

## HOW TO ESTABLISH RAPPORT WITH YOUR ATHLETIC CHILD

Here are some golden rules:

1. Make sure that your child knows that – win or lose, scared or heroic – you love him/her, and appreciate his/her efforts and are not disappointed in him/her. This will allow him/her to do his/her best, to avoid developing a fear of failure based on the spectra of disapproval and family disappointment if he/she does mess up. Be the person in his/her life he/she can look to for constant positive enforcement. Learn to hide your feelings if he/she disappoints you.
2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic capability, his/her competitive attitude, his/her sportsmanship and his/her actual skill level.
3. Be helpful but do NOT "coach" him/her on the track, diamond or court...on the way back... at breakfast...and so on.
4. Teach him/her to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying." To be working to improve his/her skills and attitudes... to take the physical bumps and come back for more. Don't say "winning doesn't count" because it does. Instead, help him/her develop the feel for competing, for trying hard, and for having fun.
5. Try not to re-live your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure; you fumbled, too, you lost as well as won. You were frightened, you backed off at times, and you were not always heroic. Don't pressure him/her because of your pride. Sure, he/she is an extension of you, but let him/her make his own voyage of discovery into the world of sport...let him/her sail into it without interference. Help to calm the water when things get stormy, but let him/her handle his/her own navigational problems.
  - Find out what he/she is all about and don't assume he/she feels the same way you did, wants the same things, and has the same attitudes.
  - You gave him/her life, now let him/her handle it, and enjoy it. Let him/her need you on his/her terms – don't help him/her to death.
  - Athletic children need their parents so you must not withdraw just remember there is a thinking, feeling, sensitive, free spirit out there in that uniform who needs a lot of understanding, especially when his/her world turns bad on him/her.
  - If he/she is comfortable with you – win or lose – he/she is on his way to maximum achievement and enjoyment – and you will get your kicks too!
  - In the meantime start to think of your child as a child, not as "my son/daughter, the athlete!!" If you do, the morale of the family will greatly improve.
6. Don't compete with the coach. The young athlete often comes home and chatters about "coach says this, and coach says that." This, I realize, is often hard to take especially for a mother or father who has had some sports experience.

When a certain degree of disenchantment about the coach sets in, some parents side with the youngster. This is a perfect opportunity to discuss (not lecture) with your student athlete the importance of learning how to handle problems, react to criticism and understand the necessity for discipline, rules, regulations and so on.

7. Don't compare the skill, courage or attitudes of your child with that of other members of the squad or team, at least in his/her hearing. And if your child shows a tendency to resent the treatment he/she gets from the coach, or the approval other team members get, be careful to talk over the facts quietly and try to provide fair and honest counsel. If you play the role of the overly – protective parent who is blinded to the relative merits of your youngster and his/her actual status as an athlete and individual; you will merely perpetuate the problem. Your student athlete could become a problem athlete.
8. You should also get to know the coach so that you can be assured that his/her philosophy, attitudes, ethics and knowledge are such that you are happy to expose your child to him/her. The coach has a tremendous potential influence.
9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate both when praised and when criticized. Temper your reactions to the tales of woe or heroics they bring home. Don't cut your student athlete down if you feel he/she is exaggerating – just take a look at the situation and gradually try to develop an even level.
  - Above all don't over – react and rush off to the coach if you feel an injustice has been done. Investigate, but anticipate that the problem is not as it might appear.
10. Make a point of understanding courage, and the fact that it is relative. There are different kinds of courage. Some of us can climb mountains, but are frightened to get into a fight; others can fight without fear but turn to jelly if a bee approaches. Everyone is frightened in certain areas – nobody escapes fear and that is just as well since it often helps us avoid disaster. Explain to your student athlete that courage does not mean an absence of fear but rather means doing something in spite of fear or discomfort.
  - In a way the parents are the primary coaches. I have talked with many great athletes who, in evaluating the reasons for their success have said, "My parents really helped – I was lucky in that respect."
  - To me the coaching job the parent has is the toughest one of all and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. It is worth all the effort when you hear your student athlete boast (now or later on) that you played a key role in his/her success!!