



Thank you for being a parent and thank you for letting your child play sports, as it can build and develop so many characteristics that can help them be successful later in life. Frederick Douglass once said, ***“It is easier to build up strong children than it is to repair broken men.”*** Parenting is hard – unless being perfect is natural for you. Parenting an athlete can be even harder at times because it is so public. It might not seem easy to build up strong children and raise them the right way – especially, when it comes to their athletic careers – but it is so worth it. All we must do is turn on the TV, scroll through social media, or interact with people on a daily basis and we see the need for more positive values such as respect, responsibility, and gratitude. When we positively develop our children, we are helping to influence and shape the future. Our children are the future leaders. How will they be taught to lead? Sports is a microcosm of life and a great means by which to teach our children lessons that they might not experience as much or as quickly otherwise. Just like we want our children to be better members of the community, we also want them to be the most valuable teammate that they can be for their team. In the same way, as parents we can also play a big part in making the team better. Here are 9 ways that you can be the most valuable parent on your child’s team ...

1.) Stop Comparing – Teddy Roosevelt said that “comparison is the thief of joy.” We don’t need to compare our kid to another kid. We don’t need to compare ourselves to another parent. We don’t even need to compare ourselves to the way we were parented. The great basketball coach John Wooden described success as “peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best you are capable of becoming.” Be the best parent YOU can be. Help your child understand that all they can do is be the best that THEY can be. Everybody is different. Everybody has strengths and weaknesses. Focus on being the best version of you.

2.) See Other Perspectives – Many of our frustrations in life come because we are only seeing our tree and not the whole forest. We are not taking the time to understand other people, situations, or perspectives. Many of us seek first to be understood, rather than seeking to understand. Something doesn’t fit our narrative, agenda, experiences, or background and we are quick to judge. Kids are different than their parents. Parents and coaches see things differently. Parents are focused on their kids more than other kids. We see things differently than others. This

doesn't mean that we are right, and they are wrong (or vice versa), it just means that we have different perspectives. You will never understand why your kid did (or didn't do) something if you are stuck on your way of thinking. It is the same with other parents and with coaches. Practice reserving judgement or holding your tongue until you've tried to walk a mile in someone else's shoes. Try to see their perspective. It doesn't mean that you'll agree with their perspective but the sooner we realize that we are not always right (wait, what?!?) the sooner we'll start to see a mindshift into positivity and solution-focused things rather than negativity and problem-fixated thinking.

3.) Be Positive – Being positive doesn't mean that you ignore the negative but rather that you overcome the negative. This isn't telling your kid that they are better than the kid that starts ahead of them or that their team is better than the opponent that just beat them by 30. It is identifying and emphasizing the qualities that make your child and/or their team good. Good is a relative term and can mean a lot of things. Saying things like "I know that you are disappointed in the results but I saw what you did in the 3rd quarter of that game when you got water for a teammate during a timeout even though you didn't have to" or "Yes, you struggled shooting the ball tonight, but you'll have off nights sometimes. I was most impressed that you dove for three loose balls and played tough defense." Choosing to find positives can be contagious, whether you are dealing with another parent, your child, or the coach. It is your choice whether you are contagious in a good way or bad way. Are you a germ or a big dose of Vitamin-C?

[Listen to Travis Daugherty, a former basketball coach and author of a sports parenting book, share parenting advice by clicking here](#)
[\(JamyBechler.com/TravisDaugherty\)](https://JamyBechler.com/TravisDaugherty)

4.) Always Grow – "Most Valuable Parents" are typically "Most Improved Parents" as well. Parenting is hard. None of us know it all. Talk to others. Google things that we don't know. Listen to parenting podcasts. Our personal growth and development will help us be better parents. I love to read (it makes time go quicker when I am on the stationary bike exercising). Here are a few books that I'd recommend that can help you (or your student-athlete) ...

