



# *US Youth Soccer Parent Education Program*

**The Parent's  
Guide**



*An Introduction to Youth Soccer*



US Youth Soccer provides a healthy activity through its recreational and small sided games programs. These programs emphasize FUN, and de-emphasize winning at all costs. Every child is guaranteed playing time and the game is taught in a fun and enjoyable atmosphere.

For the player with advanced skills and greater ambition, highly competitive leagues are offered. This player might have his or her sights set on a college soccer scholarship or playing for the U. S. Olympic or National teams.

US Youth Soccer is the largest member of the United States Soccer Federation, the governing body for soccer in the United States. US Youth Soccer is a nationwide body of over 600,000 volunteers and administrators, and over 300,000 dedicated coaches. Most of the coaches are also volunteers. US Youth Soccer registers over 3,000,000 youth players between the ages of five and nineteen. US Youth Soccer is made up of 55 member State Associations; one in each state, and two in California, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas.

US Youth Soccer is nonprofit and educational organization whose mission is to foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of America's youth through the sport of soccer at all levels of age and competition. Our job is also to make it fun, and instill in young players a lifelong passion for the sport.



The spirit of a child knows no bounds until limited by adults.

# ***The Parent's Guide***

## ***An Introduction to Youth Soccer***

**The guide is designed to provide a tool to assist parents new to the game of soccer to grow the spirit without limiting the child.**

**US Youth Soccer Coaching Committee and Coaching Education Department**

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## An Introduction to Youth Soccer

I just signed my child up for soccer!  
Now what do I do?

I don't know anything about this game.

I know that a lot of kids play it and love it. I know they use a white ball with some designs on it, that looks like a basketball. but rolls on the ground.

**Now what do I do?**





## Relax and Prepare for FUN!

### Kids love soccer because it is FUN!

- From an early age, every child loves to play with a ball. Soccer is just playing with the ball, except with others and with a few simple rules. Soccer is having **FUN!**
- The rules at the basic level are: the ball is shared with your teammates; the ball is kept away from your opponents; everyone has to "play nice;" every child gets their time with the ball and everyone has **FUN!**

### Basic equipment for soccer parents

- Comfortable lawn chair – comfort is important because you are going to be spending a lot of the time sitting in that chair watching youth soccer players having **FUN!**
- Comfortable clothing – you will be out in the sun, the rain, the heat and the cold. Dress comfortably so you can sit in that chair and watch youth soccer players having **FUN!**
- A sense of humor and joy at watching youth soccer players have **FUN!**

*"Real SOCCER... equals 2 Feet + 1 Ball - The rest is your... Imagination"*



## How to be a Supportive Parent

### Supportive Soccer Parents

- Give consistent encouragement and support to their children regardless of the degree of success, the level of skill or time on the field.
- Stress the importance of respect for coaches through discussions with their children, and highlight the critical nature of contributing to the team and its success.
- Serve as role models, see the “big picture” and support all programs and all players.
- Leave coaching to coaches and do not criticize coaching strategies or team performance.
- Avoid putting pressure on children about playing time and performance.





## Why Do Players Play?

1. To have fun
2. To be with their friends
3. To make new friends
4. To improve and learn
5. To feel good
6. To wear the stuff



“Make sure she knows that you are there because it is fun for you to watch her participate, not because you want to criticize.”

Caroline Silby, PH.D, Author of *Games Girls Play: Understanding and Guiding Young Female Athletes*



## Six Guidelines for Soccer Parents

Have you ever seen a truly gifted player sitting on the bench on any team unless the game was out of reach or the player was injured or winded? - Aicinena, 124

1. Cheer
2. Relax and Let Them Play
3. Yelling Directions = Distraction
4. Remember, They Are Your Genes
5. Have Reasonable Expectations
6. Meet with the Coaches

The greatest gift that you can give to your children throughout their sporting involvement is support. When asked what it is that they would most like from their parents in terms of support, most children suggest encouragement and acceptance of their choices.

