



SPORTS KIDS ENCOURAGED BY RESPONSIBILITY



by Mimi Hudson

At most kids' games these days, there is the absence of the "f-word" – FUN! There is too much emphasis by parents on structure, being the best, winning at all costs, coaching from the sidelines and not enough emphasis on playing the game and just having fun in the moment. Seventy-five percent of kids in organized sports quit by the time they are 13, usually because it isn't fun anymore.

Have you ever wondered why skateboarding is so popular? I think it's because 1) most adults can't do it; 2) there are no rules; and 3) it involves an element of risk. All of which spells fun for a lot of kids.

The most important thing parents can have with their child is an unconditional relationship which is strong, safe and nurturing. No matter what, our children need to know, whether they "make it" or not, they are good enough the way they are. What is the point of having an all-star athlete if getting there jeopardizes your relationship and your child ends up resenting your intrusion in his or her life or giving up altogether? We have seen many examples of this in professional sports, particularly tennis.

Most parents believe that they are doing what is best for their kids. But what is really best for our kids is to give them the skills to cope with whatever life throws at them and not constantly run interference – to demonstrate to them our belief that "they can handle it." We do this through the power of encouragement as well as discipline, which are the cornerstones of our parenting philosophy.

Encouragement is a process. It emphasizes effort and participation, not just the results that are emphasized by praise. It says: "I believe in you, kid." "I know you can do it!" "You can do it yourself."

Discipline means to teach, not to punish. The goal of discipline is to teach self-discipline. We must allow our children to make mistakes and experience the consequences of their own actions. We want our children to know intrinsically what is the right thing to do, not because we are running along behind them barking orders and telling them what to do. We need to teach them how to think, not what to think. How does a child learn to form an opinion if he or she is never allowed to have one?

We model the behaviors we expect from our children and treat our children the way we want to be treated. This is mutual respect, another tenet of our parenting philosophy. Our children have to want to play and excel at a particular sport or be an "A" student or have a particular career more than we want it for them. We can't *make* them do anything. Just as we can't *make* them eat or go to sleep. They have to want it themselves, to be prepared to work at whatever it is, more than we are. We can expose them to a wide variety of experiences and offer support, but it is up to them what they do with these opportunities. All we can say is, "I'm here for you, no matter what you decide."

We must recognize our children are separate from us. They are entitled to have relationships with others free from our judgment, interference or control. Their relationship

with their teammates, their coach and the referees is their own business. The only time we intervene is if the consequences affect their health, safety or morals.

We do not have to rescue our kids from a "bad call," from seemingly unfair distribution of playing time or from the "agony of defeat." They can handle it and usually care a whole lot less about these things than we do. Most of us do way too much for our kids that they can be doing for themselves. If they are old enough to play hockey – to wear the equipment – they are old enough to carry the equipment. Doing for a child what he or she can do for him or herself creates dependency and discouragement.


Our job as parents is to give our children the opportunity to grow up to be responsible, independent members of society. We need to give them the skills to do this, and a positive experience in team sports is one way to prepare them. We need to ensure that when they come off the bench, they are ready to play the game of life.

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