



# BEING A YOUTH SPORT PARENT



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Developed by NYSI, with inputs and support from SSI



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## Introduction

Parents highly influence their children to take part and stay in sports. They provide the necessary financial, logistical – and most critically – emotional support that allows their child to flourish in his or her sport. However, if not mindful, parents can also exert a negative influence on the sporting experience of a child (Elliott & Drummond, 2017) and potentially cause them to drop out of sports.

The goal is to get each adult youth sport stakeholder (parents, coaches) working together in the best interests of the youth athlete (Blom, Visek, & Harris, 2013; Brustad, Babkes, & Smith, 2001) so that they can reach their highest potential. Being a parent of a youth athlete can be challenging, thus we hope the contents in this handbook may guide you and your child in the pursuit of positive experiences in the world of sports.

## COACH-PARENT-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP



**COACH**

Teaches athletes technical skills and also nurtures them holistically through the sporting environment



**PARENT**

Supports the coach in the sport aspect and nurtures athletes through the home environment



**ATHLETE**

Thrives when parents and coach are aligned in supporting and nurturing athlete

*Figure 1. Coach-Parent-Athlete Relationship.*

The coach-parent-athlete relationship is like nurturing a plant. Just as a plant requires both sunlight and water to grow, an athlete requires both the coach's and parents' support to fulfil his or her sporting potential. When both the coach and parents carry out their roles effectively, the athlete has a higher chance to succeed.

## Relationships

### Coach-Athlete Relationship

All coaches want to help their athletes achieve their highest sporting potential. To do so, it is ideal for athletes to have intrinsic motivation. This form of motivation means that athletes are participating in their sport for the simple reason of enjoyment. This leads to positive effects in athletes and better sports performances.

Various factors have an impact on athletes' intrinsic motivation, one of which is the influence of the coach (Figure 2).

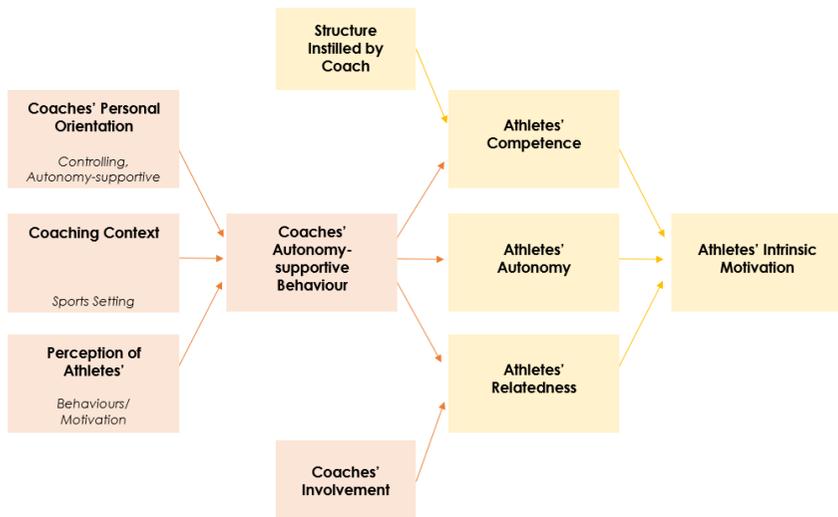


Figure 2. Coaches' Impact on Motivation. Adapted from Mageau and Vallerand (2003).

## **Parent-Athlete Relationship**

Every parent wants their child to succeed, be it sports or studies. We take a closer look at parenting styles (Figure 3) and parental involvement (Figure 4) which falls on a continuum as shown below.

Each parenting style is associated with a different set of characteristics. Parenting styles have been consistently associated with a broad range of social and behavioural outcomes throughout childhood and into adolescence. Knowing your parenting style will help you understand the kind of climate you create for your child which can in turn have an impact on their sport. Do note that every parent-child relationship is different and no one fits neatly into one single parenting style.

A moderate level of parental involvement is encouraged as it allows your child to experience their sport positively.

<b>PARENTING STYLES</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES</b>
<p data-bbox="316 245 493 268"><b>AUTHORITARIAN</b></p> <ul data-bbox="269 304 544 432" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High demandingness/control</li> <li>• Low acceptance/responsiveness</li> <li>• Discourage open communication</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="600 301 841 408" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater levels of anxiety &amp; immaturity in children</li> <li>• Antisocial behaviour (such as bullying)</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="325 510 493 533"><b>AUTHORITATIVE</b></p> <ul data-bbox="275 560 527 667" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assertive; Not restrictive</li> <li>• Responsive</li> <li>• Open communication</li> <li>• Trust, encouragement of psychological autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="600 569 818 655" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally more confident</li> <li>• Socially competent &amp; higher achieving</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="348 791 471 813"><b>PERMISSIVE</b></p> <ul data-bbox="278 842 516 954" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High acceptance</li> <li>• High responsiveness</li> <li>• Non-demanding</li> <li>• Lack parental control</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="600 839 829 954" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher levels of impulsivity &amp; aggression</li> <li>• Lower levels of social responsibility</li> </ul>
<p data-bbox="337 1086 477 1109"><b>UNINVOLVED</b></p> <ul data-bbox="278 1145 535 1257" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High acceptance</li> <li>• High unresponsiveness</li> <li>• Non-demanding</li> <li>• Lack parental control</li> </ul>	<ul data-bbox="600 1155 846 1203" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor social &amp; emotional development overall</li> </ul>

Figure 3. Characteristics & Consequences of Parenting Styles. Adapted from Baumrind (1991).