-Australian Sports Commission





## Why Do Players Quit?

1. Criticism and yelling
2. No playing time
3. Over emphasis on winning
4. Poor communication
5. Fear of making mistakes
6. Boredom
7. Not learning



“Adult spectators, coaches and league administrators are guests At the children’s games. We are guests because if no adult attended, our hosts, the children, could still have a game.”

Douglas E. Abrams, University of Missouri-Columbia School of Law



## Four Red Flags for Parents

1. **Living Out Dreams** - A parent who is continuing to live personal athletic dreams through his/her child has not released his/her child to the game.
2. **Too Involved** - If a parent tends to share in the credit when the child has done well in sport or has been victorious, the parent is too involved.
3. **Trying Too Hard** - If a parent is trying to continue to coach his child when the child probably knows more about the game than the parent does, he has not released the youth athlete.
4. **Too Serious** - A parent should realize that he is taking everything too seriously and has not released the child to the activity when the parent:
  - is nervous before his/her child's game.
  - has a difficult time bouncing back when the player's team suffers a defeat.
  - makes mental notes during a game so he can give his child advice at the conclusion of the game.
  - becomes verbally critical of an official.

"Teaching Character through Sport: Developing a Positive Coaching Legacy" by Bruce Brown



## How Do I Start?

**Find out why YOUR child wants to play soccer! Ask the real questions?**

- Why do YOU want to play soccer?
- What is fun about soccer for YOU?
- What do YOU like to hear from ME before, during and after YOUR GAMES?

“Everyone forgets today's score before the end of the season, but decades later the children still remember the adults whose affection and support remained steadfast regardless of the scoreboard.”

Abrams, 2002





## Meeting Your Child's Needs

Once you have asked the questions, **LISTEN** to the answer and learn....

- Shape your support to meet your child's expressed desires; make his/her dreams come true.
- Ask yourself "What can I do to assist my child in being successful in meeting his/her goals for participation in soccer?"



92% of student-athletes believe participating in sports helps them to be a better person.

97% of student-athletes say the main reason they play sports is because it is fun and exciting.

*"The Athletes Speak Survey 2002-2004," a survey of pilot projects conducted by the National Center for Student Aspirations involving Maine and Massachusetts student athletes.*



## Four Emotional Needs of Players

### Children have four basic emotional needs in organized sports

1. To be treated like children, not miniature professionals
2. To be treated like children, not miniature professionals
3. Adult role models whose sportsmanlike behavior helps make participation fun
4. To play without unhealthy pressure to win imposed by parents and coaches

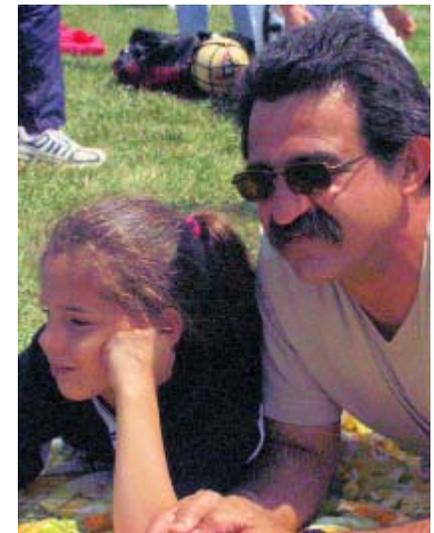
Douglas E. Abrams; Villanova Sports Journal, 2002





## Being a Good Soccer Parent

- **Encourage your child** regardless of his or her degree of success or level of skill.
- **Ensure a balance** in your student athlete's life, encouraging participation in multiple sports and activities while placing academics first.
- **Emphasize enjoyment**, development of skills and team play as the cornerstones of your child's early sports experiences.
- **Leave coaching to coaches** and avoid placing too much pressure on your youngster about playing time and performance.
- **Be realistic** about your child's future in sports, recognizing that only a select few earn a college scholarship, compete in the Olympics or sign a professional contract.
- **Be there** when your child looks to the sidelines for a positive role model.



