



Why It's Important to Avoid Tension on the Sidelines

"I joke that when my daughter was playing tennis, I was just a chauffeur taking her to practice. And sometimes, that's all kids really need you to be," says Dr. Patrick Cohn, a sports psychologist at Peak Performance Sports. He's only partially joking...most parents could benefit from decreasing their tension and taking a more passive role when it comes to youth sports.

"We tell parents that their only goal is to make sure that their kids are having fun. Your job is to support kids when it's appropriate," Cohn adds. With that in mind, here's why and how to avoid being tense and distracting on the sidelines.

Sideline Coaching

Your goal as a parent may be to see your child having fun, but [research](#) has shown that sideline behavior rarely reflects that goal. "Shouting instructions from the sidelines is a major no-no," says Cohn. Not just because it's irritating for the other parents, but because it can actually hurt your child's performance."

"Remember, the coach is there to coach the kids, and having another person shouting can also make them lose focus, get embarrassed, or feel pressure to perform perfectly for the parents shouting instructions all the time," Cohn adds.

Your 'Cheering' Style

Showing up with your face painted in team colors while the other parents are in business casual? Try not to stand out too much.

"Pay attention to the cues from the other parents. Parents should be cheerleaders, reinforcing when they're playing well but not overdoing it," says Cohn. "Depending on the sport, there are different rules of behavior. Golf has quiet clapping, hockey has more yelling."

"If you know you have trouble controlling your temper and what you do on the sidelines, I recommend you watch the game from afar where your athlete can't see you. Watch up on a balcony, or even behind a tree...if you truly want your athlete to have more fun and be more focused, take yourself out of the equation if you know you're a distraction."

Handling a Bad Call

Your anger with a bad call in a child's game may be the same rage you feel on the road, which [research](#) had shown is tied to ego defensiveness and a control-oriented mindset. Angry reactions on the sideline often happen because parents make the game about them and take events personally. Even if you think you're being subtle when you disagree with a 'bad call,' your child likely is picking up on it.

"Your tension is extremely obvious to young athletes, and to yell at people around you is actually disrespectful to your kids," Cohn says. Instead, let bad calls be a learning opportunity for them. If the ref makes a call you don't agree with, that's OK.

You won't agree with every call, and the referee might even be in the wrong. But if you complain every time you disagree, you're teaching your child that that behavior is acceptable in life. Keep in mind that your child will have to deal with a teacher or boss who isn't always fair and can't always rely on you to 'fix' everything.

Non-Verbal Behaviors

"Kids are easily distracted during games. If you're arguing on the sidelines with another parent, they're likely going to notice, be embarrassed, and even alter their performance," says Cohn. "If I roll my eyes, my daughter can see from 50 yards away."

"I try to teach athletes to stay focused on the field or court, but that's hard. Kids pick up on parents' non-verbal cues. I've heard parents tell me that they got up to use the restroom, but their athlete assumed they had gotten up because they were upset with the child's performance. If a kid is feeling your tension, they tend to start playing safer and more tentatively, in fear of making mistakes."

Dr. Cohn concludes, "From a long-term perspective, the athlete won't have as much fun in the sport [if they're worried about their parents on the sidelines], because they're so tuned into what they think their parent is feeling during their game, which can lead to them leaving the sport altogether."

Bottomline: Knowing how to best support your athlete is key in creating a positive sport experience for not only your athlete, but also for their team and the rest of the parents on the sidelines supporting their athletes.



About TrueSport

TrueSport®, 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.

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, by creating leaders across communities through sport.

You can link back to the TrueSport article beginning October 1st at:
<https://learn.truesport.org/avoid-tension-on-sidelines>