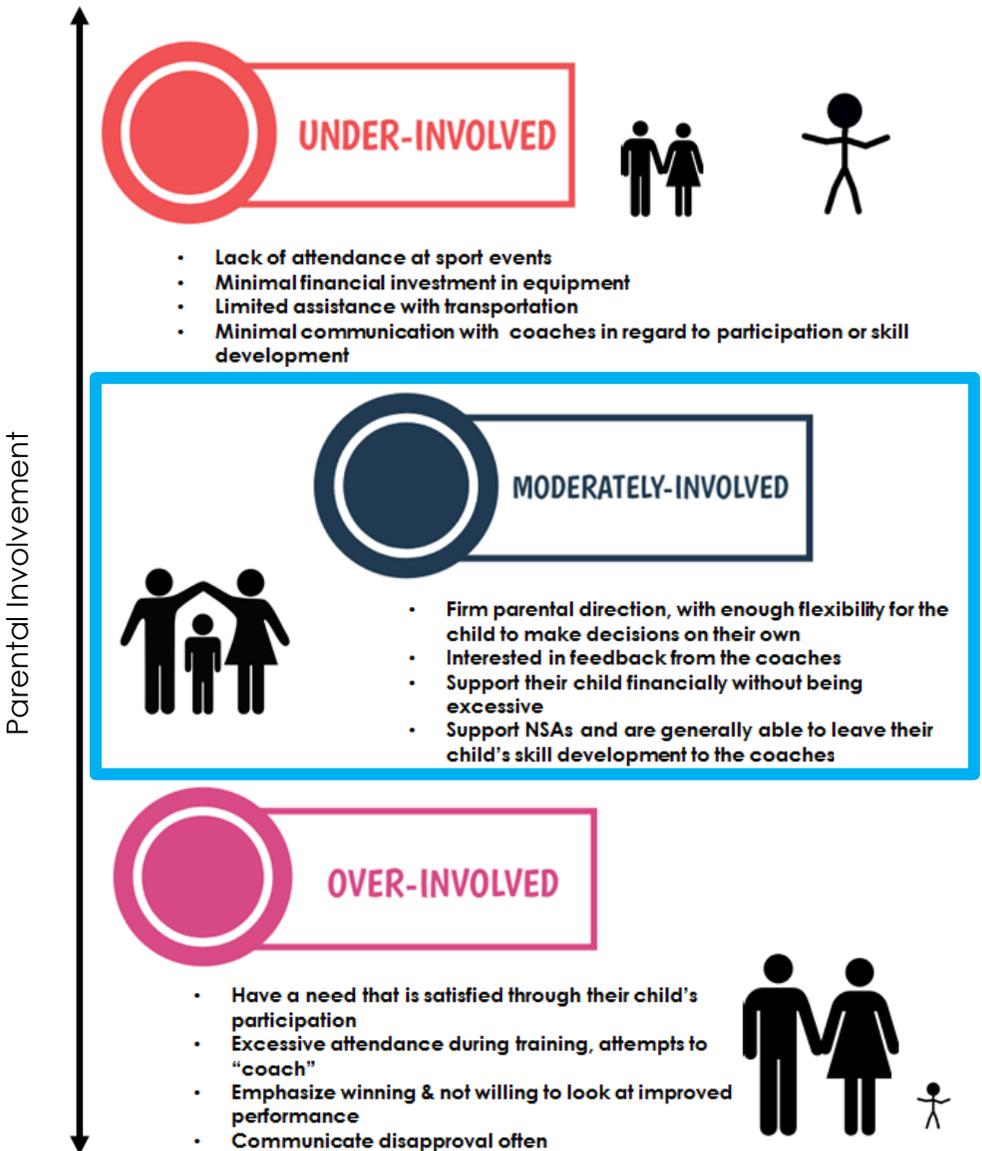


Figure 4. Involvement of Parents. Adapted from Hellstedt (1987).

## Coach-Parent Relationship

The expectations and values of parents and coaches can affect how a youth athlete experiences their sport. A positive coach-parent relationship will ensure the child has the best chance to develop optimally in their sport.

### Communication PARENTS should expect from COACHES

- Coach's background and philosophy
- Expectations and requirements (attendance, grades, dress, conduct, etc.)
- Injury procedures
- Performance of child
- Disciplinary consequences that may result in your child being unable to compete

### Communication COACHES should expect from PARENTS

- Notification that your child is ill or injured
- Advance notice if your child will miss training or competition
- Clarifying questions about team procedures and time commitments
- Appropriate concerns expressed directly to the coach

## Communication & Expectations

### **Appropriate**

- The treatment of your child, mentally and physically
- Ways to help your child improve and develop
- Concerns about your child's behavior, injury, academic or discipline problems

### **NOT Appropriate**

- Playing time, team strategy, play calling and other student athletes
- Right before, during and after training/competitions = emotional times
- For optimal resolution and objective analysis, it could be best to speak to coaches at other times other than the ones stated above

## **Appropriate issues to discuss with coaches**

## Youth to Elite Transition

The youth-to-elite transition period is a significant one, so it deserves more attention. As youth athletes grow both physically and mentally, these changes are likely to affect their sports as well. Some of these changes are captured in Figure 5.

To prepare your child for elite levels, it is important to help them understand the increasing demands as they advance in their sport. In the same way, being aware of these changes can also help you understand and support your child better.



Legend: On the next page, the blue boxes refer to males and the pink boxes refer to females.

## Growth and Maturation (Physical)

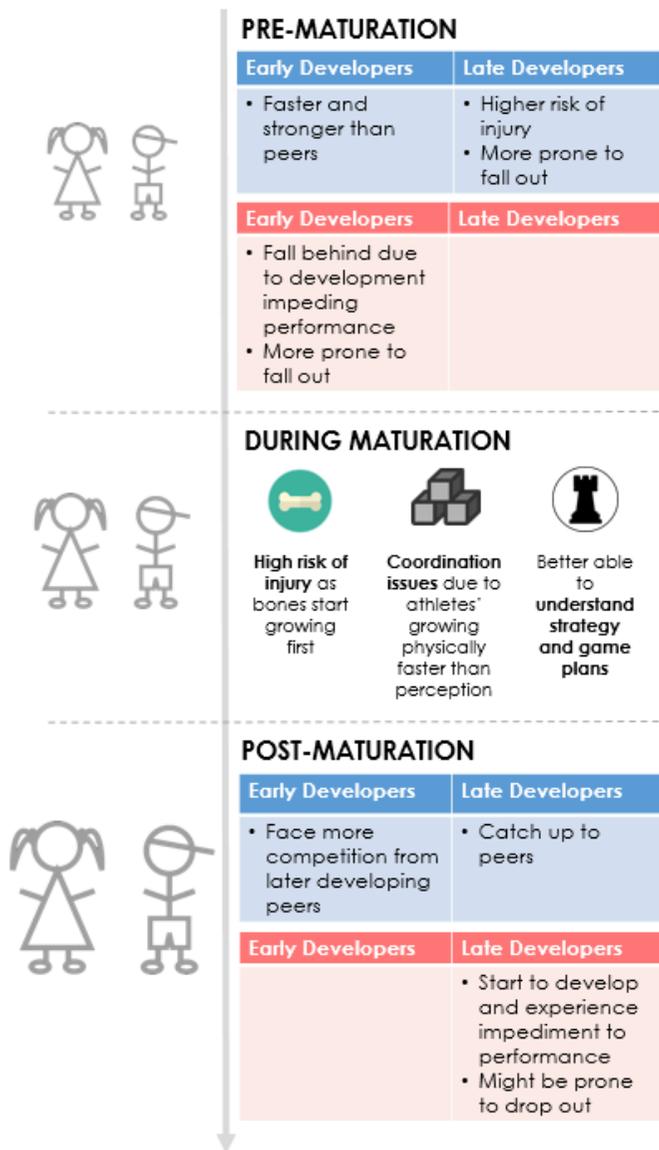


Figure 5. Stages of maturation and implications.

