

The Ten Commandments for Parents of Athletic Children

Reprinted from "The Young Athlete" by Bill Burges

1. Make sure your child knows that win or lose, scared or heroic, you love him, appreciate his efforts, and are not disappointed in him. This will allow him to do his best without a fear of failure. Be the person in his life he can look to for constant positive enforcement.
2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic ability, his competitive attitude, his sportsmanship, and his actual skill level.
3. Be helpful but don't coach him on the way to the pool or on the way back or at breakfast, and so on. It's tough not to, but it's a lot tougher for the child to be inundated with advice, pep talks and often critical instruction.
4. Teach him to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying", to be working to improve his swimming skills and attitudes. Help him to develop the feel for competing, for trying hard, for having fun.
5. Try not to re-live your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure; you lost as well as won. You were frightened, you backed off at times, you were not always heroic. Don't pressure your child because of your pride. Athletic children need their parents so you must not withdraw. Just remember there is a thinking, feeling, sensitive free spirit out there in that uniform who needs a lot of understanding, especially when his world turns bad. If he is comfortable with you win or lose; he's on his way to maximum achievement and enjoyment.
6. Don't compete with the coach. If the coach becomes an authority figure, it will run from enchantment to disenchantment...with your athlete.
7. Don't compare the skill, courage, or attitudes of your child with other members of the team, at least within his hearing.
8. Get to know the coach so that you can be assured that his philosophy, attitudes, ethics and knowledge are such that you are happy to have your child under his leadership.
9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reaction and investigate before over-reacting.
10. Make a point of understanding courage, and the fact that it is relative. Some of us can climb mountains, and aren't afraid to fight, but turn to jelly if a bee approaches. Everyone is frightened in certain areas. Explain that courage is not the absence of fear, but a means of doing something in spite of fear of discomfort.

The job of the parent of an athletic child is a tough one, and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. It is worth all the effort when you hear your child say, "My parents really helped and I was lucky in this respect".