

The American Counseling Association's "Counseling Corner" Weekly Columns

Organized Sports Should Be Fun, Not High Stress

from the American Counseling Association

As spring days grow warmer and longer, outdoor activity increases for our children. This usually means it's also time for more organized sports programs.

Baseball, softball, soccer, track, rugby, lacrosse, or swim team are but some of the opportunities for kids to be active and have a good time.

One unfortunate side effect is that organized athletic activities can sometimes lose their focus on teaching children a sport and letting them enjoy the experience. Instead, kids can find themselves facing pressure and more stress as winning becomes over-emphasized.

Professional sports clearly have an excessive emphasis on winning. This isn't surprising considering the million dollar salaries in many sports and the need to deliver a winning team to paying fans.

The problem arises when that same emphasis is passed on to kids who really should be out developing or honing their skills and having lots of fun.

Parents, often without realizing it, can also add pressure on their child to perform well and to be a "winner." It's not only out of control parents fighting or abusing coaches and officials. Some parents, with the best of intentions, may be placing such a high value on athletic achievement that their child may feel like a failure unless he or she is winning and making Mom and Dad proud.

If you find that your family's life revolves around your children's sports activities, and that winning or losing plays a major role in how you react to your child, you may be contributing to your child's stress. When you're getting upset or angry because your child's team loses, or tease your child for not winning, or find yourself pushing your child to train harder and not be "lazy," you may very well be causing problems without even realizing it.

We all want our children to do well but that doesn't mean, especially in terms of sports, that they have to win all the time. When you communicate that to your children, even subtly or unintentionally, you're putting them under pressure that no young person needs.

If you suspect that an over-emphasis on sports, or on winning, might be affecting your family, talk to your school counselor or an outside professional counselor who can offer suggestions for getting sports into their proper perspective.

Athletics should be a positive, enjoyable activity for our children, not a situation where stress is a constant and winning is everything.

"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to ACAcorner@counseling.org or visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org

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