

# Hey Mom and Dad! Behave Yourselves!

Most parents—indeed, **all parents**—want their children to succeed in youth sports. OK, let's admit it: They **would like their children to be stars**. That's normal. And they want to be involved in their star's—err, child's—sport activities. That, too, is normal. In fact, **parental involvement is a critical element in the overall success of youngsters' sport participation**.

**Youth sports** should be viewed as a **part of child rearing**, and parents obviously should be part of that experience. But **parents' obligation** to participate **must include taking responsibility for behaving appropriately**. Coaches, program administrators, sport officials, and the athletes themselves have a right to demand that spectators conform to acceptable standards of behavior.

What are some guidelines for appropriate parent behavior prior to and during sport events?

## Pre-Practice/Game Preparation

- Tell your child to have *fun*. Emphasize that sports and other activities in life are enjoyable in themselves—whether you win or lose. In other words, having *fun* does not depend on winning!
- Tell your child that success is related to commitment and *effort*! The goal is to *do your best*, rather than be the best. Emphasize that athletes are never “losers” if they commit themselves to *doing their best* and giving maximum *effort*.
- Let your son or daughter know that the pride you feel is not affected by their level of performance, or by winning. Again, *effort* is what counts!

## During Practices/Games

Youth sports should be enjoyable for everyone, so remember to have *fun*. Moreover, in addition to some obvious *don'ts* (using profanity, drinking alcohol, etc.), you are encouraged to follow these rules of conduct:

- *Do* remain in the spectator area during the event.
- *Don't* interfere with the coach. You must be willing to give up the responsibility for your child to the coach for the duration of the practice or game.
- *Do* express interest, encouragement and support to your child. Be sure to cheer good *effort* as well as good performance. Communicate repeatedly that giving total *effort* is all you expect.
- Put down the cell phone and watch your child
- *Don't* shout instructions or criticisms to the children.
- *Do* lend a hand when a coach or official asks for help.
- *Don't* make abusive comments to athletes, parents, officials or coaches of either team.

## What if a parent violates a rule of conduct?

- You have the obligation to control your own behavior, and to remind others of their responsibilities, if necessary.
- When parents behave badly (loud, rowdy, obnoxious actions), it is primarily the duty of program administrators and sport officials to step in. But you can also help to correct the situation with a reminder that these are just kids playing a game.
- Caution! When parents misbehave, it could be emotionally charged and potentially dangerous. So, be very careful and diplomatic in how you approach unruly parents.

**Editor's Note:** Thank you to Frank L. Smoll, Ph.D., and Ronald E. Smith, Ph.D., for this article. Drs. Smoll and Smith are sport psychologists at the University of Washington and co-directors of Youth Enrichment in Sports. To see previews of their *Mastery Approach to Parenting in Sports* and *Mastery Approach to Coaching* DVDs, visit [www.y-e-sports.com](http://www.y-e-sports.com).