- *The LENS: Raising a Champion Athlete and Man in Today's Myopic World* by Travis Daugherty
- *12 Huge Mistakes Parents Can Avoid: Leading Your Kids to Succeed in Life* by Tim Elmore
- *13 Things Mentally Strong Parents Don't Do: Raising Self-Assured Children and Training Their Brains for a Life of Happiness, Meaning, and Success* by Amy Morin
- *The Energy Bus: 10 Rules to Fuel Your Life, Work, and Team with Positive Energy* by Jon Gordon
- *The Leadership Playbook: Become Your Team's Most Valuable Leader* by Jamy Bechler
- *Changing the Game: The Parent's Guide to Raising Happy, High Performing Athletes, and Giving Youth Sports Back to our Kids* by John O'Sullivan
- *#HeySportsParents: An Essential Guide for any Parent with a Child in Sports* by Sharkie Zartman and Dr. Robert Weil
- *Parenting Young Athletes the Ripken Way: Ensuring the Best Experience for Your Kids in Any Sport* by Cal Ripken and Rick Wolff

[Hey coaches & administrators, learn how to stop “dealing with parents” by clicking here
https://www.w.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/stopped-dealing-with-parents.html](https://www.w.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/stopped-dealing-with-parents.html)

5.) Emphasize Responsibility – This is one of the biggest issues with kids today – they blame their results, actions, or outcomes on anyone and anything other than themselves. In fact, we do it as adults. The first thing we do when we get pulled over for speeding is to rationalize or make excuses. We might even blame the police officer for enforcing the law or play the victim card. When I was an A.D., we had to suspend a student-athlete for getting arrested (according to our printed policies). Her parents made a stink about it. They hired a lawyer. They went to the school board. They went to the papers. They never claimed she didn't do what she was arrested for, instead they claimed that we should never have known about it because she was a minor. If your kid gets in trouble, if your first reaction is to say the punishment isn't fair or why didn't so-and-so also get in trouble, then you are focused on the wrong thing. What lessons are you teaching your child? If we are not teaching them to take responsibility for their actions (or lack thereof), then we are failing them. It doesn't matter if the coach is an idiot or unfair, a player is still responsible for having a good attitude and giving their best effort. We do what is right not because the situation is to our liking but because we have character and values.

[Listen to renowned recruiting expert Dan Tudor share recruiting advice for both parents and student-athletes by clicking here \(JamyBechler.com/DanTudor\)](https://www.jamybechler.com/DanTudor)

6.) Be Supportive – Obviously, you need to support your kid. Do it in your own way as long as you are positive and not getting involved in the comparison game. Be available for your child. Do what they need done. If they want to play catch with you, if they need you to rebound for them, if they need you to stay quiet, if they need you to cheer loudly, then do it. You might need to ask them what they want and need. You might need to see a different perspective by doing more observing in order to really understand what they need. As a side note, fixing things for your child is not necessarily supporting them. Be there for them. Love on them. Encourage them. Help them to be positive. Help them to see other perspectives. Help them to help others. Support not only your kids but other kids. Cheer for other players. Support all the players. Support the coaches. Support the other parents. Bake cookies. Bring Gatorades. Volunteer (not so that you can have power or be seen but because it's the right thing to do). Help with fund-raisers. Find ways to be helpful to the team. Find ways to let your kids know that you love them and are proud of them.

7.) Value Kids – Your child is not their results. When your child does well, don't love them more or praise them more than when they struggle. Making shots in a basketball game does not make your child a better person. Yes, “society” often makes this mistake, but you shouldn't. Our children are receiving negative messages all day long about their self-worth. Much of their self-esteem is wrapped up in superficial things, not in who they really are. As a parent, it can be embarrassing when our child has the turnover at the end of the game or fails to make the play that costs the team the game, but how much more so is it for our child? We can't withdraw from them emotionally

(or physically). We can't criticize them or react with disgust or negativity. Our child is precious. Our child is valuable. Our child is going to do big things in life. Treat them as such. Don't punish them for poor performance and be careful rewarding them too much for good performances. Teach them early that the process and the journey is more important – that results will take care of themselves. They need to know that you love them and are proud of them regardless of whether the ball bounced the right way or not. In fact, we can apply all of this to other kids on the team, as well. Don't treat them any better or any worse based on their performance.

