

Parental Support – The Key to Peak Performance

By Jeff Pill, New Hampshire Soccer Association Director of Coaching

The role that parents play in the life of a soccer player has a tremendous impact on their experience. EWG YSA has heard a lot of advice for parents, but none better than the following reminders. (EWG YSA has added the thoughts in parenthesis.) If you have any questions about the advice that follows, please discuss them with your child's coach.

Let the coaches coach: Leave the coaching to the coaches. This includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals or requiring additional training. You have entrusted the care of your player to these coaches and they need to be free to do their job. (You should ask the coach if he or she needs extra help at practice.)

Support the program: Get involved. Volunteer. Help out with fundraisers. (We always need help at the concession stand. Think about joining the executive committee. New ideas are always welcome.)

Be your child's best fan: Support your child unconditionally. Do not withdraw love when your child performs poorly. Your child should *never* have to perform to win your love.

Support and root for all players on the team: Foster teamwork. Your child's teammates are not the enemy. When they are playing better than your child, your child now has a wonderful opportunity to learn. (All children in EWG soccer are guaranteed at least 50 % playing time, and get the chance to play all positions. It is a developmental program. Parents and coaches should not emphasize winning.)

Encourage your child to talk with the coaches: If your child is having difficulties in practice or games...encourage him or her to talk to the coaches. This "responsibility taking" is a big part of becoming a big-time player.

Understand and display proper game behavior: Be supportive, cheer, be appropriate. A player needs to focus on the parts of the game he can control, such as positioning, decision-making and aggressiveness, not on what he cannot control. Parents should not distract a player by complaining about the weather, field conditions, referee or opponent. (See EWG YSA Code of Conduct.)

Monitor your child's stress level at home: Keep an eye on the player to make sure that they are handling the stress of a full schedule effectively.

Monitor eating and sleeping habits: Be sure your child is eating the proper foods and getting adequate rest.

Help your child keep priorities straight: Help your child maintain a focus on schoolwork, relationships and things in life besides soccer. Also, if your child has made a commitment to soccer, help him fulfill his obligation to the team.

Reality test: (EWG soccer does not keep score in games, but players still do. Help your child focus instead on preparing adequately for games. Parents should get their child to all games and practices on time. Players should follow coaching instructions. Coaches should not tolerate horseplay, poor attendance, lack of focus and poor effort.)

Keep soccer in proper perspective: Soccer should not be larger than life for the parents. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Your relationship will continue with your children *long after* their soccer days are over. Keep *your* goals and needs separate from your child's experience.

Have fun: (This is our main goal at EWG soccer. But we also stress developing soccer skills, sportsmanship and teamwork. A two-month season is an exciting time of growth for a child. Enjoy the season with us. Help us meet the challenge of helping your child grow as a person and a soccer player.)

Dos and Don'ts for Coaches and Parents

By Cheshire (CT) Soccer Club

DON'T

Don't shout instructions to the player with the ball. The player has enough problems maintaining possession while making quick and difficult decisions about what to do next. He or she must learn to make decisions without your input.

Don't use such phrases as, "boot the ball," "Kick it," or "Send it." First you violate the first "don't"; second, you encourage panic rather than good decision making, and mindless kicking rather than possession.

Don't try to control the game from the sidelines. You can't! A soccer coach is not an active participant in the game. Soccer is played, controlled and ultimately coached by the players on the field. Teach players to "coach" themselves.

Don't try to teach "aggressiveness." In soccer, what is perceived as "aggressive play" merely reflects the confidence a player has in his or her own abilities. Teach the skills that generate confidence; encourage players to believe in themselves. If you do, they will play "aggressively."

Don't abuse game officials, or show disrespect for opponents. Referees make fewer mistakes than your players; your opponents are not your enemy. Be aware of the example you set for your players.

DO

Do offer suggestions to players not currently involved in what is happening on the field. Brief words of advice are helpful to players who have time to consider them (those who are either out of the match or on the field far from the ball.)

Do encourage players to use the skills they are being taught. Encourage – and sometimes push – players to experiment in scrimmages and games. If this approach costs goals, learn to accept temporary setbacks as the price of progress, and recognize them as opportunities to help players improve. Soccer is best learned through trial and error.

Do teach players to coach themselves on the field. By the time they find themselves on a full-size field they will be unable to hear you anyway. Players must learn to assist each other in making hundreds of split-second decisions each game.

Do teach players the game's skills, and encourage them to hold the ball long enough to make good decisions about what to do next.