

Guidelines For Supportive Parents

ARE YOU A SUPPORTIVE PARENT?

1. **Supportive parents emphasize improving performance rather than competitive ranking.** Sport mastery focuses on performance that can be controlled by the athlete, while competitive ranking focuses primarily on winning and losing, an outcome frequently outside the athlete's control. An overemphasis on competitive rank and an under emphasis on sport mastery is a primary reason young athletes quit. By emphasizing mastery, parents can help youngsters be the best they can be. Encourage your youngsters to risk giving a 100% effort and not to fear losing.
2. **Supportive parents decrease the pressure to win.** Competitive sport creates its own pressure to succeed. Additional pressure from the parent is likely to be counterproductive, particularly in the long run.
3. **Supportive parents believe that sport's primary value is the opportunity for self-development.** The probability of achieving lasting fame and glory via sport is extremely low. Sport's value is the opportunity it gives participants for self-development. Many outstanding athletes never achieve professional status, but their sports experiences allow them to develop lifelong values and self-respect.
4. **Supportive parents understand the risks.** Competition places the athlete on center stage. Anytime you attempt to succeed publicly where others can judge you, you risk failing. In the long run, competing is a willingness to chance failure. Striving to win and giving your best are what athletics are all about.
5. **Supportive parents communicate their true concerns directly with the coach.** A positive working relationship is based upon clearly communicated, mutual goals among parents, coaches, and athletes. While parents cannot control the behavior of a coach, you can and should communicate with the coach on a regular basis about your concern for your child's overall development.
6. **Supportive parents understand and respect the differences between parental roles and coaching roles.** Both parents and coaches need to understand their different roles in supporting the young athlete. While parents are ultimately responsible for their child's development, once they have selected a coach, they must leave the coaching to the coach. Even though supportive parents can and should play sports with their child, you should avoid coaching "over the shoulder" of the coach and/or publicly questioning coaching decisions.
7. **Supportive parents control negative emotions and think positively.** Few athletes wish to perform poorly. Negative parental reactions to poor performance only add to an athlete's pressures. Supportive parents realize that even the athlete who "chokes" is trying hard to succeed, sometimes trying too hard. Criticizing such efforts does little to enhance your child's performance.
8. **Supportive parents avoid the use of fear.** Punishment and withdrawal of love can pressure kids to perform better. Unfortunately, such strategies tend to trade short-term performance gains

for long-term emotional risks to the youngster's health and well-being. Supportive parents recognize that a love for sport is rarely fostered by fear of the consequences of failure.

9. **Supportive parents avoid criticizing.** Nagging parents often confuse support with constantly reminding the children that they need to practice more, condition more, concentrate more, etc. Overly involved parents frequently lose their objectivity. They are unable to provide the critical emotional support children often need before, during and after highly competitive contests.
10. **Supportive parents recognize and understand expressions of insecurity.** Youngsters who express high anxiety, more often than not, have parents who are insensitive to their symptoms. When children are nervous, uncertain, or feeling pressured, insensitive parents may trivialize the child's fears or see such concerns as signs of weakness. Realize that such expressions are normal and are usually a call for emotional support.
11. **Supportive parents avoid the use of guilt.** "We've done so much for you," or "The family's sacrificed so much, the least you could do is to ..." are typical remarks of unsupportive parents. Guilt is used to manipulate the child to perform the way the parents desire.
12. **Supportive parents show empathy for the young athlete.** Empathy is an understanding of what the child is feeling and an awareness of the pressures and demands that the sport places on the athlete. Empathy is not sympathy or agreement but rather is a true understanding that the task is difficult. A sympathetic response to an expression of doubt by the athlete might be "Perhaps you're right. It might be too difficult. Maybe you shouldn't compete today." Empathy on the other hand might be expressed by a supportive parent as "Yes, it will probably be a tough match today. That's exciting! C'mon, let me help you get ready."