

10 TIPS FOR FIRST-TIME SPORTS PARENTS

Rather than focusing on the scoreboard and wins and losses, PCA hopes that you, as a sports parent/caregiver, keep your eye on the **Big Picture** – the life skills that sports can help develop – such as teamwork, resilience, overcoming adversity, communication skills, and more.



- 1 Write down goals:** It's easy to get wrapped up in the excitement of youth sports – we all want our children to succeed. But before your child's season starts and emotions run high, sit down with them and collaboratively write down goals for their sports experience. Keep this list close by and refer back to it throughout the season to help maintain your focus on the bigger picture.
- 2 Review program options:** There are a lot of youth sports organizations out there. Take the time to learn about sports organizations in your community. Look up their websites or talk to other parents/caregivers to find out about their philosophy/mission, if training is provided to coaches, and other children's experiences. You may want to take as much care in this matter as you would in selecting the school your child should attend.
- 3 Encourage and celebrate:** Learn the names of the other kids on the team, and during a game cheer positively for all the players...even the other team! Avoid shouting instructions and instead limit yourself to shouts of encouragement. Either way, let coaches coach, and don't confuse or overwhelm your child by shouting instruction from the sidelines or stands.
- 4 Model calm behavior:** Sometimes, parents/caregivers or other spectators behave in a way that feels out of place or just too intense for the situation – berating officials or screaming at their children or other players. You may be unsure how to respond. One key is to consistently model the appropriate behavior.

Then, if you want to help an over-exuberant spectator, sometimes all it takes is a glance or a gesture, such as lowering your palms to indicate “calm down.” You might choose to distract them with conversation about another aspect of the game, or if you feel comfortable, you can remind them about the role of parents/caregivers in upholding a positive sports culture.
- 5 Ask, listen, and engage:** When talking with your athlete after the game, resist the temptation to critique. Ask open-ended questions that elicit longer responses, “What was your favorite part of today's game?” Actively listen to their responses by putting phones away, maintaining eye contact, nodding and smiling so your child knows you're engaged.

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- 6 **Focus on life skills:** When you do have that conversation with your child about their team, practices, or games, focus on the life skills available from the experience. If your child seems discouraged by their performance, use the opportunity to connect with them and let them know that you are there for them. Ask them if there is anything they can learn from their experience that day.
- 7 **Acknowledge the coach:** Coaches put a lot of time into planning practices and ensuring a successful season, so be sure to acknowledge their efforts often! Encourage your child to thank the coach after each game or practice. Offer to help the coaches however you can. That may mean anything from occasionally helping out at practice to creating the snack schedule or coordinating carpools. Coaches need parents/caregivers' support, and your children may appreciate seeing how enthusiastically you support their team.
- 8 **Pre-season meeting:** One key to a positive relationship with your child's coach is a pre-season parent meeting, where the coach explains his or her philosophy and goals for the season to the parents/caregivers of all the players on the team. If any of your children's coaches do not call such a meeting, be sure to ask about their goals so that you know what to expect.
- 9 **Consider coaching:** If you're asked to coach, or to be an assistant, strongly consider accepting! You do NOT need to be a sports-specific expert to provide a fun environment for kids to participate. Good organizations provide training and resources to coaches to help them do great work with their players. Remember, the top goal of a coach at this age is to be positive and create a fun and safe place for kids to play!
- 10 **Enjoy the time:** At every possible turn, let your children know that you love them unconditionally (by saying it!), regardless of their athletic performance. Enjoy your child's time in youth sports. It is fleeting, and you will want to look back, in conversation with your grown children, on the good old days.



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