

How you can be a positive sports parent

By JACK PERCONTE
McClatchy-Tribune

Positive parenting in sports is a choice parents make that allows sports to be about kids and not about parents. Parents who are out to relive their playing careers through their kids are the source of a lot of negative parenting in sports. The choice to be positive is not easy because of the emotional ties involved. Parents want their kids to do so well and, of course, a parent's role is to help youth avoid mistakes that they may have made. Additionally, it is very difficult to see your kids struggle, so it is easy to become overbearing with advice and criticism.

Does this mean parents should just sit back and do nothing? Of course not, but parents are there to help kids deal with the physical, mental and emotional issues that occur in youth sports without forcing kids into decisions that are not mutual ones. Like most things, this positive choice requires practice and review, because it can be difficult to know if parents are placing their wishes and decisions on kids or not. With that in mind, following are some points to practice and review so everyone involved has a positive sports experience.

Positive parents should:

1. Objectively evaluate player's effort and not just their results when the preparation and effort is given, parents must learn to accept the results. When the effort is not there, parents should point that out in a compassionate manner and try to determine ways to help the child's interest and effort levels.
2. Allow kids to set their own goals and be realistic about their son's or daughter's potential. Unrealistic expectations are another common reason for drifting into negative parenting.
3. Communicate in a way that does not incite players and that does not attack them as people. Communication is a two-way street where parents should listen to their kids, understand their perspective, and try to determine the best course of action based on their kids' feelings.
4. Know when to talk to their kids about their sports play not continually, and at a time when kids do not feel bad enough, already.
5. Display the necessary patience to remain positive, with the understanding that pushing kids and teaching with negativity does not work.
6. Never forget the F-word Fun is the key to youth sports; and that does not mean just saying, "have fun" every time kids get upset. Finding ways to make sport fun and finding coaches that know how to do that is another responsibility of sport parents.

Finally, all parents of athletes want the best for kids. Unfortunately, the negative parents do not realize that their words and actions are causing a "disconnect" between them and their kids. Getting through to these type parents is necessary with better education of parents and youth sport coaches by our sport leagues, organizations and schools. Passing on positive parenting in sports information, even in an anonymous or subtle way, is necessary. I have seen parents change their attitudes with such information.

Jack Perconte played 12 years of professional baseball. After retiring from professional baseball in 1987, Perconte opened a baseball training academy in Naperville, Ill. The hitting drills, mental training and coaching tips found in "The Making of a Hitter" (www.jackperconte.com) were culled from the 60,000

hitting lessons Perconte estimates he gave while operating the academy. He has also written "Raising an Athlete," and writes for the blog Positive Parenting in Sports at www.jackperconte.com.