

Making Sports Great For Your Kids

We live in an age where parents often have trouble distinguishing between a fun game of soccer and the potential for a seven-figure Nike endorsement deal. They push golf clubs into their 3-year-old's hands in the hopes of raising the next Tiger Woods and start fist fights at little league games. While those may be the most extreme of examples, there is not a parent who hasn't struggled with issues involving their own child's performance.

I have experienced the sports world from many different perspectives. I was an elite level athlete. I spent five years on the United States Rhythmic Gymnastics National Team, was a Junior National Champion, winning all five gold medals, competed in many international competitions and performed exhibitions at the 1984

Olympic Games. During graduate school I served as a sports coach and a judge for gymnastic competitions. It was my work

with those athletes that helped me create Psychological Edge, my sport psychology consulting, business, which I do in addition to my psychotherapy practice.

As a result of these experiences I have witnessed first hand the struggles parents face to help their children become better athletes and better people. If you push too hard you may push your kid right out of the world of sports, but if you don't help an undisciplined child learn to keep his commitments to the team or herself, you may unwittingly teach her to undervalue her word. A great book that helps parents with these struggles is *Pushed to the Edge: How to Stop the Child Competition Race So Everyone Wins*. In this book the author, Donna Corwin, teaches parents

how to encourage healthy competition and accomplishment without pushing too hard.



Photo: Sharon Holly
Sports can be great for kids if they're not pushed too hard.



Dr. Jenn

—Dr. Jenn Berman

Here are some things for parents to consider when trying to best support their athletic children.

Focus on the process not the end result. The process or effort put forth is far more important than the outcome. This is the only thing your child can control. If your child is able to show some commitment to the activity he will learn how to commit to other things in life.

According to sports psychologist Dr. Alan Goldberg: "Perhaps the most common (and the most performance-disrupting) mistake is an overemphasis on winning and the outcome. Parents who get their kids too focused on the outcome of an athletic contest inadvertently participate in their child's bad performance. You can't play your best at any age if you are focused on or worried about

Please see Dr. Jenn, page 121

RESOLUTIONS from page 31


that at least someone in your household be a part of your support team. They can help support you in having your home life be congruent with your resolution becoming reality, as well as assist you when you "fall off the wagon" that tomorrow is a New Day.

You may also want to consider hiring a professional coach. One of the things they are trained at is helping you find your blind spots and where you could improve further still. A coach helps you get outside of your own head and gives you a neutral perspective on how to bring your performance to the next level.

10. Remember... it's fun! Don't forget to have fun and enjoy the process of achieving your New Years resolutions and when coming at them from these 10 steps, two things are sure to happen: 1) You love the process of accomplishing your resolution, and therefore 2) You have AMAZING results.

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at VALENCIA II



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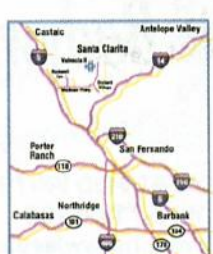
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Hundreds of readers responded to this year's family choice award balloting, answering our call to identify the best family oriented businesses in the Southland. Each month, we'll introduce readers to a few of the different winners.



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Caricatures by Jennifer West

Jennifer West is a former television and Disneyland artist, and her fun caricature art will enliven any event. For more information, call 800-DOODLES.

Santa Monica Gymnastics Center

8476 Warner Dr., Culver City

Santa Monica Gymnastics Center offers summer and winter day camps, gymnastics classes, baby and me classes, and a special needs program. They also organize competitive teams and birthday parties. For more information call (310) 838-4228.

DR. JENN from page 40

winning or losing. In order to win, the child-athlete must concentrate on what she is doing and nothing else."

You can help your child by asking process-oriented questions like "How did it go?" "Did you have fun?" "How do you like the game?" or "What was it like playing against that team?" instead of outcome oriented questions like "Did you win?"

Let your child make his own goals. Your child may surprise you. A few years ago a young competitive swimmer came into my office for a sports psychology consultation. During the session she told me about her goal to qualify for the national championships. We made process-oriented goals and worked on imagery to help her performance. The next day I got a call from her mother who was very concerned. She believed that while her daughter was a very hard worker, she was not as naturally talented as the other girls on the team. She was worried that her daughter would be disappointed. I explained to her that it was not her job to tell her daughter whether or not her goals were reachable, just to support her. As it turned out, the mom was wrong. Her daughter not only qualified for the competition, she placed really well.

Be unconditionally supportive. Sandy Connelly a top rhythmic gymnastics coach always told the parents of her athletes "leave room for the coach to coach." The belief behind this statement is that kids need parents to be the support system so the coaches can push as hard as they need to get results. Child athletes need to be able to turn to their parents for that support. Never withhold love or act angry about your child's athletic results.

Don't participate in your child's burn out. In a study on the sources of stress and burnout in youth golf, some of the most frequently cited reasons for burnout in golf were: 1) Over training; 2) A lack of enjoyment; 3) Too much pressure from self and others to do well. If you push your child to practice too much they will enjoy their sport less and they will feel pressured by you to do well. It is worthwhile to note that most great athletes are self-motivated anyway.

Help your child learn how to be a graceful winner/ loser. Not being selected is not a measure of self-worth or even an indicator of your child's future in sports. Michael Jordan didn't even make his 10th

grade basketball team and still managed to do pretty well in the sport later in life. The most valuable lesson I learned as an athlete was not as a result of winning. My first year at the Rhythmic Gymnastics National Championships I was one of the only people on my team who did not make the National Team. To this day, I will never forget congratulating all of my teammates who made the team and waiting until I got to my hotel room to cry. As painful as it was, I am glad I had that lesson on good sportsmanship. It taught me many life lessons such as how to lose well, the importance of training hard, discipline, and ultimately how to win well.

The good news is that you don't have to be a perfect parent. The most important thing is to make your child feel supported and loved by your regardless of his or her performance.

Dr. Jenn Berman is a psychotherapist and sports psychology consultant. She regularly appears on television and radio as an expert on psychological issues. She has been on 48 Hours, NBC News, The Other Half, and many more. For questions, comments, or advice to be used in one of her columns, she can be reached through her website at www.DoctorJenn.com.