## Growth and Maturation (Cognitive)

As youth athletes grow and mature, the way they understand information will change. Therefore, you will have to be mindful of how you talk to your child and how they understand what you or their coaches tell them. Instructions will have to be given progressively and as your child starts to comprehend information, you can get them to see how it is applied in various contexts in sport.

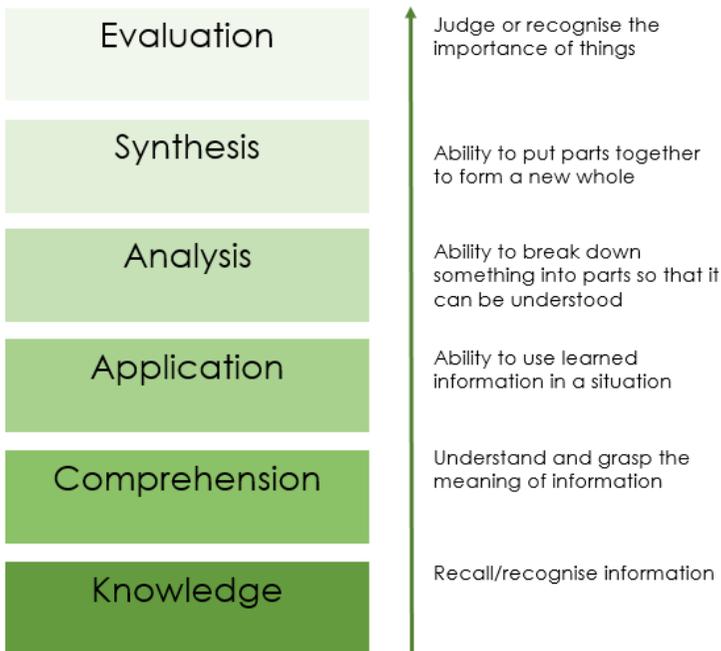


Figure 6. Cognitive domain of learning. Adapted from Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill and Krathwohl (1956).

## Growth and Maturation (Affective)

On top of growing physically and cognitively, youth athletes grow affectively as well. They progress from observing to responding to things around them and developing their own value system. The formative period for their value system is sometimes later on in their growth and being aware of this can help you understand your child better. One way to support your child is to begin modelling values for your child to observe. Then progress on to getting them to express those values and finally help them formulate values through their experiences in sport.



Figure 7. Affective domain of learning. Adapted from Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill and Krathwohl (1956).

## Demands

With transition comes change, and with change comes stress and uncertainty. An athlete may struggle with the adoption of a whole new set of behaviours associated with the increased intensity, hard work, and commitment necessary with the transition. Transitions normally come with a set of specific demands (Figure 8) that athletes have to cope with in order to successfully continue in their sport. The support received from coaches, other athletes and family is important during the transition from youth to elite (Figure 9).

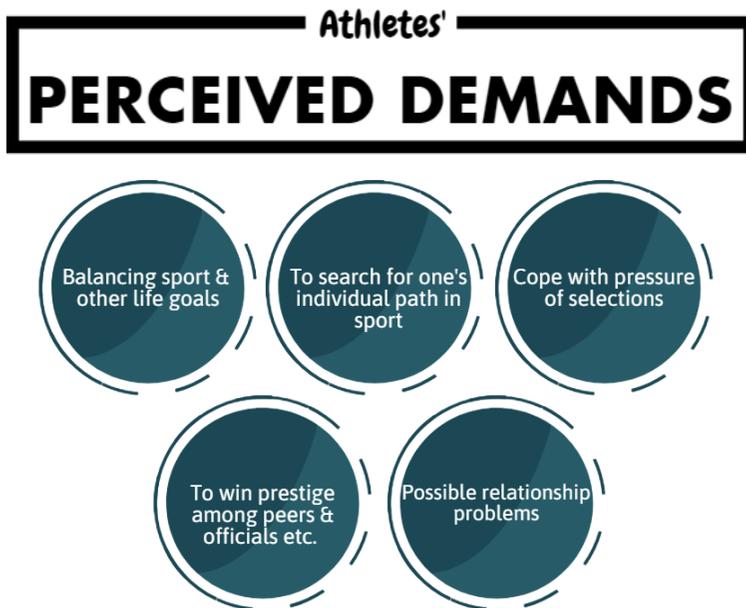


Figure 8. Perceived demands faced by youth athletes. Adapted from Hollings (2013).

