

## Five Tips for Youth Football Parents



At some point in their lives, many children express an interest in playing football. Some parents react with swelling pride at the thought of their future MVP quarterback; others immediately shudder in horror at the thought of their sweet little baby playing such a dangerous game. A more appropriate reaction lies somewhere in the middle. To eliminate

some of the mystery and misconceptions, this guide outlines five essential principles that every youth football parent should understand.

### 1. Know Your Role as a Football Parent

First thing's first: You have every right to make any and all decisions related to the well-being of your child. If at any time you feel your child is in a legitimately dangerous situation, it's both your right and responsibility to remove your child from harm's way.

In reality, the type of situation that would warrant such severe language happens very, very rarely. As this is the case, it's important you understand that when it comes to matters associated with your child's team, the coach is ultimately in charge.

Confronting the coach in the middle of practice, or during the halftime break of a game, is not a good idea. The coach will likely brush you off, and you'll walk away feeling jaded. Instead, take the following advice when approaching the coach:

#### Hot Tip: Talk it Out

For beginning players, dealing with a head coach is unfamiliar territory. Depending on how old your player is, this may be something you'll want to bring up with him as well. Explain that the coach is in charge of football, like a parent or guardian figure is in charge at home.

- If you have a question or concern about something that's going on — it can be as trivial as the players' sock color, and as important as a nagging injury — you should absolutely feel comfortable bringing it up with the coach...**at the right time and place.**
- Set up a time when both you and the coach are available to talk freely and with minimal distractions.

## 2. Be Ready to Help the Coach

Running a youth football team is not a one-person operation. A football parent's duties extend way beyond simply transporting your player to and from the field. Here's a sampling of the type of jobs football parents will be expected to do:

- Work the concession stand during games
- Work the measurement chains during games
- Assist the coach during practice
- Coordinate fundraising efforts
- Transport equipment and gear

A good coach will go out of his way to express gratitude for a parent's assistance.

Regardless of the coach's appreciation, actual or perceived, parents sign themselves up for additional responsibilities as soon as they sign up their child to play.

## 3. Cuts & Bruises are Inevitable

Football is a physical, contact-heavy sport by nature. Players at the youth level aren't capable of delivering the same bone-jarring hits seen in the National Football League, but it's likely that your player will be involved in a hearty collision at some point. And while it's important for your child to learn the following lesson, it's just as important for the parents: There is a big difference between *hurt* and *injured*.



Younger football players — especially those who are new to the game — may require a bit of time to get used to football's rough-and-tumble nature. They may not be used to the sensation that comes with being tackled, making a tackle, or getting pushed over on a block; "sensation" refers to the fact that it can

hurt a little bit, even if you're the one delivering the hit. But once they take a few licks and realize everything still works fine, those players will soon accept that physicality as part of the game.

This same lesson can be even harder for parents to learn. No good parent would reasonably stand by while their child was being severely maimed, but parents shouldn't treat a scraped knee or bruised elbow like a compound fracture. This is an understandably fine line; some parents will be more comfortable than others with the idea of their child playing football. And again, as a parent you absolutely have the right to remove your child from any situation you deem legitimately dangerous. Still, after a bit of time and exposure, both players and parents should find it much easier to enjoy all that football has to offer — including the physicality.

## 4. Don't Reach for Your Wallet

It's probably not news to any parent, but kids tend to grow. And more to the point, they routinely outgrow their clothes. The same is true for sports apparel and equipment; like the newest shiny toy that every kid on the block wants, many youth football players seem convinced that only the most expensive gear will allow them to play well. Here are two specific equipment traps that are easy to fall into:

If there's one piece of equipment that's ok to spend extra money on, it's the mouthguard. Though you can get a perfectly functional mouthguard for no more than a couple of bucks, it may be a worthwhile investment to spend a bit more on a top-end mouthguard. This is especially true for players with dental or orthodontia work.

1. **Cleats:** Most high-end cleats cost upwards of \$100. And while there are a few benefits to investing serious money in cleats, the cost quickly outweighs the advantages when you have to replace cleats every season or two. Stick with more moderately priced cleats — and in terms of cleat type, molded is definitely the way to go.
2. **Under-pad clothes:** Shirts and pants designed to regulate body temperature and help remove sweat are all the rage today. However, while they work to that effect in adults, buying such items for kids is overkill. The same argument with the expensive cleats applies here as well: This type of clothing is expensive, and your child will likely outgrow them quickly.

## 5. It's All Fun & Games

While joining a football team *can* teach your child about discipline, teamwork, and perseverance, your child should also enjoy playing. That's not to say you should let them quit after the first practice because they're not used to running around so much; rather, if you get the impression that your player reacts to football like it's detention with pads, your child simply may not like playing football. Encourage them to stick it out at first, but don't let it turn into a forced march. There's no reason to associate playing football with being punished.