

## **Supportive Sports Parents**

Athletics are a valuable part of the educational process. Being a supportive parent can help student athletes achieve both academically and athletically. Studies have shown that supportive parenting can boost self-esteem, encourage creative problem solving and foster a healthy, independent identity. Parents are an important component of making the participating in sports a worthwhile experience for their child.

Share your student's athlete goals and expectations. Ask them what their goals are. Listen and attempt to accept their goals and aspirations.

Be positive and model behaviors you expect from your student athlete. During competition, be a supportive and positive fan encouraging student athletes to do their best with their goals and team in mind.

Consistently demonstrate the behaviors you want your student athlete to learn from this experience, such as respect others, win and lose with equal grace, be a model of poise and confidence and look upon every situation as a learning experience.

Be the face athletes need to see during competition. When they look at their parents, they need to see the same things you hope for them--positive determination, composure, poise and confidence. Anger, frustration and disappointment will not help any athlete, especially ones that tend to be low-confidence performers.

Be a good listener reflecting any thoughts shared after practices and games are about the big picture, such as working hard and having a positive attitude. Always applaud your student athlete's efforts. They often seek praise, approval through your words, reactions and body language.

Do understand the big picture and keep things in perspective. Athletics are important and can teach student athletes so much, but it is only a small part of who your child is. If you really think about why we want your student athlete to be involved in athletics, it is because we hope that something happens during that experience that brings them joy and that is going to make them a better adult, parent, worker and citizen. We want them to have fun and enjoy the whole experience.

Do concentrate on the important lessons that sports can teach. Athletics provide a great opportunity for student athletes to learn lessons about life that they may not learn in the classroom. Focus on these life lessons: Being part of a team means playing a role, accountability, teachable spirit, mental toughness, resiliency, selflessness, work habits, confidence, pride and humility, discipline and leadership. These are the best things that can prepare them for success in all areas of their life.

One of the things that successful athletes attribute to their success is that they had parents who “released” them to the game – to the team, the sport and the coach. As soon as you know that your child is physically and emotionally safe, one of the best gifts you can give them is to let the activity become theirs. There is not a better place than athletics to learn to take healthy risks and to fail. Let them take the natural risks involved in sport without worrying. Teaching them that failure is part of the experience and it does not mean they are a failure. All of the successes and all of the struggles that come with sport participation are opportunities for student athletes to learn problem solving skills, while persevering and growing.

In athletic competition there are roles: players, coaches, parents, spectators and officials. It is better for the athlete if everyone carries out their appropriate role. Trying to get the team to perform well is the responsibility of the coaches and the players. It is the job of the official to make the judgment calls. Parents can contribute by being encouragers and confidence-builders.

When we really get to the core of why we want our students to play sports, all of us hope that the athletic experience provides an opportunity for our students athletes to have an enjoyable experience while they play the sport and to help them become a successful adult. Coaches and parents can work together to develop strong citizens.

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