

Keys to Peak Parental Performance

Youth soccer clubs are always seeking ways to rein in parental enthusiasm without dampening it.

The Stone Mountain (Ga.) Youth Soccer Association recently distributed a clear, concise set of standards addressing that delicate balance:

Let the coaches coach. This includes goal setting and psyching up your child for practice and post game critiques. Having more than one "coach" confuses children.

Do not bribe or offer incentives. Leave motivation to the coach. Offering money for scoring goals, for example, distracts your child from concentrating properly in practices and games.

Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly. Support all players on the team. Your child's teammates are not the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, she has a wonderful opportunity to learn.

Support the program. Get involved by volunteering, helping with fundraisers, car-pooling, or however else you can.

Encourage your child to talk with the coaches. "Taking responsibility" - whether about playing difficulties or missing an upcoming match - is a big part of soccer.

Understand and display appropriate game behavior. When you cheer appropriately, you help your child focus on the parts of the game he can control (positioning, decision-making, skills, etc.). If he begins focusing on elements he can't control (field conditions, the referee, the weather, etc.), he will not play up to his ability.

Monitor your child at home. Be sure she is eating and sleeping properly.

Help your child keep priorities straight. A youngster needs help balancing schoolwork, friendships, and other commitments besides soccer. But having made a commitment to soccer, she also needs help fulfilling her obligation to her team.

Pass the reality test. If your child's team loses but he played his best, help him see this as a "win." Remind him to focus on the process, not the end result. Fun and satisfaction should come from "striving to win." Conversely, do not let him be satisfied with "winning" if it comes from inadequate preparation and performance.

Keep soccer in its proper perspective. The game should not be larger than your life. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Keep your own goals and needs separate from your child's. Remember that your relationship with your child will continue long after her competitive soccer day's end.

Article courtesy of Soccer America's Youth Soccer Letter and editor Dan Woog.