

HOW TO CREATE A PARENT EDUCATION PROGRAM

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Parents play a crucial role in the soccer growth process of their child, yet, are the least informed participants. The whole skill of parenting is clouded by common misconceptions and poor role modeling by parents who are a product of their own upbringing. Parents want what's best for their child, but could actually do more harm than good through lack of knowledge or education. Most parents would gladly accept advice from people they perceive as experts if they believe that knowledge gained will help their child. Youth clubs can enlist experts and/or develop the expertise to provide guidance to parents. The efforts in this area are certainly going to be worthwhile if the parents become more supportive of the coach, the club and most importantly, their child. Some of the parenting topics that require the most guidance fall under the following categories:

Overbearing Parents

Today's society has become more materialistic and competitive. Parents want to start preparing their child for the world earlier than previous generations. The result is often overbearing parents who constantly monitor their children and suffocate their freedom to be kids.

Whose needs and expectations are met?

Some parents live vicariously through their children and some coaches are in it for their own personal glory. Youth sport is often shaped to satisfy the needs of the adults rather than the needs of the kids. Kids play sports to have fun, be with their friends and learn new skills. Many children quit organized sports by the time they are teenagers because their needs are not being met.

How players become committed to a sport

Players go through stages of commitment and 'fall in love' with a sport if they enjoy it and are improving their skill. Motivation and enjoyment go hand in hand with youth sports. Parents often force the sport on the child and try to 'fast track' the commitment level. They need to let the child decide how much time they want to spend playing and training.

What the coaches are trying to teach the players

Parents need to have some understanding on how players develop their soccer skills, the benefits of practices over games, the age specific priorities of technique over fitness and tactics and what a good practice looks like in order to maximize ball contacts and hone technique.

Role of practices versus games

We have a disease in North America called 'tournamentitis'. Our youth teams play in too many tournaments and don't train enough. Parents and coaches think that players develop in games but players actually develop mostly through the practices.

Tournaments benefits and pitfalls

Tournaments have become big business in North America. They are good for fund raising and for team bonding and family outings, but they are not conducive to player development. By the second game of the tournament, players are too tired to derive any developmental benefits. Teams should not do more than 2-3 tournaments per year, but many teams do 8-10 tournaments. Tournaments have the potential to cause burnout and are a financial hardship for many families who think they have to spend all this money to play on a good team.

How College Showcases work

Many tournaments are billed as 'College Showcase' yet attract teams as young as U-12. College coaches are not interested in looking at U-12 players and only start to scout players at U-16 and U-17. Also, college coaches don't go to tournaments to 'see what's out there'. They come to a tournament prepared with a list of players they want to observe. Players do not get 'discovered' at tournaments. Unless they have done the leg work first and contacted the college coaches and sent them their resume, college coaches won't know they exist and there are way too many players in a tournament for college coaches to notice someone out of the blue.

Player evaluations

Parents should sit with the coach and get an evaluation of their child's progress. But at the youngest ages of U-6 through U-12 there is no need to fret over strengths and weaknesses and goal setting. It should all be about fun and social skills and self image and confidence building. Starting at U-13, the soccer potential can be evaluated and discussed.

Playing up

Some parents think that their child should play up to be challenged. It's again the 'fast track syndrome' of parenting. Playing up is only recommended if the player would still be an impact player with the older team and has already gone through most of the puberty so physical attributes potential is already known. Many players show early promise but fizzle out once other players reach their puberty.

Understanding the role of youth sports

Parents should be reminded that 99.9% of players will not become professional players. The most important benefits from youth sport are the social skills, life skills, coping skills and values and character building that a sport team setting can offer.

Understanding the odds of success

Many parents look at soccer as an opportunity to get a college soccer scholarship. Only a small percentage of players get soccer scholarships and the average soccer scholarship is around \$8,000 per year while the average college expenses are \$40,000 to \$60,000 per year. Parents spend thousands of dollars a year on youth sport looking for a return on their investment and the numbers don't add up except for a few very talented players.

Role modeling

Parents need to keep in mind their responsibility to model good behavior to their child. Staying positive on the sideline, no coaching from the sidelines, treating everyone with respect, are just a

few examples of positive role modeling. Being a good listener and not manipulating the conversation towards their agendas but rather using conversations to learn about their child's needs and wants are desirable parenting skills.

Evaluating the club and the coach

Parents need to be educated on what a good club should be like. Are the club coaches and officers behaving in a way that is consistent with the club's mission? Are the coaches licensed and knowledgeable? Are the players treated properly or are they abused?

Understanding the pursuit of excellence

For players to reach their potential, they have to invest time and effort in addition to what they do with the team. Top players have all spent hours practicing and watching soccer on TV when they were young. It's what players do away from their team that will determine how far they advance in the game. Just because a number of youth coaches are trying to recruit their child doesn't mean that their child 'has arrived'. Achieving success at U-12 means nothing. It's where they will be at 19-20 that is most important and there are no short cuts. Talent is not enough. It takes a lot of hard work and dedication to reach the top and not everyone will achieve it.

All the topics listed above plus any other deemed important by the club should be addressed thoroughly through handbooks, meetings, newsletter, etc. The effort behind parent education by clubs will pay dividends in the long run. Good luck