## Impact of Parents on Youth Athletes

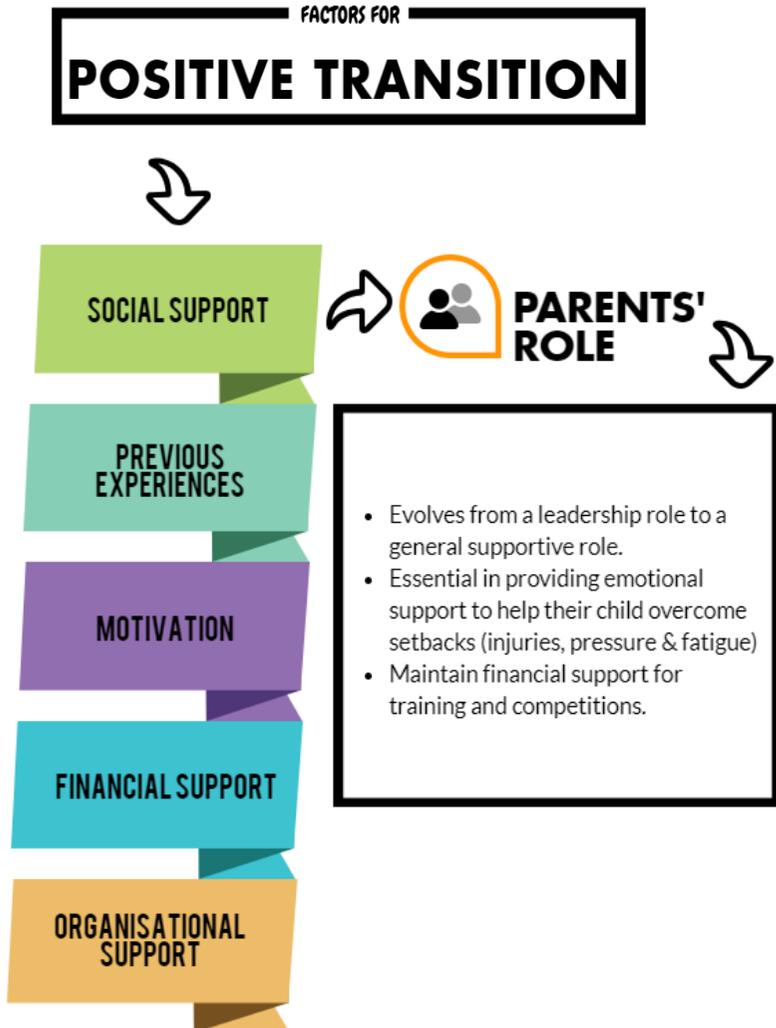


Figure 9. Parents' Role in Positive Transition from Youth to Elite. Adapted from Hollings, Mallett and Hume (2014).

Youth athletes have their own set of routines and tasks to follow before, during, and after competitions. This is where your behaviours and actions as a parent can have a significant impact on your child.

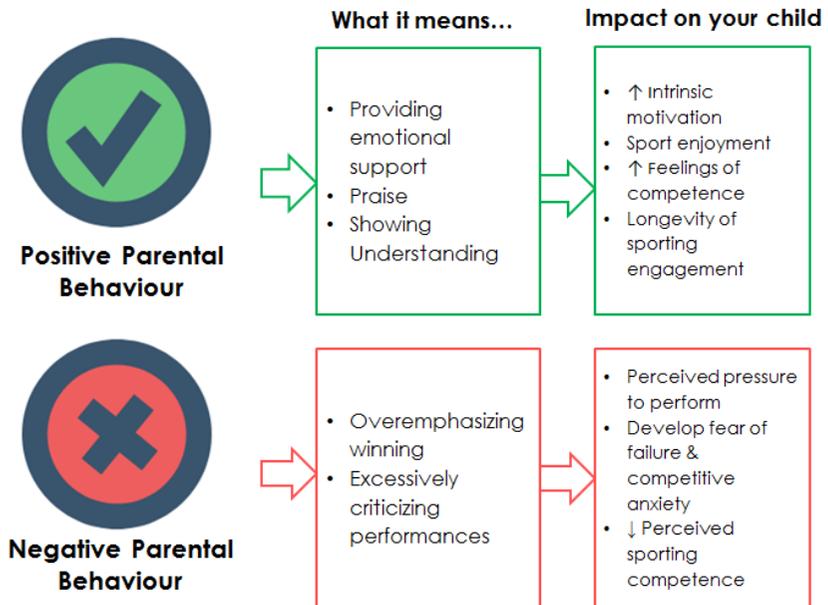


Figure 10. Parental Behaviour. Adapted from Elliott and Drummond (2016).

# Impact of Parents on Youth Athletes

1

Parents' role  
BEFORE | DURING | AFTER  
Competitions

- Prepare physically & mentally (imagery, playlist etc.)

- Focus on what is important
- STAY in the PRESENT
- Reset

- Reflect
- Recover
- Relax (PMR, breathing)
- Refocus

**BEFORE**

- Accept that being nervous is NORMAL
- Build autonomy/independence
- Understand HOW athletes need help to MENTALLY prepare

**DURING**

- Maintain control of emotions
- Encourage EVERYBODY in the team

**AFTER**

- Allow your child time & space to process the game outcome
- "Would you like to talk about the competition?"
- Human being 1<sup>st</sup>, Athlete 2<sup>nd</sup>

**YOUR CHILD**

**YOU**

## BEFORE

- **Accept that your child being nervous is normal!** Know that the adrenaline rush your child feels is normal and part of their body's natural preparation for the competition. Notice it, but don't focus on it. Let them ride on the buzz and energy that it gives them.
- **Build autonomy/independence.** As much as it is important to remind them and make sure they have packed what they need for their competition, it is also important to let them be independent and not do everything for them. Doing too much for them could hinder their growth.
- **Understand HOW your child needs help to MENTALLY prepare.** Every youth athlete is different and it is important to know that some may want to be left alone to prepare for their competitions while others may want to have that social and parental support to give them that extra boost. It is about recognising and being aware of what works and does not work for them.

## DURING

- **Maintain control of emotions.** Omli and Wiese-Bjornstal (2011) claim that parents may display highly supportive but fanatical (getting overly excited) behaviour, which could distract the child. Hence, it is important to be aware of what you are feeling and how you display them.
- **Encourage EVERYBODY in the team.** It is important for the team dynamics (whether individual or team sports) that everybody is encouraged, including those whose parents are not there to support them.

## AFTER

- **Allow your child time and space to process the game, regardless of the outcome.** Research has found that parents who debrief with their children after competition about performance can unwittingly upset them and worsen negative feelings (Elliott & Drummond, 2015).
- **“Would you like to talk about the competition?”** If you do feel the need to speak to them about the game, wait a few hours and then ask whether they would like to talk about the competition.
- **Human being first, athlete second.** Remind your child that their worth as a person is not linked to their abilities as an athlete and making mistakes are a normal part of sports and life.

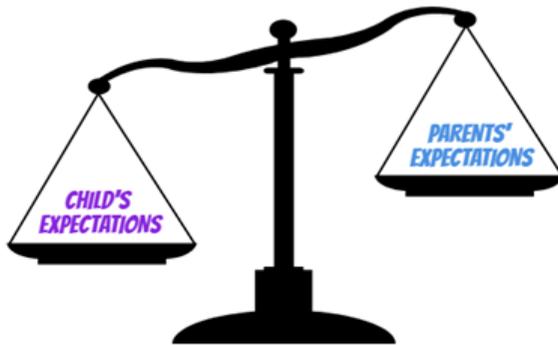
#1

**EVERY YOUTH ATHLETE  
IS DIFFERENT!**

## Impact of Parents on Youth Athletes

**2**

### Perceived Parental Pressure



Parental pressure is the imbalance in expectations between parents and youth athletes. You may unwittingly apply pressure on your child in the interest of success. The amount of parental pressure experienced also depends on how your child perceives your support and involvement. Hence, it is important as a parent to understand the needs of your child. The degree of parental pressure varies from **positive support** to **excessive pressure** (Figure 11). While a certain degree of pressure may be beneficial, excessive parental pressure can have dire consequences (Hoyle & Leff, 1997).

