



ADOPTING A POSITIVE PARENTING ROLE IN YOUR CHILD'S SPORT

Sport is the perfect vehicle for children to experience and develop life-long, positive and meaningful experiences and friendships. Participation in a sporting context is not just about developing sport-specific skills, but equally as important is the personal growth experienced by your child in further developing their character eg interpersonal skills (ability to connect and communicate with others & show empathy) and intrapersonal skills (ability to reflect, rationalize feelings and regulate emotions) within a team environment. To ensure your child can extract the full benefits and learnings associated with their sporting experience it is imperative that parents understand their role in partnering their child in a positive, supportive & constructive manner.

KNOW YOUR ROLE:

- **Sideline Behaviour:**
 - Encourage and support your child and their team-mates. It is not the role of the parent to coach their child from the sideline, that is the role of the coach. All this does is confuse the child. Parents yelling instructions to a player involved in the play, under pressure and trying to make the decisions that the game requires is confusing and is scientifically proven to diminish performance (refer to the book, Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence by Daniel Goleman).
 - Respect Officials – Practice what you preach! We teach our kids to respect authority figures (parents, teachers, coaches, referees etc). It is unsettling and confusing to all children involved when a parent loses their cool and reacts inappropriately to an umpire, especially a youth umpire. Like the players on the field, umpires make mistakes too.
 - Treat the opposition with dignity and respect.

- **Supportive Behaviour:**
 - Always respect, support and reinforce the coaches' decisions and key messaging to the team. When parents question coaching decisions they undermine the coaches' authority and adversely affect the player-coach relationship. This type of behaviour results in players being indecisive in the game as they start to focus on the things they can't control like coaching decisions rather than focusing all their energies on the things they can control such as their attitude and their effort etc. This behavior will also impact the child's ability to form positive relationships with their coaches in the future which will ultimately impact on future selections.
 - Role model positivity! Positive comments praising the effort and fair play of your child and their teammates sends the right messaging to the team. Negative

comments to your child impacts adversely on their confidence and undermines the learning environment the coach is trying to cultivate. Mistakes are a learning opportunity and scientifically proven to be one of the most effective ways for children to learn, provided it is done in a safe and supportive manner. Criticism of your child's teammates destroys the critical trust that teammates need in each other and their coach and teaches kids that it's okay to say disparaging comments about how their peers and friends play sport.

- **The Ride Home:**

- Keep it positive and framed around what your child wants to talk about. Coaches generally don't give feedback straight after a game for a reason – athletes are tired, possibly emotional and need time to reflect on the game themselves. It's best to touch base with the coach if you want to help your child with giving feedback as providing mixed/contrary messages to the coach is counter-productive for all involved.

- **Developing Character:**

- The most important learnings for your child in their sporting experiences are the skills and knowledge they can transfer into their everyday life. Whilst your child's talent has opened the sporting door for them, it's their leadership skills and character traits that will ultimately take them to the top and keep them there - in sport, school, work, relationships – life in general.
- Encourage independence and accountability by talking to your child about how they could be organising themselves rather than you organising them (packing hockey gear, organizing liquids and recovery food etc).
- Encourage broader thinking when things don't quite go to plan. Try to explore some positives from another angle (a silver lining) and empathy for another person's circumstances or point of view.
- While it is important for you to always be there to listen to your child's issues and feelings it is also important to help them think of constructive solutions to their problems. Listening to them and validating their emotions and feelings is an important part of the process as well as thinking of constructive solutions. Providing your child with tools to remain composed in the heat of the moment, eg a self-control routine is also a powerful way to help your child deal with adversity in life – eg take a deep breath, turn away from person/incident and count backwards from 100 or engage in self-talk etc.
- Always praise your child for their effort rather than their ability as this sends the right message to your child about how to improve their sporting performance on an ongoing basis. For more reading on this topic see Dr Carol Dwecks' Mindset: The New Psychology of Success book.

