

What is a Toxic Sport Parent?

A toxic sport parent is one whose behaviors negatively impact children participating in youth sports. These parents can influence not only their own children but also teammates and opponents. Their actions may lead to a range of issues for the athlete, including performance anxiety, diminished motivation to engage in sports, and various other negative effects. Furthermore, these detrimental behaviors can extend beyond the realm of sports, affecting other areas of the child's life.

A Few Toxic Behaviors Observed Among Sports Parents

1. Negative Reactions Towards Mistakes
2. Forcing Excessive Training
3. Becoming Consumed by Game Outcomes
4. Being Highly Critical Following Games
5. Engaging in Trash Talk

References

- Jennifer Breheny Wallace. **Never Enough.** Penguin, 2023.
- Payne, Kim, et al. **Beyond Winning.** Rowman & Littlefield, 2013.

Abbey Nelson
Girl Scout Gold Project
2025

They Are J.U.S.T. Kids: Sport Parenting



Strategies for Eliminating These Habits and Transforming Your Approach to the Game

Identify Your Triggers: Recognizing emotional triggers, such as seeing your child get hurt or disagreeing with a referee, is crucial. To manage impulsive reactions, prioritize listening, ask questions when confused or upset, and try to avoid yelling.

Understand Your Child is Still Learning: Young children are still learning and may not play at the same level you did when you were their age or their peers. If you are concerned about their skill level, you can talk to the coaches to get their input or if your child is older you can suggest outside training; otherwise, allow them to progress at their own pace with their team.

Put the Past Behind You: You can't go back in time and change the outcome of a game. Most children will forget or not mull over the outcome of a game when they are young. You can learn from your kids and understand that it is unhealthy to keep replaying losses or poor outcomes. Try focusing on the next game and how much fun your child will have.

Let Your Kid Start the Conversation:

After a hard game or a poor performance from your child the last thing they want to hear is criticism from their parents. Instead, allow your child to initiate discussions after a game; ask open-ended questions and let them decide when to talk about performance.

Think Before You Speak: To avoid rude statements towards coaches or players; consider how comments may be perceived by others. Ask yourself "will this come off as rude to others?" or "how would I feel if someone said this to me?" Trash talk can come in many different forms. That can be a passive comment towards players, coaches, other teams or just a blunt insult.

Remember They Are J.U.S.T Kids

Justify

It is essential to think before you act. Controlling impulsive reactions concerning your athlete's performance can be challenging, particularly when mistakes occur. Frequent outbursts from parents can lead athletes to feel not good enough, potentially prompting them to consider quitting due to their parents' behaviors.

Understand

It is important to understand that every child develops skills at their own pace, and they may not be at the same level as their peers. Each athlete is unique, and comparing your child to others can foster feelings of insecurity regarding their abilities and diminish their self-esteem. This decline in confidence may ultimately discourage them from wanting to participate in sports in the future.

Support

Children need support and encouragement. When it comes to encouraging children in sports, offering praise for their efforts that lead to achievements, instead of criticizing mistakes, can enlarge their confidence and motivation. It's essential to actively listen to your child's thoughts and feelings about their experiences in sports, showing empathy and understanding to create a supportive environment where they feel valued and heard.

Trust

It's important to build trust in your child's sports journey. No child should face too much training or pressure from parents who want too much too fast. Your young athlete should feel safe talking to you. Pushing them into more training can create tension, making it hard for them to share their limits or feelings of being overwhelmed.