

# How to establish rapport with your athletic child

*by Lloyd Percival*

**1. Make sure that your child knows that- win or lose, sacred or heroic- you love them, appreciate their efforts and are not disappointed in them.**

This will allow them to do their best, to avoid developing a fear of failure based on the specter of disapproval and family disappointment if they do mess up.

Be the person in their life they can look up to for constant positive enforcement. Learn to hide your feeling if they disappoint you.

**2. Try your best to be completely honest about your child's athletic ability, their competitive attitude, sponsorship and actual skill level.**

**3. Be helpful don't "coach" them on the way to the track, diamond or court...on the way back ...at breakfast...and so on.**

Sure, it's tough not to, but it's a lot tougher for the child to be inundated with advice, pep talks and often critical instruction.

**4. Teach them to enjoy the thrill of competition, to be "out there trying" to be working to improve their skills and attitudes... to take physical bumps and come back for more.** Don't say "winning doesn't count" because it does. Instead, help develop the feel for competing, for trying hard, for having fun.

**5. Try not to re-live your athletic life through your child in a way that creates pressure; you fumbled too, you lost as well as you won. You were frightened, you backed off at times, and you were not always heroic. Don't pressure your child because of your pride.**

Sure, they are an extension of you, but let them make their own voyage of discovery into the world of sports...Let them sail into it without interference. Help to calm the waters when things get stormy, but let them handle their own navigational problems. Find out what your child is all about and don't assume they feel the way you did, want the same things, or has the same attitude.

You gave him life, now let them learn to handle it, enjoy it. Just remember there is thinking, feeling, sensitive, free spirit out there in that uniform who needs a lot of understanding, especially when their world turns bad on them. If they are comfortable with you-win or lose- they are on their way to maximum achievement and enjoyment- and you will get your kicks too!

## **6. Don't compete with the coach.**

The young athlete often comes home and chatters on about "coach says this, coach says that," ad nauseam. This, I realize, is often hard to take. When a certain degree of disenchantment about the coach sets in, some parents side with the youngster and are happy to see him shot down. This is a mistake. It should provide a chance to discuss (not lecture) with the youngster the importance of learning how to handle problems, react to criticism and understand the necessity for discipline, rules, regulations and so on.

## **7. Don't compare the skill, courage or attitudes of your child with other members of the squad or team, at least in range of him/her hearing.**

And if your child shows a tendency to resent the treatment he gets from the coach, or the approval other team members get, be careful to look over the facts quietly and try to provide fair and honest counsel. If you play the role of the over-protective parent who is blinded to the relative merits of your youngster and his actual status as an athlete and individual, you will merely perpetuate the problem. Your youngster could become a problem athlete.

## **8. You should also get to know the coach so that you can be assured that his philosophy, attitudes, and ethics and knowledge are such that you are happy to expose your child to him. The coach has a tremendous potential influence.**

## **9. Always remember that children tend to exaggerate, both when praised and when criticized.**

Temper your reactions to the tales of woe or heroics they bring home. Don't cut your youngster down if you feel he is exaggerating—just take a look at the situation and gradually try to develop an even level.

Above all, don't over-react and rush off to the coach if you feel an injustice has been done. Investigate, but anticipate that the problem is not as it might appear.

## **10. Make a point of understanding courage and the fact that it is relative.**

There are different kinds of courage. Some of us can climb mountains but are frightened to get into a fight; others can fight without fear but turn to jelly if a bee approaches. Everyone is frightened in certain areas—nobody escapes fear and that is just as well since it often helps us avoid disaster. Explain to your youngster that courage does not mean an absence of fear but rather means doing something in spite of fear or discomfort.

In a way, the parents are the primary coaches. I have talked with many great athletes who, in evaluating the reasons for their success, have said: "My parents really helped—I was lucky in this respect."

To me the coaching job the parent has is the toughest one of all and it takes a lot of effort to do it well. It is worth all the effort when you hear your youngster boast (now or later on) that you played a key role in his success.

