

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

Help Your Child Develop a Love for Sports

By David Benzel



You love sports.

In fact, some of your fondest memories from youth, center around participating in YOUR favorite sport.

And now that you are an adult, you are on the other side of all the great benefits you gained from your sports experience. Things like:

- Learning a skillset
- Growing in confidence

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- Being physically fit
- Making solid friendships
- Working towards goals

Yet it is apparent that your child does NOT share your enthusiasm for being active.

- **If only you could get him to see the fun side of being on a team.**
- **If only you could convince her there is value in being an athlete.**
- **If only you could help him to develop a love for sports.**

That's a lot of "if only" to dwell on. And although there are never any guarantees when it comes to our kid's choices, there are some things you can do, to give your child the best chance of having a good sports experience.

Here are 4 of them.

1) Let Her Choose

Allowing your child to choose which sport she will play, may be more difficult than you care to admit. Because let's face it, most of us ARE attracted to creating a "mini-me."

If you happened to be pretty good at your favorite sport, then her choice might seem like a no-brainer—at least to you.

However, giving your child the opportunity to choose HER sport, sets the stage for:

- More ownership
- A positive view
- A platform to express her own unique talents and likes

How-To: Sometimes a child may be inclined to pick an activity that is unrealistic—especially in regard to finances or availability. Take these steps to help her.

- Create a parent-approved list with several choices on it
- Expose her to multiple sports with varying levels of intensity

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- Talk to her about how her body-type will make her stronger for particular activities (i.e., being shorter might give her a natural edge for gymnastics)
- Explain the differences between a team and individual sport and help her to discern what best fits her personality

2) Give Him the Tools to Be Competent

Once he has chosen a sport, your #1 parental job is to be “his biggest fan.”

Providing your budding athlete with the tools he needs to be competent is probably the most tangible way to show your support.

However, it’s critical to recognize the difference between helping him to be competent at the skills required, and pushing him beyond HIS competitive appetite. The latter can land you in a place where your child resents you and the sport.



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How-To: Getting your child the help he needs to learn and improve his skills does not always necessitate personal coaching. Here are some other ways to help him gain competence and confidence:

- You can help by just spending 10-20 minutes together—a few days a week—practicing the drills that will help him improve
- Enlist the help of an older sibling or another athlete on the team to mentor your child
- Be sure that he has the right equipment and gear to improve

3) Incentivize Them to Get Better

Not every athlete will be competitive. Some kids could really care less when it comes to being the best.

And that's OK.

But you can still encourage your athlete to work hard at improving. You must find the right way to incentivize them. And for each kid that might look different.

Aside from the obvious incentives like personal awards, recognition, and accolades teach your child about the basics of working toward a measurable goal.

How-To: Be creative in the ways you both measure efforts. For example:

- Tell her to focus on going just a little longer before taking a break—in other words, build her endurance.
- Encourage her to set a goal date to be better at one part of her sport. For a tennis player, it might mean working on aspects of her footwork.
- Talk about the great benefits to just being physically active. Focus on staying consistent and healthy with her fitness choices.

4) Keep It Fun

Kids are notorious for getting bored. And guess what? This can happen even when there IS a lot of fun to be had.

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When your child tells you he is bored with his sport, challenge him to figure out what would make it more fun. Let him be a part of solving the problem. And always insist that he follow through with his commitments.

If however, it becomes clear that he needs a break or wants to explore other activities, remember that each decision is for a season.

How-To: Keeping it fun will look different for every child but often comes down to these issues:

- Are they spending time with friends?
- Do they have enough variety?
- Are they well-rested and getting proper nutrition?
- Are the coaches and parents imposing too much stress?

There Are Other Options

Are you still feeling like your child will just never love sports?

It's OK. Organized sports have their place, but they don't have to be the ONLY solution.

At the end of the day, we want our kids to make healthy choices, and being physically active is a significant part of good health.

Help your child to pick ways to be active every day. It could include:

- Cycling
- Running—train for and do a 5K as a family
- Walking
- Swimming recreationally
- An exercise class
- Jumping on a trampoline

Make staying active a family priority and allow each person to customize or choose what they want to do, give them the ability to get good, encourage them to work at improving, and always keep it fun.

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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