

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

The 5 Temptations of a Youth Sport Parent

By David Benzel



Somewhere between first introducing your child to sports and enthusiastically pursuing team participation, there lies a great temptation that beckons to most parents.

It plays out as an internal battle between **judging your child's sports experience** or **simply enjoying the journey**.

And it is real.

Parents that are aware of the risks and take steps to avoid it, improve their child's involvement with sports – and possibly their lifelong view of it.

Here are 5 ways that the temptation can ambush an unsuspecting parent.

1) Analyzing Technique

Most parents enter into a new sports season excited for their kids to have fun and experience all that athletics afford. However, they quickly encounter a slippery downward slope when they begin analyzing how their child executes his skills and how the coach, coaches.

They can fall into the mindset that it is their job to judge everything that takes place on the field – from the coach's technique to the team's behavior and their child's performance in each game.

Having a critical spirit robs them of the joy of just watching their kids play and learn and figure things out.

In many cases, this fault-finding mode can trickle into the next level of this temptation which involves vocalizing those internal thoughts.

2) Coaching from the Sidelines

The urge to communicate all of those compelling “words of wisdom” from the sidelines is just a bit much for some parents to contain. Yelling to their child that one-hot-tip that will surely help them to play better seems to make perfect sense.

Unfortunately, it doesn't work.

Athletes focused on the game and on the coach's instructions are not able to also process what is being hollered from the stands. **It is distracting at best.** Not only is this interruption unwanted by the coach, athletes, and surrounding fans, but it is also ineffective.

3) Showing Displeasure

Body language has the potential to have the same impact as words misspoken. Often parents will unwittingly demonstrate dissatisfaction with their child's performance or with a coach's decision.

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It might show up as:

- Rolling the eyes
- Frustrated gasp
- Kicking the ground
- Turning away
- Hands in the air

Even though it might innocently be a response to a general disappointment in the way the game is going, it is usually interpreted as, “my Mom/Dad is upset with me.”

Once again, this diverts the athlete’s attention from the task at hand. Additionally, because kids genuinely crave their parent’s approval it sets a negative tone on the child’s attempts to play well.

4) Criticizing Performance



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The car ride home may seem like the ideal time to have a constructive talk about the game. Regrettably, it can easily sound like criticism to the captive audience.

After a game – regardless of if it went well or not – kids are emotionally and physically drained. It is not the optimal time for feedback.

Parents anxious to share all their observations may start out the conversation with:

- If only you...
- What were you thinking when...
- I don't understand why you did...

If this becomes the pattern for the ride home, kids will quickly come to dread those conversations with mom and dad and begin to associate any feedback as undesirable.

5) Becoming the Agent

When a parent is dissatisfied with some aspect of the sports experience and seeks to manipulate the environment, he is playing a role that he was not meant to play. This is perhaps the unhealthiest of the 5 ways this temptation can play out.

It might look like a parent who:

- Fights to get a child on a particular team
- Works behind the scenes to get a certain coach
- Coerces a coach to give a child more playing time

In all of those scenarios, the parent is acting more like an agent than the child's hero, and it is not helpful to their growth and development.

So How Can A Parent Help and Not Hinder the Sports Experience?

The temptation to take on too much ownership is real.

If you find yourself being lured by these common temptations, it may be necessary to place some emotional distance between you and your athlete's performance. Be supportive but allow them to manage responsibilities on their own.

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In regards to the coach, be curious but don't make assumptions. If you have questions, then set up a time to speak to the coach one-on-one to get a clear picture of his coaching style and philosophy.

At the end of the day, the sports experience should be full of learning, fun, and character building. Parents that work to keep analyzing and criticism out of the picture, positively impact their child's immediate and long-term view of sports.

David Benzel is the Founder and Executive Director of [Growing Champions for Life, Inc.](http://www.growingchampionsforlife.com), which provides parents and coaches with practical tools & positive strategies for helping athletes reach their full potential while enjoying the youth sport experience. David is also the author of *"From Chump to Champ - How Individuals Go From Good to Great"* www.growingchampionsforlife.com