[Read an "Open Letter to Sports Parents Who Are Doing it Right" by clicking here](https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/open-letter-sports-parents-whos-doing-right-becky-carlson/)
(<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/open-letter-sports-parents-whos-doing-right-becky-carlson/>)

8.) Be Low Maintenance – We all know that person that drama and headaches seem to follow them around like they are Pig-pen with the dirt cloud from Charlie Brown. They are the ones that complain about the schedule because it interferes with a family vacation or their plans to go to the big college football game on a Saturday afternoon. They are the parent that complains about the choice of post-game food but aren't ponying up any money or volunteering to help. They are the parent that doesn't like the choice of travel attire but didn't do fund-raising. They are the parent that doesn't like the way the programs turned out but didn't return the information to the coach or A.D. on time. They are the parent that gets mad that their kid can't go home with them after the game because they didn't follow protocol. I could go on and on but you get the picture. Coaching is tough enough when things go right. You want your kid's coach to be a better coach, then don't make it tough on them by being a high-maintenance parent. Every ounce of energy and time they spend taking care of parent pettiness is energy and time they could spend coaching and making the team better.

9.) Start Now – The old Chinese proverb says, "The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago. The second-best time is now." You can start today. Here are 20 specific things that you can do this season ...

1. Go to the parent meeting and volunteer for at least one thing during the year.
2. Do not yell at officials (even when they are bad). No calls will be changed. Rise above the noise. Model good sportsmanship.
3. Organize the food schedule for before/after games. Donate money or food/drink items.
4. Develop an old-fashioned phone chain. Yes, some coaches have a text list but if not volunteer to do it for the parents so that important things are communicated in a timely fashion.
5. Organize and encourage community service activities (Salvation Army bell ringing, Christmas shoe boxes for needy children, food drives, blood drives, soup kitchens, etc...). These bring the team together, but they also help out people in need.
6. Resist the urge to coach them during games or practices. Don't confuse them. They need to hear one voice (their coaches). They also don't need to hear "Play your game baby" from the bleachers.
7. Share equipment. Pass on older equipment to younger kids (high school to middle school) instead of selling it at a yard sale or throwing it away.
8. Show the coach gratitude during the season (even if you don't like them). If they drive the van or bus, thank them for driving. If they provide a meal, thank them for it. Even if they don't pay for the meal but stop at a fast food restaurant after the game, thank them for providing the opportunity for the kids to get some food (avoid sarcasm if you didn't like the choice of restaurant or something else along those lines).

9. Stay away from the bench, sideline, or dugout during games. Avoid hovering, intimidating, or disapproving behaviors.
10. Congrats every kid you see on the win (whether you like them or whether they played).
11. Encourage every kid you see after a loss (whether they played bad or not). “Hang in there”, “Keep working”, or “Stay Positive” are all quick, easy, and non-judgmental phrases you can use.
12. Do not go over the coach’s head unless you have first talked with them about that specific topic and the situation didn’t get resolved in a timely manner.
13. Give all the [coaches a gift](#) at the conclusion of the season with a card that thanks them for their time and effort. Even if you don’t like the coach, this gesture still demonstrates gratitude (which says more about you than it does them).
14. Wait at least 16 hours to communicate (this includes texting and email) with the coach about playing time or role-related issues. If you talk to the coach right after the game, it should be about things like logistics or thanking them or encouraging them. Nothing good can come of passive aggressive questions, threats, or criticism. In fact, if you want to talk with them about something negative, please schedule an actual meeting so that it doesn’t distract from a practice or game.
15. Have a team get together (with the coach’s approval). Some examples include a movie night, pool party, game-night, hayride, or team meal. Team meals could be a one-time thing or maybe a meal the night before every game or once per week.
16. Always have extra healthy snacks or drinks for those kids that don’t have them or if someone has unhealthy snacks.
17. Have extra chairs, umbrellas, and blankets. This really doesn’t take up much space in your vehicle and it is helpful when somebody forgets theirs or doesn’t plan ahead.
18. Buy a season family pass even if you won’t use it all the time. You won’t hold up the line paying for an individual game ticket(s) and you are helping support the athletic department.
19. Don’t just meet deadlines but be early. Get paperwork in early. Get the physicals done early. Get your fund-raising money in early.
20. Give a ride to kids that don’t have rides, especially when it gets cold out and they might be walking, riding their bike, or missing practice altogether.

Jamy Bechler is the author of *The Leadership Playbook*, host of the *Success is a Choice Podcast*, professional speaker, and trains organizations on creating championship cultures. Bechler spent 20 years as a college basketball coach and administrator. He has worked with businesses and teams, including the NBA. Follow him on twitter at [@CoachBechler](#). To connect with him via email or find out about his services, please contact speaking@CoachBechler.com.