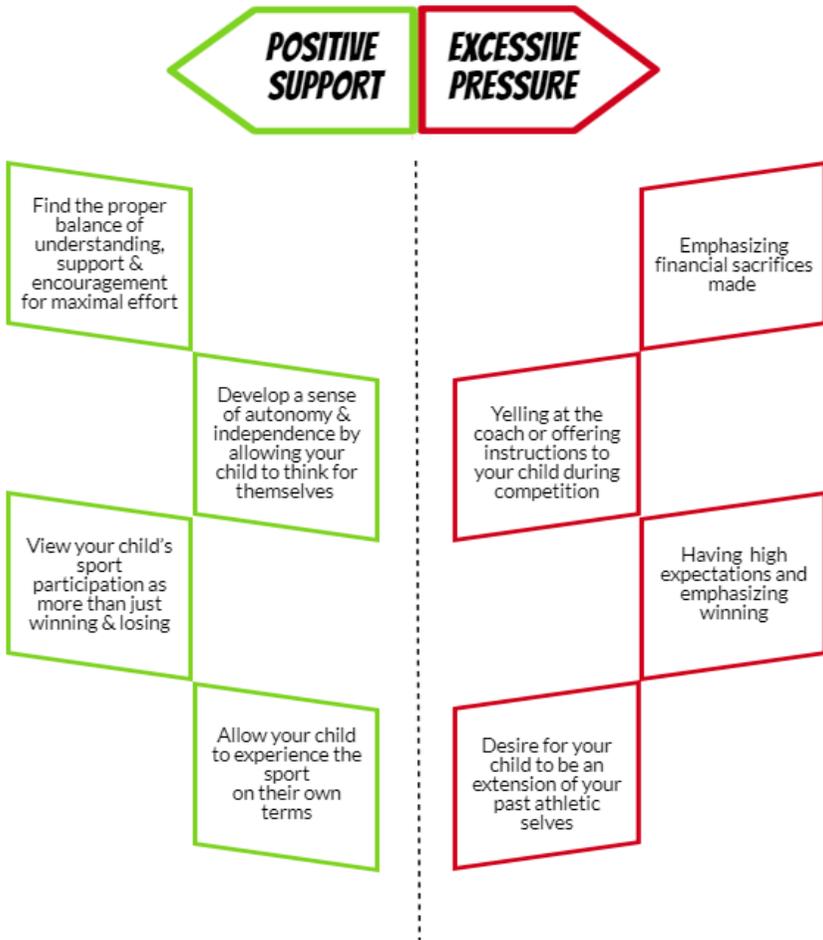


Figure 11. Parental Support and Excessive Pressure. Adapted from Stroebel (2006).

## Self-Awareness

Developing self-awareness can help build your child's ability to perform. Self-awareness aids in your child's practice habits, focus and confidence. Having self-awareness helps your child check blind spots and realise their strengths and weaknesses (McDonald, n.d.).



Figure 12. Self-Awareness. Adapted from Kalaiyarasan and Solomon (2016).

## Sports Values

Sport is not only about medals and rankings. It is a great way for your child to build values such as integrity, responsibility, and respect. It provides an ideal setting to learn life lessons such as overcoming adversity and making decisions. Parents play an important role in instilling these values as well.

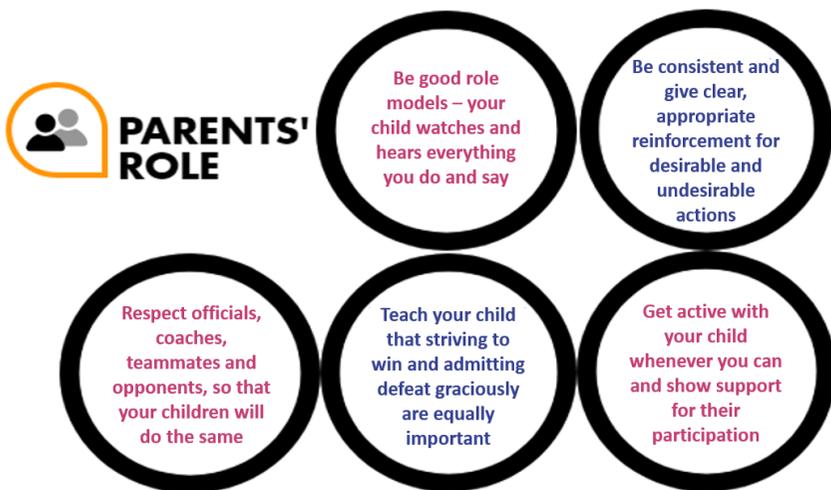


Figure 13. Parents' Role in instilling Sports Values. Adapted from National Standards for Youth Sports (2017).

