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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.
Being a YOUTH SPORT PARENT

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.

Figure 1. Coach-Parent-Athlete Relationship.
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.
### Parenting Styles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authoritarian</th>
<th>Authoritative</th>
<th>Permissive</th>
<th>Uninvolved</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• High demandingness/control</td>
<td>• Assertive; Not restrictive</td>
<td>• High acceptance</td>
<td>• High acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low acceptance/responsiveness</td>
<td>• Responsive</td>
<td>• High responsiveness</td>
<td>• High unresponsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Discourage open communication</td>
<td>• Open communication</td>
<td>• Non-demanding</td>
<td>• Non-demanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Trust, encouragement of psychological autonomy</td>
<td>• Lack parental control</td>
<td>• Lack parental control</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequences</th>
<th>Greater levels of anxiety &amp; immaturity in children</th>
<th>Antisocial behavior (such as bullying)</th>
<th>Generally more confident</th>
<th>Socially competent &amp; higher achieving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher levels of impulsivity &amp; aggression</td>
<td>Lower levels of social responsibility</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Poor social &amp; emotional development overall</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. Characteristics & Consequences of Parenting Styles. Adapted from Baumrind (1991).*
Figure 4. Involvement of Parents. Adapted from Hellstedt (1987).

Parental Involvement

- **UNDER-INVOLVED**
  - Lack of attendance at sport events
  - Minimal financial investment in equipment
  - Limited assistance with transportation
  - Minimal communication with coaches in regard to participation or skill development

- **MODERATELY-INVOLVED**
  - Firm parental direction, with enough flexibility for the child to make decisions on their own
  - Interested in feedback from the coaches
  - Support their child financially without being excessive
  - Support NSAs and are generally able to leave their child’s skill development to the coaches

- **OVER-INVOLVED**
  - Have a need that is satisfied through their child’s participation
  - Excessive attendance during training, attempts to “coach”
  - Emphasize winning & not willing to look at improved performance
  - Communicate disapproval often
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 & Expectations

**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
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)

**PRE-MATURATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Developers</th>
<th>Late Developers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Faster and stronger than peers</td>
<td>• Higher risk of injury</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• More prone to fall out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Developers</th>
<th>Late Developers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Fall behind due to development impeding performance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DURING MATURATION**

- High risk of injury as bones start growing first
- Coordination issues due to athletes’ growing physically faster than perception
- Better able to understand strategy and game plans

**POST-MATURATION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Developers</th>
<th>Late Developers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Face more competition from later developing peers</td>
<td>• Catch up to peers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Early Developers</th>
<th>Late Developers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Start to develop and experience impediment to performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Might be prone to drop out</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.

![Diagram of Cognitive Domain of Learning]

*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).](image-url)
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

Factors for Positive Transition

Social Support

Parents’ Role

Previous Experiences

Motivation

Financial Support

Organisational Support

- Evolves from a leadership role to a general supportive role.
- Essential in providing emotional support to help their child overcome setbacks (injuries, pressure & fatigue)
- Maintain financial support for training and competitions.

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

   BEFORE
   - Accept that being nervous is NORMAL
   - Build autonomy/independence
   - Understand how athletes need help to MENTALLY prepare
   - Maintain control of emotions
   - Encourage EVERYBODY in the team

   DURING
   - Reflect
   - Recover
   - Relax (PMR, breathing)
   - Refocus
   - Allow your child time & space to process the game outcome
   - “Would you like to talk about the competition?”

   AFTER
   - Human being 1st, Athlete 2nd

   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.
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).

- **Positive Support:**
  - Find the proper balance of understanding, support & encouragement for maximal effort
  - Develop a sense of autonomy & independence by allowing your child to think for themselves
  - View your child’s sport participation as more than just winning & losing
  - Allow your child to experience the sport on their own terms

- **Excessive Pressure:**
  - Emphasizing financial sacrifices made
  - Yelling at the coach or offering instructions to your child during competition
  - Having high expectations and emphasizing winning
  - Desire for your child to be an extension of your past athletic selves
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.

1. **FUEL UP & DRINK UP**
   - Before: Last meal should **not be more than 2 hours before**.
   - If yes, your child should have a light snack containing **1-2 servings of carbohydrates** (1 serving = 15g carbohydrates).

2. **TRAINING / COMPETITION**

3. **RECOVER & REPLENISH**
   - 30 – 60 minutes after: Priority will be for your child to have some carbohydrates and protein for recovery. It is most ideal if he/she can have a **proper meal with 20g high-quality protein** (1 serving) and adequate **carbohydrates**.
   - If your child is unable to consume a full meal within 30-60 minutes, he/she should consume **a light snack** with at least **1 serving of carbohydrates and ½ - 1 serving of protein**.

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

**FOOD FIRST**

5 Supplements contain BANNED SUBSTANCES

80% Of performance supplements contain high levels of estrogenic endocrine disruptors

**QUESTIONS**

to ask before you consider supplements for your child

- Is your child ready for supplement use?
- Is it necessary?
- Is it only found in supplements?
- Is it safe?
- Is it free of prohibited substances?

- Appropriate age/maturity?
- What are his/her training/performance goals?
- What is the purpose?
- Is there a medical need?
- Is there strong evidence of benefit?
- Can the active ingredient be found in a food item?
- Any known side effects or interactions with medications?

STOP

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

**REFERENCES**

**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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DO (P)</th>
<th>NOW (E)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protection helps to prevent further injuries</td>
<td>Tools like crutches, slings and splints within PAIN-FREE limits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Optimal loading aims to promote early recovery</td>
<td>Gentle range of movement of injured area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ice reduces pain and swelling</td>
<td>Apply ice for 15 – 20 minutes every 2 – 4 hours (1 cycle)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compression reduces swelling</td>
<td>Minimum 3 cycles, bone via ice pads, crye cuff, ice spray, ice massage and ice bath</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevation reduces swelling</td>
<td>Apply bandage from the injury towards the heart</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elevate the injured area above the heart to encourage blood flow back via gravity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 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

Figure 18. Parents’ Role in instilling Sports Values. Adapted from Fullagar et al. (2015); Hirshkowitz (2015); Venter (2012).
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.
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
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
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).
Being a YOUTH SPORT PARENT

General Parenting Stressors

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

Parenting Stressors in Sport

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

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

Coping Strategies

- Cognitive Restructuring
- Contingency Planning
- Relaxation
- Coping Reflection
- Parental Peer Support
**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://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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