

# Top 10 Tips for Sports Parents

By Dr. Carol Dweck

Winning is great – but joyful, meaningful winning comes from a good team process.

## First and foremost, teach children the purpose of youth sports:

- 1. Having fun.** Win-at-all-cost parents and coaches spoil the fun for kids and cause many to drop out of sports entirely. Kids these days have lots of pressure on them to achieve. Sports should be something they look forward to and then feel good about.
- 2. Growing their skills.** The serious part of sports is inspiring kids to grow their skills through mentoring and practice. It's a good lesson for life – teaching them to work on weaknesses (and existing strengths) and pointing out how they're progressing. This isn't about just praising effort. It's about guiding the development of high-level skills.
- 3. Becoming a great team member.** On a win-at-all-cost team, it's often every team member for themselves. Each one proving that they're worthy. Yet, great teams have great "chemistry" – team members support, root for, and help each other whenever possible. Parents and coaches should encourage and reward this.

## What you expect in a game:

- 4. Full effort and commitment.** As legendary coach John Wooden said, that's a great game. Winning is secondary – but often follows from it.

## What to do when the team loses:

- 5. Analyze and learn.** You can share the team's disappointment, but then get down to work. What happened? What did we learn from it? What will we try to do next time? No finger-pointing, no blaming, but no excuses either – just learning. Let as much as possible come from the kids.

## What to do when the team wins:

- 6. Analyze and learn.** Often after a win, we just rest on our laurels. But wins can teach us a lot. What did we do that worked? How can we capitalize on that in the future? What were our weaknesses in the game? How can we overcome them? Again, let as much as possible come from the kids.

## Final tips:

- 7. Educate the other parents.** Many of the other parents may still be in the win-at-all-cost mentality. Bring them on board with your goals of having fun, growing skills, and building team spirit. They should understand that in the long run, this will serve their children best.

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## Top 10 Tips for Sports Parents, continued

8. **Minimize talk about “talent.”** Many parents may want to hear that their child is talented, more talented than the others. This kind of thinking can limit kids, both the ones with higher skills and the ones with lower skills at the moment. Therefore, talk of talent should be minimized.
9. **Highlight developing skills.** Talk of skills and developing skills should be highlighted. It gives more highly skilled children permission to take on challenges and make mistakes, without jeopardizing their “talented” status. And it gives students who currently have lower skill levels the motivation to learn and improve. It is not unusual for them to later excel.
10. **Stay mindful of one of my mantras.** “I have always been deeply moved by outstanding achievement and saddened by wasted potential.”

*Dr. Carol Dweck is the author of Mindset, a Stanford University Professor and a PCA National Advisory Board Member.*