## Sports Science Tips

### Mental Skills

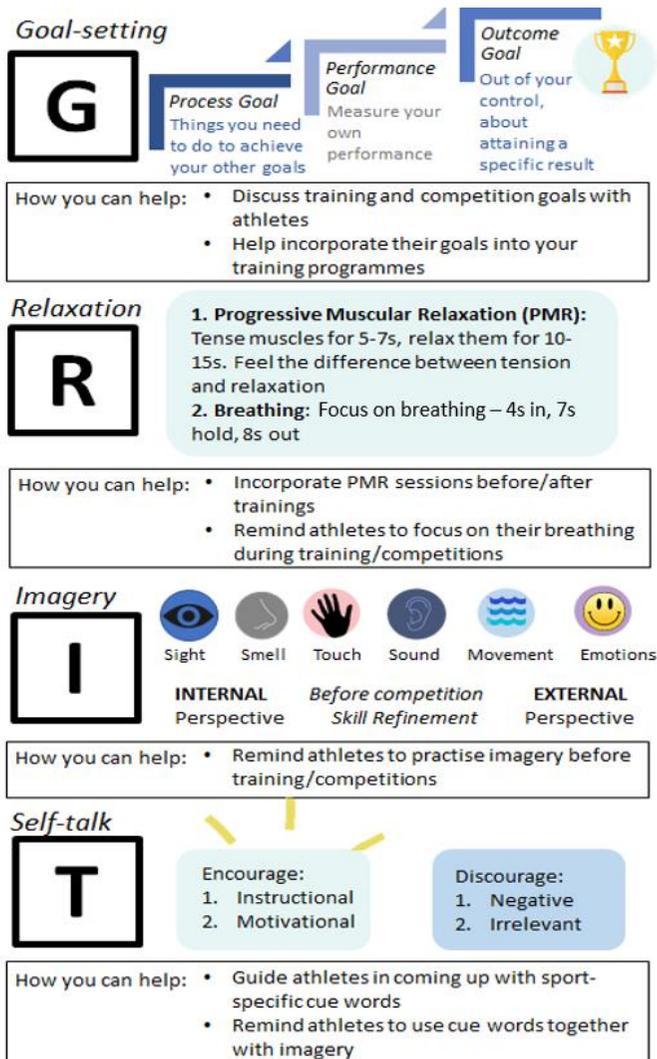


Figure 14. Mental Skills. Adapted from Weinberg and Gould (2014).

## Nutrition

### Helping your Child Achieve Optimal Nutrition

Important nutrition time-points where parents can play a huge role are when your child is required to fuel up **before training** and recover well **after training**.

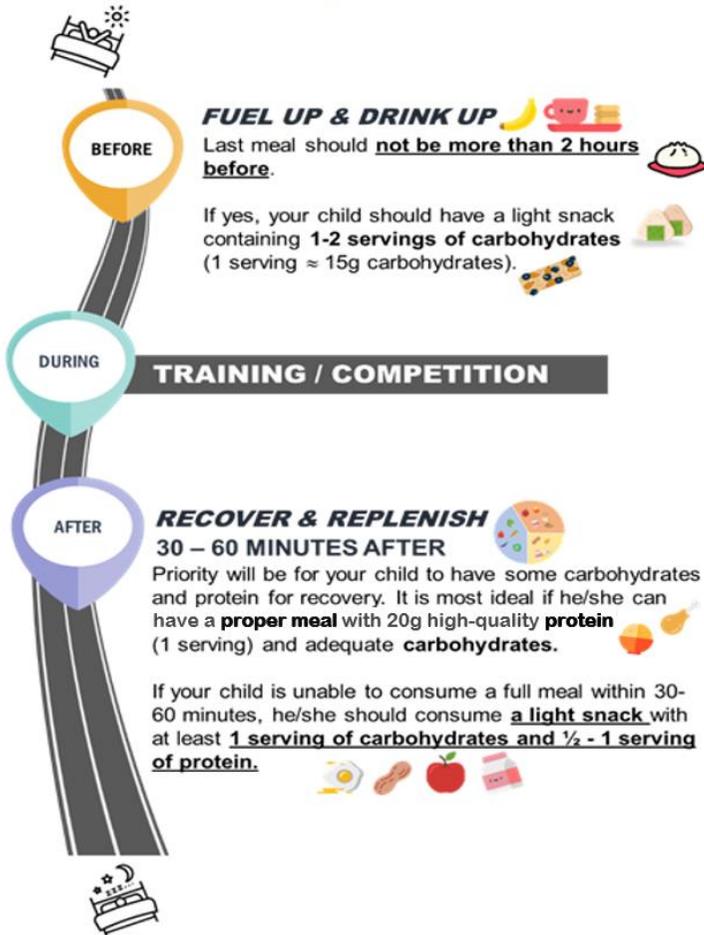


Figure 15. Playing a role before and after training. Adapted from Burke, Hawley, Wong and Jeukendrup (2011); Kerkick, et al. (2008).

## Consumption of Supplements



Supplements contain  
1 in **5** BANNED SUBSTANCES\*



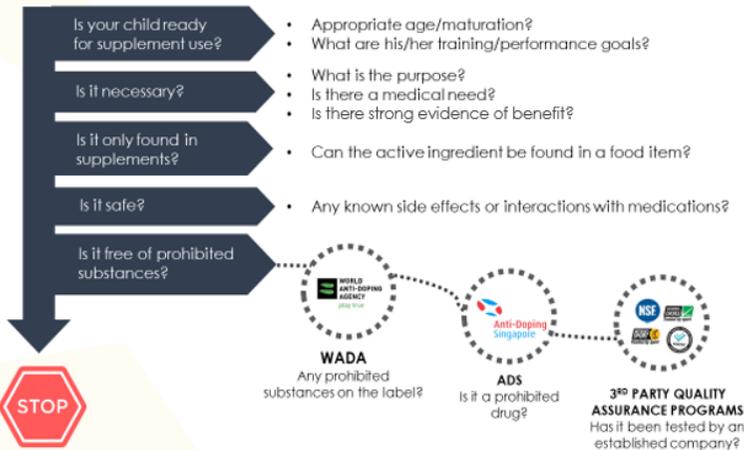
**ESTROGENIC ENDOCRINE DISRUPTORS** can affect the effects of estrogen in youth athletes. They are undergoing puberty and require optimal actions of estrogen for growth and maturation.

**80%**

Of performance supplements contain high levels of **estrogenic endocrine disruptors**†



### QUESTIONS to ask before you consider supplements for your child



If **NO** is the answer to any of these questions, supplements **ARE NOT NECESSARY**. No supplements are 100% safe and free of prohibited substances. Maximise your child's training adaptations and performance through a **food-first** approach instead.

**REFERENCES**

(1) Australian Sports Anti-Doping Agency. (2014). Big 1 in 5 supplements tainted with banned substances [online]. Available at <http://www.asiad.org/news/big1-in-5-supplements-tainted-with-banned-substances> (Accessed 2 May 2018). (2) Pappas, M., Blum, C., Fabel, C., and Connolly, L. (2014). Estrogenic endocrine disruptors in youth supplements: A risk assessment for human health. *Food chemistry*, 159, pp. 127-36. (3) Icons made by Roundicons, Freepik, Beasts from [www.flaticon.com](http://www.flaticon.com)

Figure 16. Consumption of supplements in youth athletes.

## Injury Prevention

When an acute injury occurs, there are 5 distinct signs and symptoms to look out for.

*If a serious injury (e.g. fracture, dislocation, severe pain and/or swelling) is suspected, emergency first aid should be sought, and you should keep your child calm until the emergency service personnel arrives.*



### P.O.L.I.C.E

What should you do if you are injured?