Athletic participation must be healthful, positive and safe for everyone involved, conducted in an environment that teaches values and ethics, strengthens the community, promotes competition without conflict and enriches the lives of the athletes.

**Sports Done Right**™ *The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching*



## What Can I Expect?

- Children differ greatly due to age, gender and maturity
- Soccer is “the game for all kids” and that means there will be all types of kids playing together
- Most volunteer directed programs are conducted by parents and coaches who know they will be involved for only a few years while their own children are involved
- 85% of volunteer directed youth sports are coached by parents with a child on the team
- Women coach only 20% of the 5 to 14 year-olds on non-school-affiliated teams
- Less than 10% of the volunteer coaches in the United States have had any type of coaching education



Parents love their children and want the best for them. Parents should focus on their child’s potential rather than on an assumption of superiority. Parents should help their child to become what they can be, not fail at becoming something they are incapable of becoming.

Aicinena, 125



## You WILL Be Surprised?

- Young players cry immediately when something is hurt. Some cry even when something is not hurt
- Somebody will come off the field in need of a toilet. Somebody will stay on the field in need of a toilet (U8)
- A model rocket that is launched from a nearby field will get 99% of the players' attention
- Some players will wear their uniform to bed, to school and everywhere else
- A player will forget to go on the field, another will forget to go off
- Players will still stop and laugh if the referee gets hit in the backside with the ball during a game – they are not competing, they are having fun
- If you drive some one else's child to a game, he/she may not remember after the game to look for you to get home



“Most children play to have fun and be with their friends. They do not play to entertain the adults, boost the adults' egos or improve the family's social status in the community.” - Abrams, 2002



## What Does My Player Need?

1. **BALL** - Each child should have his or her own age appropriate ball and bring it to team practice.
2. **SHIN GUARDS** - An absolute requirement for games, should also be worn for all practices, the pull-on "legging" type with foam padding protecting the front of the leg from ankle to shin.
3. **SOCCER SHOES** - Recommended, but not required by most clubs. Soccer cleats for most recreational play must be rubber or molded plastic (no metal cleats), and no less than 3/8 inch in diameter. Baseball or football type shoes with square or rectangular cleats are not legal for soccer.
4. **WATER BOTTLE** (with child's name on it) - Fresh water should be available to your child at each practice and game.
5. **SHIRTS, SOCKS, SHORTS** - One or more of these items may be provided for each player by your local club. Be sure you are aware of your club's policies for games and practices



## What Is a “Practice”?

### Warm-up

- Enthusiastically sets the tone for fun.
- The warm-up prepares the mind and body for upcoming activities.
- Young players need very little stretching, but it is a good habit for them to begin at an early age.
- Warm-ups encourage each player to use a ball and often incorporate games and exercises that emphasize a lot of touches and dribbling

### Individual Activities

- Fun filled activities that emphasize technical development. Remember this is the discovery age. Lots of ball contacts.
- Activities are appropriate for the skills and ages of the players.
- The coach should be conducting a number of short and different activities.
- Remember a child's attention span is limited.



## What Is a "Practice"?

"With few exceptions, parents can be invaluable allies if they really know that a coach's first priority is the health, safety and development of their child."

Robert Cobb, University of Maine

### Group Activities

- Group games are an extension of the individual activity.
- Groups are small to allow for the most ball contact and players are involved in the game as much as possible, so they are not standing around in lines awaiting their turn.

### "The Game"

- Designed to familiarize the players with the varying aspects of the game. Kids want to play and have fun. After a brief explanation and/or demonstration quickly get the players playing.
- Small-sided games (e.g. 4 v 4) to help keep everyone involved. Activities are organized to progress into controlled scrimmages and then into an open scrimmage.
- Remember, the kids signed up to play soccer!



