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# The Beacon

## *Guiding You through the Process of Change*

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### ***Parenting Your Child Athlete***

A child's success and development in a sport is determined by a number of influences, the core factors being the child him- or herself, the coach, and the child's parents. This newsletter describes some of the parental qualities which have been associated with children's positive performance and character development through sporting activity.

The key to successful sports parenting seems to be providing the child with consistent support and encouragement, without pushing him or her beyond their inherent capacity to perform or find satisfaction in their sport.

The helpful parent is relaxed and provides their child with encouragement and support. This parenting style creates a secure foundation from which the child can take the risk of committing their personal capital (i.e., time, energy, health, self-esteem) to improving in their sport.

Examples of parenting behaviors which encourage positive performance include: showing interest by inquiring about your child's sport experiences or attending a competition; providing financial resources as affordable; or giving consistent encouragement and praise for the child's involvement and effort despite the natural ups and downs of their actual performance.

Unhealthy sports parenting can take many forms including parents who are in conflict over their child's athletic endeavors, parents who are skeptical of or disinterested in their child's sport, parents who are overly critical, or those who bring

an anxious, worried demeanor to the practice facilities and competitive arena.

However, there is one parenting style that is often singled out for its negative impact on a child's development in the sport: the "Little League Dad" or "Soccer Mom".

These terms describe a parent who is always present, pushing the child and lobbying on their behalf. This parent is tense and demanding, and these pressures are readily transmitted to their child - athlete. While "sports parents" can be encouraging, they are often critical and the child feels their support is conditional, which only adds to the felt pressure. To the observer, it is apparent that this parent is imposing their own desires and needs on the child. While "sports parents" may see themselves as their child's protector and advocate, they are often unaware of the child's *actual* needs and their over-involvement can unintentionally impede their child's growth in the sport.

In summary, the core of healthy sports parenting is consistent positive support and encouragement. However, helpful sports parenting also means avoiding being over involved and pushing the child beyond their inherent ability and/or interest. So, go to the competitions, be an interested spectator and let the coaches coach and your athlete do his or her best.

### **References**

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***By T. Scott Sewitch, Ph.D.***  
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