During the initial inflammatory stage which lasts 48 hours, you can do the following to reduce swelling, pain and eventual time to full recovery.

DO	WHY	HOW
	<u>Protection</u> helps to prevent further injuries	Tools like crutches, slings and splints Gentle range of movement of injured area
	<u>Optimal loading</u> aims to promote early recovery	Stay as active as physically possible Within PAIN-FREE limits
	<u>Ice</u> reduces pain and swelling	Apply ice for 15 – 20 minutes every 2 – 4 hours (1 cycle) Minimum 3 cycles Done via ice packs, cryo cuff, ice spray, ice massage and ice bath
	<u>Compression</u> reduces swelling	Apply bandage from the injury towards the heart
	<u>Elevation</u> reduces swelling	Elevate the injured area above the heart to encourage blood flow back via gravity

## Avoid HARM!

To avoid aggravating the injury, do no HARM

Heat

Alternative Treatment

Running/Vigorous Activities

Massage

Figure 17. Injury Prevention. Adapted from Bleakley and Macauley, (2011); Brukner, Khan and Brukner (2012).

## Sleep



### QUANTITY

#### Teen (14 – 17 years)

Recommended: 8 – 10 hours

#### Young Adult (17 – 25 years)

Recommended: 7 – 9 hours



### QUALITY

#### Consistent schedules

- Fixed bedtime
- Regular activities before bed

#### Limited usage of technology

- Night mode 60 minutes before bed

#### Positive sleep environment

- Quiet
- Dark
- Well ventilated

How you can help:

- Discuss sleep schedule with your child
- Plan activities in support of sleep schedule

### Sleep - BONUS



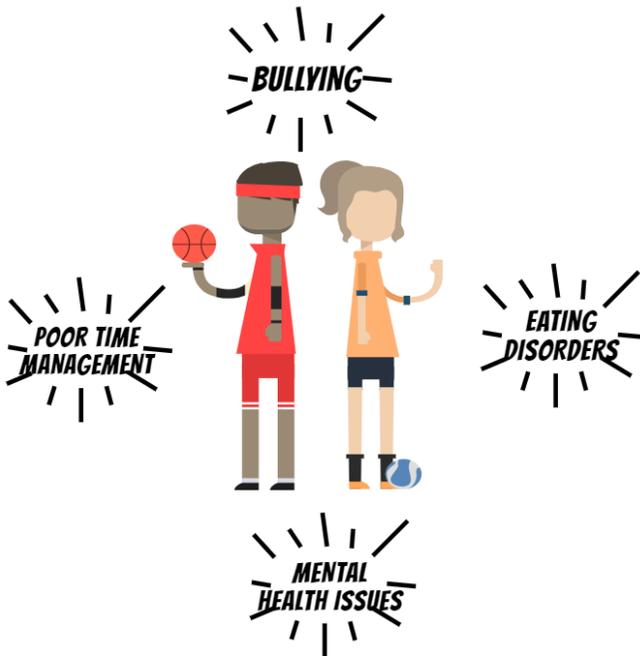
### NAPPING

#### Good method to reduce daytime mental and physical fatigue

- 15 – 20 minutes
- In early afternoon
- Not too close to training/competition time
- Freshen up after napping

Figure 18. Parents' Role in instilling Sports Values. Adapted from Fullagar et al. (2015); Hirshkowitz (2015); Venter (2012).

## Issues Youth Athletes Could Face



Being a youth athlete is not easy and besides competition pressures, your child could face issues that are not directly related to their sport, such as eating disorders (Smith, Robinson, & Segal, 2018), poor mental health (Gustafsson, Kenttä, & Hassmén, 2011) and bullying (DiMarco & Newman, 2011; Espelage, Gutgsell, & Swearer, 2004). As a parent, being aware of and knowing how to recognise these issues means you can engage professional help swiftly to prevent the situation from escalating and affecting your child's psychological development.

# 01 | EATING DISORDERS

## **Possible Causes:**

- Overvalued belief that lower body weight will improve performance
- Sports that emphasize appearance, weight requirements, or muscularity
- Social influences emphasizing thinness, performance anxiety, and negative self-appraisal of sport achievement

## **How to spot:**

- Avoidance of water or excessive water intake
- Preoccupation with one's own food/other people's food
- Ritualistic eating and/or avoidance of certain foods
- Excessive concern with body aesthetic
- Personality shifts may occur, ranging from being more withdrawn and isolated to acting excessively

## **What to do:**

- Seek professional help (refer to page 37)
- Promote self-esteem
- Set a positive example
- Remember, it is not your fault

## 02

## POOR MENTAL HEALTH

### Possible Causes

- Excessive training
- Inadequate recovery
- Balancing sports and studies
- Fear of failure
- Reduced social life

### How to spot

- Depressed mood
- Frustration over lack of results
- Feelings of helplessness and loss of motivation
- Withdrawal from friends, coaches, parents

### What to do

- Seek professional help (refer to page 37)
- Allow your child to take a break/do something they used to enjoy
- Persist in expressing concern and willingness to listen even if they shut you out
- Encourage relaxation exercises

## 03a

### **BULLYING** *(if your child is being bullied)*

#### **Possible Causes**

- Low understanding of social and emotional interactions
- Low self-esteem

#### **How to spot**

- Physical – headaches, change in appetite (relation to stress)
- Psychological – irritability, sadness, trouble with sleeping
- Behavioural – avoid social situations, poor school and sport performance

#### **What to do**

- Remain calm, supportive, and reassuring – they are not to blame for their victimisation
- Lend a listening ear; find out details about the bullying
- Build confidence
- Speak to coach or team manager
- Seek professional help

**03b****BULLYING** *(if your child is a bully)***Possible Causes**

- Have been bullied before
- Jealousy
- Lack of understanding or empathy

**How to spot**

- Observe how your child interacts with his or her schoolmates/teammates
- While it may not be easy to spot if your child is a bully unless an incident has been brought to your attention, it is important to be mindful that your child may be bullying others

**What to do**

- Listen to their side of the story
- Hold them accountable for their actions
- Spend more time with them
- Speak to coach or team manager
- Seek professional help

# 04

## POOR TIME-MANAGEMENT

### Possible Causes

- Not setting personal goals
- Failing to manage distractions (social media, video games)
- Procrastination

### How to spot

- Poor punctuality
- Poor performance in school and sports
- Lack of energy
- Impatience

### What to do

- Encourage a to-do list/prioritising
- Encourage breaks
- Discourage taking on too much
- Seek professional help

## Helplines

Please do not hesitate to contact or visit the following to find out how else you can help your child.

