

## **Do's and Don'ts for Parents When It Comes to Supporting a Positive Team Culture**

The word “culture” is a buzz word we hear or read about all the time. With regards to the youth sport arena, it is about the everyday behaviors and interactions of the performers who show up to the competition.

For [TrueSport Expert](#) Roberta Kraus, PhD, the President of the Center for Sports Psychology – Colorado Springs, Colorado, her meetings with parents of young athletes start with her telling them that every time a competition takes place involving their child, there are four performers who show up: the athletes, their coaches, the officials or referees, and all of the parents in the stands. In many cases, the parents in the stands have just as much—or more—impact on team culture as the athletes, coaches, and officials on the field.

Kraus then asks parents to share what they value about having their child participate in sports and she often hears all the right answers, such as spending time with friends, having fun, learning to respect others and support teammates, practicing time management, learning how to win and lose with dignity, avoiding unhealthy habits and activities, and learning to work hard and stay motivated.

Kraus applauds those goals and the parents for having their kids in sports, but she follows that up with this question: “So, why doesn’t your behavior in the stands match those values you just shared?” Unfortunately, the moment we watch our child step onto the court, we can unintentionally destroy team culture by getting too involved with how the athlete or the team are performing.

How long has it been since you asked your child after a game you could not attend, “Did you have fun?” “What did you enjoy the most?” “Did you learn anything new?” All too often, the first thing out of a parent’s mouth is, “Did you win?” or “How did you do?”

At the end of the day, this culture of ‘we treasure what we can measure’ is counterproductive to the kind of team culture that teaches young athletes the value of competing for the love of the sport, being with friends, and learning to come back from a loss or win with dignity.

Although children receive benefits from participation in competitive sports, they can often experience negative feelings, such as low self-esteem, lack of motivation, and

excessive anxiety when they have parents who focus only on the stats, the results of the competition, or how this sport can help their 10-year-old get a college scholarship. The end result is a competitive team culture that very few kids want to be a part of. In addition, [a study by the American Academy of Pediatrics published last year](#) shows that 70% of kids drop out of organized sports by age 13, mostly due to injury or burnout.

To prevent these potential negative effects on team culture, parents should de-emphasize the importance of winning, while encouraging the improvement of effort and enjoyment derived from the thrill of competing. These types of supportive behaviors help build a child's self-esteem and love for the game, while [excessive pressure can lead to stress and burnout](#). In the long run, parents who exhibit more positivity than negativity at competitions will likely be respected more and have athletes who work harder and perform better.

Parents of young athletes need to remember that if outcomes were the only measure of success, most athletes would be failures. If there is one fact we know about human behavior, it is that we participate and do our best in what we like, and we avoid and do poorly in what we don't like.

Parents need to drive a team culture that holds onto a belief that the value of competition exists in defeat as well as in victory, and that athletic competition can provide positive life lessons for both athletes and parents –making athletic competition a true win-win for everyone.

Here are more tips from Kraus on how parents can contribute to a positive team culture in youth sport.

### ***Parent DO's and DON'Ts for Inspiring a Positive Team Culture***

- ✓ DO get to know the coach and support his or her philosophy, knowledge, and skill ability. Let your child know that not all coaches are equal. Nevertheless, it is still essential that the child and the parents give coaches the respect they deserve to do their jobs.
  - ✗ DON'T be a sideline critic at your child's competition. It will suck the joy out of the competition for everyone, especially your child. The American Academy of Pediatrics reinforces the idea that if you want your kid to continue with a sport, they should enjoy it, perhaps even more than you enjoy watching them play it.
- ✓ DO apply the 24-hour rule after a competition, which means no discussing stats or giving advice about what needs to be different next time your athlete competes for at least 24 hours. Giving kids time to process their own excitement or disappointment

before piling on criticism or analysis will create space for growth, resilience, learning, and motivation.

- ✘ DON'T be 'Velcro' parent(s) and impose your past athletic life experience on to your young athlete in a way that creates negative pressure. It's tough not to inundate your child with advice and critical instruction on the way to a competition or on the way home afterwards, but finding a balance between involvement and boundary management is key to being a happy sport family.
- ✓ DO remind them that improving one's effort and enjoying the thrill of competition is the only thing in their control.
  - ✘ DON'T forget that as kids get older, priorities can and will change.
- ✓ DO take time after every competition to give your child clear, vivid images/pictures of the hard work in their performance. Be the person in their life who they can look to for constant positive reinforcement.
  - ✘ DON'T forget that no matter how tall, how big, how fast, or even how skilled your child gets in sports, they are still a kid and deserve to behave like one. Stop trying to make them a professional adult athlete when they're still young and trying to have fun and be with their friends.
- ✓ DO open yourself up to being coached by your child. Ask them how to best support them in their sport and then honor their wishes in your behaviors. Be prepared that they may say things like: "Keep bringing brownies for after the game," "Please don't sit together," or even "Please don't come."
  - ✘ DON'T forget that all those wonderful lessons about life, determination, sportsmanship, and teamwork that you believe sport has to offer your child can also be learned by being a member of the school band, drama club, chess club, or robotics team. Sports are not for everyone.
- ✓ DO say to your child these seven words at the end of any competition: "I love coming to watch you compete." Then follow that up with: "Did you have fun and are you hungry"?

### **Takeaway**

Even from the sidelines, parents can have a massive impact on team culture, as well as their athlete's enjoyment and continued involvement in sport. That's why it's critical for sport parents to align their own behaviors with the goals and values they hope their athlete will achieve through sport. In many cases, that starts by focusing on the experience rather than the outcome of competition and asking questions like, "Did you have fun today?"



### *About TrueSport*

TrueSport<sup>®</sup>, a movement powered by the experience and values of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, champions the positive values and life lessons learned through youth sport. Backed by U.S. Congressional mandate, [TrueSport](#) inspires athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators to change the culture of youth sport through active engagement and thoughtful curriculum based on cornerstone lessons of sportsmanship, character-building, and clean and healthy performance, while also creating leaders across communities through sport.

For more expert-driven articles and materials, visit TrueSport's [comprehensive collection of resources](#).

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<https://truesport.org/teamwork/parents-positive-team-culture/>