanding that fumbles, misses, losses and disappointment are all part of the journey to getting faster, stronger and more skilled. Resilience also comes from developing self-awareness - understanding your strengths and weaknesses and having the confidence to take a risk, such as trying something new, learning a skill, participating in an activity with people you don't know or walking away from an activity if it's not the right environment for you.