## Teaching Sportsmanship

**Here are six things you can do to show your child (and other parents) what being "a good sport" means:**

- Cheer for all the children, even those on the other team. What a surprising difference it can make on the sidelines and in the stands when parents make an effort to applaud a good effort or a fine play - no matter who makes it.
- Talk to parents of the other team: They are not the enemy.
- Be a parent, not a coach: resist the urge to critique. Children dread their parent going over their performance in detail, pointing out all their mistakes. Sometimes just being there shows your children what being a good parent is all about. Leave the coaching to the coaches: this includes motivating, psyching your child for practice, after game critiquing, setting goals, requiring additional training, etc.

"With few exceptions, parents can be invaluable allies if they really know that a coach's first priority is the health, safety and development of their child."

Robert Cobb, University of Maine



## Teaching Sportsmanship

- Thank the officials - Find a few moments to compliment the officials for their hard work after a game (especially if your child's team loses) you will be rewarded with the pleasure of seeing a surprised smile in return.
- Keep soccer in its proper perspective: Soccer should not be larger than life for you. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, suppress them. Remember your relationship will continue with your children long after their youth soccer days are over. Keep your goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
- Have fun: That is what the children are trying to do!

"One reason kids love video games so much is that they can each pick their own level of challenge."

Lenny Wiersma, Center for the Advancement of Responsible Youth Sports





## Game Day

### Sideline Behavior

- Children want cheerleaders to applaud their success, not adults yelling instructions. Think of the soccer field as a playground and not as a sports venue.
- What's appropriate at a sport stadium with adult athletes is NOT appropriate for young children at play.
- Focus on the process of playing and not the outcome.

“When watching a youth sports game, if you can't carry on a normal conversation with the person next to you then you're probably paying too much attention to the game.”  
- Bigelow, Moroney, & Hall, 2001





## Friends NOT Enemies

### Sideline Behavior

- Unlike the adult games, kids playing soccer do not see the other team as the enemy. The other team is full of their friends – friends from their school, their place of worship, their neighborhood. They are likely to be playing together in your backyard or in your den after the game.
- Cheer ANY and ALL success on the field. It DOES NOT matter what player OR team. They are all kids and they want you there to see them play.

“A good way to determine whether the sideline comments are helpful and supportive is to ask the children what they prefer to hear on the sideline, if anything.”

- Developing Decision Makers





## Kids Don't Care Who Wins

"Asked what embarrasses them most, every single child surveyed listed parents hollering plays or instructions from the sideline or stands."

Mom's Team.com

### Sideline Behavior

- Don't keep score, the kids don't regard it as that important.
- Don't care who wins or loses, they are having fun and that is the objective NOT winning or losing.

*Note: Winning can become more important as the child develops; for that reason, administrators seek to form balanced teams to create equal opportunities to win and lose.*

"Youth sports provide an ideal avenue for early exposure to setback and allows supportive adults to offer guidance with the stakes not nearly as high as they will be sometimes later on in life." - Abrams



**What is FUN for them is more important than what is FUN for you!**



## The Ride Home

- **Never reward** what you perceive as success
- **Never punish** what you perceive as failure
- **Don't evaluate** your child's performance, he or she is playing to have fun, not to earn a grade! If he/she had fun, the day was a success
- **Meet your child's needs:** remember the questions you asked and the answers you got as to why your child is playing soccer

"The youngsters are a captive audience in the back seat on the way home, but they deserve to ride in peace without being unwilling victims of their parents' "station wagon syndrome."

Abrams, 2002





## Good Questions on the Way Home

"If parents receive one-word answers or silence, they can be sure that their child feels trapped with no way out." Silby, 2000

- **Did you have fun today?**
- **What did you think you did well today?**
- **Did you learn any new moves?**

*If you are greeted with the sound of silence, give off the gentle sounds of approval, be sure he/she knows you there for him/her.*

"Parents need to understand that the period following practice and competition is a crucial time for a young athlete. It's important she be given the freedom to process it on her own."

