GREAT SPORT PARENTING

Gloria Balague Ph.D.
USA Rhythmic Gymnastics
What do Exemplary Sport Parents Do?

They want sport to be their child’s activity, not theirs.

- They do not force a direction
- Share their daughter’s goals, not impose their own
- Foster independence (allow them to make some decisions and some mistakes)
- Emphasize effort and fun

They build healthy relationships

- Trusting and communicating with coaches
- Supporting the team and club
Exemplary Sport Parents (II)

• Cope with the Emotional Demands of Competitions
  • Assisting before competitions while teaching them to take responsibility
  • Monitoring emotions during and after competitions
  • Managing their own emotions, not overreacting to a bad score, never putting competitors down. After a competition, being supportive, being a sounding board and doing more listening than talking.

• Pynn, Dunn and Holt, 2018. Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology. Vol 8, # 2 163-178
RULES for PARENTS

- Have *realistic and appropriate* expectations
- Youth sport is about *Skill Development, not Results*
- Plan *effective ways to communicate with your child*
- Build *relationships with coaches and parents*
DO’S

• Reinforce being a good person
• Limit conversations about your daughter’s gymnastics
• Let her participate for her own reasons
• Support, don’t coach!
• Keep it fun
• Maintain composure during competitions (and before and after)
• Hold realistic expectations
• Be supportive, especially after a tough performance
• Encourage your daughter to keep her commitments and work hard
• Unconditionally love and support her

• Gould, Pierce, Wright, Lauer and Nalepa, 2016 Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology
DONT’S

- Focus your conversations always on sport
- Put the opponent down to make her feel good
- Criticize her for poor performance after meets
- Coach from the stands
- Treat her differently depending on results
- See her sport as a financial investment needing a return
- Reinforce bad sportmanship

Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology
DEVELOPMENTAL ISSUES

• Puberty changes: Physical, Emotional, Cognitive, Social…
• Impact on performance, approach to competition, motivation
• Pick your battles! Figure out your non-negotiables: Respect for others, manners, effort level…
• Watch out for social media behavior!
The Parents and the Coach

• Ideally allied to help the child, but with separate roles.
• Communicate with coach periodically, **not only when there is a problem**
• Allow your child to vent, but do not intervene too quickly.
Parents and Coach II

- Encourage your daughter to communicate directly. Rehearse with her and accompany her to support, but let her say it if she can.
- Help her take responsibility
- Issues with changing coaches
Parents and Parents

- You do not have to like your child’s friends’ parents.
- Separate your like/dislike from your child’s friendships
- Let gymnastics be your daughter’s activity. You just pay for it!
PARENTS AT/AFTER COMPETITION

• You are the emotional coach, so model calm and show confidence!

• After (if she can talk about it) ask how she thinks she did; I like to use 3 questions: What was Good about your performance? What do you want to do Better next time? How are you going to make sure you improve on that?

• Reward Effort!! Ask: Did you go for it? Did you do all your difficulties? Mention specifics: “I liked how you recovered after a mistake”.
THE FAMILY OF AN ELITE ATHLETE

• The higher the level the more time/resources an elite athlete requires.

• Issues of unfairness with siblings

• Being a good gymnast vs a good citizen

• Educate the rest of the family so they do not see her “only” as a gymnast: Show your pride about her grades, art projects, good deeds....
Common Roadblocks

- Trying to protect your child from all disappointment
- Wanting it more than she does
- Expecting a fair world
- Getting emotionally over-involved
- Wanting to see more return from your investment…
DO NOT IGNORE!

- Watch for signs of excessive stress:
  - Insomnia, drop in grades, repeated injuries, constant negative self comments
- Weight/Food issues: Make sure your daughter eats healthy but do not obsess over food. The whole family should eat healthy, do not single out the gymnast.