



Parenting Athletes:

Best Practices for a Positive Sports Experience



Youth sports can be intense, for kids and parents alike. While coaches teach skills and strategy, it's often the support at home that shapes whether a young athlete feels confident and motivated, or pressured and discouraged. Your role isn't to control the outcome, but to create an environment where your child can enjoy the game, grow through challenges and build lasting confidence.

Most kids won't go on to play professionally, but all of them can walk away with valuable life skills. The strategies below are designed to support your child's growth, well-being and love for the game, on and off the field.

1. Support the Effort, Not the Outcome

- **Focus on growth and effort.** Praise hard work, improvement, promoting a positive team culture and determination, rather than just wins or stats.
- **Celebrate learning.** Mistakes are part of the process—treat them as opportunities to grow.

INSTEAD OF	TRY SAYING
"Did you win?" or "How many points did you score?"	"You've been putting in so much effort at practice and I can really see it paying off. I'm proud of how hard you're working."

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- **Listen without fixing.** Sometimes kids just need to vent—resist the urge to solve every issue. Be a calm, supportive listener – not a problem solver.

2. Be a Role Model

- **Stay positive.** Your behavior sets the tone. Model calm, constructive responses, even after tough losses. Show respect toward coaches, referees and other families.

3. Trust the Coaching Process

- **Let the coaches coach.** It can confuse your child when you undermine the coach's guidance.
- **Respect the coach's role.** Communicate appropriately and trust their process, even if you disagree at times.

4. Support Their Journey

- **Let your child lead.** Encourage them to play for their own enjoyment—not because they feel pressure to perform.
- **Check your motives.** Make sure you're supporting your child's interests, not fulfilling your own.

5. Make Your Presence Count

- **Show up consistently.** Your presence means more than your advice.
- **Enjoy the moment.** Cheer, clap and support with enthusiasm—avoid criticism from the stands or during the car ride home.

6. Celebrate Who They Are, Not Just What They Do

- **Separate identity from performance.** Remind your child they're valued no matter what happens in the game.



Let's be honest, youth sports can bring out strong emotions in all of us. But parenting an athlete isn't about chasing wins or perfect performances. It's about providing steady, consistent support that helps kids stay balanced, focused and resilient.

When you emphasize effort over results, respect the coach's role and show up in a positive, constructive way, you're helping your child develop skills that go far beyond the scoreboard. The real goal isn't a trophy, it's raising a young person who enjoys the game, grows from the experience and carries those lessons into every part of life.

➡ **For more information** or to make an appointment at the Boys Town Center for Behavioral Health, call **531-355-3358**.

Visit **Parenting.org** for more information from the parenting experts at Boys Town.