- Silby, 2000





## Dealing with the Coach

- **Let the coach - coach**
- **Ask the coaching philosophy, team rules and guidelines**
- **When to ask questions** - Don't ask questions during a game or in front of a small group that you wouldn't want asked of you.
- **Ask the coach how you can help, during practice and games** – Get involved.
- **Be supportive** - Always role model positive behavior, support the program.



“What often happens in the parent-coach relationship is that the parents become critical of the “poor job” the coach is doing. They complain to their spouses and other parents, often in front of their children. This serves to undermine what authority and “expert” knowledge the coach may have had in the beginning. This results in greater challenges for the coach. In such a case, those engaging in vociferous complaints are contributors to the problems challenging the coach.” Aicinena, 27



## Conflicting Agendas

### Why are the children playing?

- to have fun
- friends are playing
- mom said so
- time away from mom and dad
- get player in shape

### Why is the coach, coaching?

- their child is playing
- wants to be in charge
- wants to show the players all the skills they have learned over their career
- because they enjoy and have fun with the kids
- to give back to the game



If your child were truly one of the best players, how would the coach benefit by not playing him/her?

Aicinena, 124



## What about Referees?

### Everyone sees the play differently.

- The main goal of the referee is to make the game safe and fun for the children.
- Being a referee is not as easy as it appears. They are another coach on the field for small sided games.
- Remember, many referees are brothers and sisters of soccer players or soccer players themselves. Others are fellow parents trying to just help youth soccer players have FUN!
- Recognize that the referee is doing his/her best. It may not be what you saw, but the goal is to let the game be played so that children can have FUN!.





## Let the Referee Call the Game

### Referees deserve respect and support too!

- Helping the referee to call the trip or a foul only confuses children.
- Disagreeing hurts you child's respect for the referee, and may hurt the view of the referee towards your child's team.
- Criticism causes referees to quit rather than become better. Many referees quit due to being yelled at by parents.
- As you cheer for the players, cheer for the referees too.



“Parents and coaches need to remember that if officials can hear profanity and other verbal abuse directed at them when a call goes against the team, the children on the field can also hear it.”

Abrams, 2002



## Resources & Credits

**US Youth Soccer  
Coaching Committee**

**US Youth Soccer  
Coaching Education Department**

**US Youth Soccer  
Parent Education Task Force**

**Kentucky Youth Soccer  
Parent Education Program**

*"The Challenges Facing Parents and Coaches in Youth Sports: Assuring Children Fun and Equal Opportunity", Douglas E. Abrams, Villanova Sports and Entertainment Law Journal*

*"Through the Eyes of Parents, Children, and a Coach: A Fourteen-Year Participant-Observer Investigation of Youth Soccer", Steven Aicinena*

*"Games Girls Play", Caroline Silby*

*"Sports Done Right"™ - The Maine Center for Sport and Coaching*  
[www.mcsc.umaine.edu/sportsdoneright](http://www.mcsc.umaine.edu/sportsdoneright)

*"Developing Decision Makers", Dr. Lynn Kidman,*  
[www.ipcltd.com](http://www.ipcltd.com)

*"Teaching Character through Sport: Developing a Positive Coaching Legacy" by Bruce Brown*

*"A Guide for Parents" – Florida Youth Soccer*

*"Parent Booklet" - The Australian Sports Commission*

*"The Cheers and Tears", Shane Murphy, PhD.*



<http://usyouthsoccer.org>

**Thank you for taking the time to read The Parent's Guide – An Introduction to Youth Soccer. The guide is designed to provide a tool to assist parents new to the game of soccer to grow the spirit without limiting the child.**

**Now that you have completed the guide, please take a moment to go online at USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG to take a short quiz on these materials. At the successful completion of the quiz, you will be able to print a personalize Certificate of Completion.**

*The spirit of a child knows no bounds until limited by adults.*

To promote the growth of the game in the United States by properly preparing those new to the game to encourage the young child to develop a love for the game is the mission of US Youth Soccer's Coaching Committee and Coaching Education Department