### ***SAMARITANS OF SINGAPORE (SOS)***



**1800 221 4444 (24H)**  
**WWW.SOS.ORG.SG**

### ***INSTITUTE OF MENTAL HEALTH (IMH)***



**6389 2222 (24H)**  
**WWW.IMH.COM.SG**

### ***SINGAPORE ASSOCIATION FOR MENTAL HEALTH (SAMH)***



**1800 283 7019**  
**WWW.SAMHEALTH.ORG.SG**

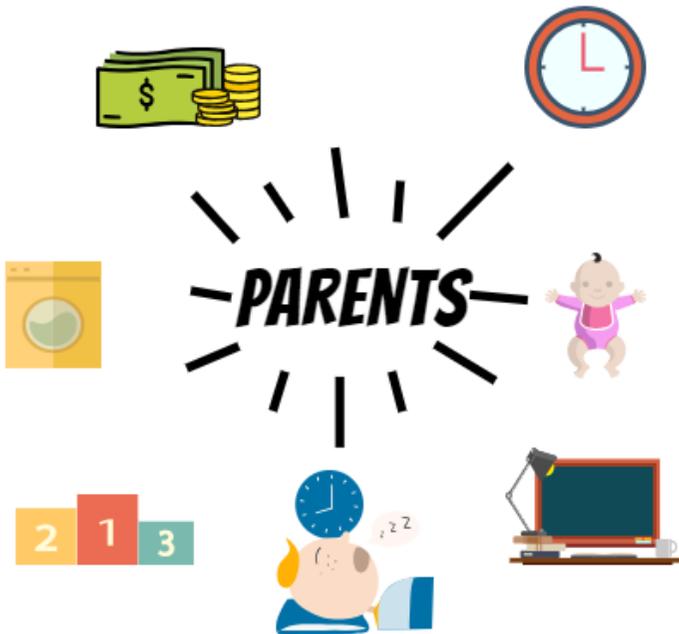
### ***COMMUNITY HEALTH ASSESSMENT TEAM (CHAT)***

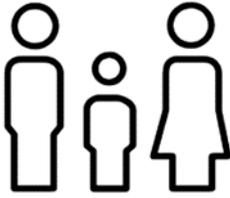


**6493 6500 / 01**  
**WWW.CHAT.MENTALHEALTH.SG**

## Parents' Well-being

Research is starting to show that parents face a range of stressors arising from their child's sport participation (Burgess, Knight, & Mellalieu, 2016). These stressors can affect your behaviour towards your child, in turn affecting their sport performance negatively. It is important that parents recognise their stressors, the effects it could have on your child, and engage in strategies to help cope with the stressors (Knight, Holt, & Tamminen, 2009).

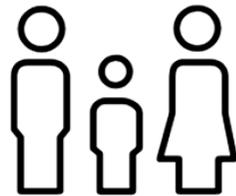




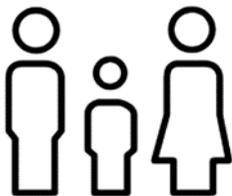
General Parenting Stressors

- Financial stressors – providing for the family; ensuring financial security
- Time stressors – balancing child-rearing responsibilities, domestic chores and work, personal time

- Competitive stressors – watching your child perform, poor behaviour from opposing parents
- Time-related stressors – transporting children to training and competition
- Financial commitment



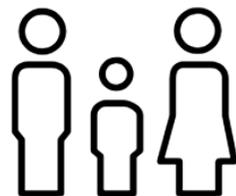
Parenting Stressors in Sport



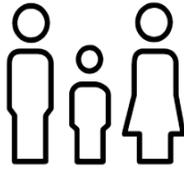
Possible Consequences of Parenting Stressors

- Fewer interactions with children
- Controlling behaviours
- Emotional exhaustion, anxiety, anger
- Looking at financial cost and time as an investment that will “pay off”, adding pressure on children unknowingly

- Cognitive Restructuring
- Contingency Planning
- Relaxation
- Coping Reflection
- Parental Peer Support



Coping Strategies



## COPING STRATEGIES

### RELAXATION

1. Acknowledge that you are feeling stressed
2. Consider taking a time out (taking a 5 minute walk)
3. Engage in breathing exercises (inhale 4 counts, hold 7 counts, exhale 8 counts)
4. Yoga, Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR)

**EXAMPLE:**  
The referee makes a bad call.

1. Acknowledge that you are angry.
2. Take a "time-out" and go for a walk or engage in breathing exercises.
3. You may not want your child to see you angry at that point as it could affect their performance.

### CONTINGENCY PLANNING

1. Considering difficult situations
2. Plan how to respond to them
3. Increases familiarity, sense of control

**EXAMPLE:**  
Your child gets injured and is out of training & competitions for 6 months.

1. Realise that this is part and parcel of your child's sporting life.
2. Plan what you would say and do in response to their injury.

### COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

1. Acceptance of stressor
2. Reappraise stressor
3. Focus on the positives

**EXAMPLE:**  
Your child lost an important international competition that you paid a lot of money for.

1. Accept that this has caused a financial strain and that you are upset about it.
2. Acknowledge that your child could be just as upset and it is important to still be there for them.
3. View the loss as a learning experience for your child and an investment in your child's future growth as an athlete.

## COPING REFLECTION

Just as we encourage the athletes to reflect on their performance and help them figure out what works and what does not, it is important that as parents you do the same kind of reflection.

1. Reflect on how well you handled a difficult situation
2. Effectiveness of the coping strategies you used
3. Is there anything you would do differently next time to respond optimally
4. This reflection may save you future stress and help you to self-regulate

## PARENTAL PEER SUPPORT

Other parents involved in sports can be another useful group to tap on for help. Parent peer support groups can provide knowledge, experience, emotional, social or practical help to other parents who are having difficulty coping with the demands of raising a student-athlete.

REMEMBER TO TAKE  
CARE OF YOURSELF



## Useful Resources

<https://believeperform.com/coaching/the-influence-of-parents-in-youth-sport/>

<https://wgcoaching.com/sporting-parents-the-vital-element-in-the-performance-partnership/>

<https://www.betherepeersupport.org/resources/parenting-support/#1476846833272-b380dca2-3317>

<https://www.amazon.com/Changing-Game-Parents-Performing-Athletes-ebook/dp/B00DZC25LW>

<https://bullyfree.sg/>

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