

# News for Swim Parents

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## Sports Psychology Guidelines For Sports Parents

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*Dr. Patrick Cohn explains how parents can help make sport a successful and fun experience for young athletes. Sports parents have a big impact on their young superstars. A healthy and successful sports experience will depend on the sports parents' ability to instill confidence and self-esteem in athletes. Parents have a tremendous impact on how children will engage in sports. I am often asked by parents how they should help their child superstar win at and enjoy their sport. Below are some simple guidelines for sports parents to adopt with youth athletes.*

### **Guidelines for Sports Parents**

Sports should be fun for kids. Treat sport as a game, it is not a business for kids. With all the money in professional sports today, it is hard for parents to understand that it is just good fun to young athletes. The primary goal should be to have fun and enjoy the healthy competition.

Your own agenda is not your young athlete's. They compete in sports for many reasons. They enjoy the competition, like the social aspect, engage with being part of a team, and enjoy the challenge of setting goals. You might have a different agenda than your young athlete and you need to recognize that it is their sport, not yours.

Emphasize a mental focus on the process of execution instead of results or trophies. We live in a society that focuses on results and winning, but winning come from working the process and enjoying the ride. Teach your young athlete to focus on the process of the challenge of playing one shot, stroke, or race at a time instead of the number of wins or trophies.

You are a role model for your young athlete. As such, you should model composure and poise on the sidelines. When you are at competition, your young athlete will mimic your behaviour as well as other role models. You become a role model in how you react to a close race or the questionable behaviour of a competitor. Stay calm, composed, and in control during games so your young athlete superstar can mimic those positive behaviors.

Refrain from game-time coaching. During competition, it is time to just let them play. All the practice should be set aside because this is the time that athletes need trust in the training and react on the court or field. "Just do it" as the saying goes. Too much coaching (or over-coaching) can lead to mistakes and cautious performance (called paralysis by over analysis). Save the coaching for practice and use encouragement at game time instead.

Help your athlete to detach self-esteem from achievement. Too many athletes attach self-worth to the level of performance or outcomes. Help your young athlete understand that they are a person FIRST who happens to be an athlete instead of an athlete who happens to be a person. Success or number of wins should not determine a person's self-esteem.

Ask your young athlete the right questions. Asking the right questions after competition and games will tell your young athlete what you think is important in sports. If you ask, "Did you win?" they will think winning is important. If you ask, "Did you have fun?" he or she will assume having fun is important.

*Dr. Patrick Cohn works with athletes and teams world wide from a variety of sport backgrounds. As the president and founder of Peak Performance Sports (Orlando, Florida), Dr. Cohn is dedicated to instilling confidence and composure, and teaching effective mental game skills to help athletes, teams and corporate professionals perform at maximum levels.*