

WHAT TO DO IF YOUR YOUNGSTER WANTS TO QUIT

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What are the causes of dropping out of youth sports? In general, the reasons fall into two categories. The first category involves a shift in interests, especially in adolescents. Other involvements, such as a job, a boyfriend or girlfriend, or recreational pursuits, may leave little time for sport involvement. In such cases, a youngster may simply choose to set other priorities.



The second general set of reasons why youngsters drop out relate to negative sports experiences. Research conducted in the United States and Canada has shown that the following reasons often underlie a decision to drop out:

Not getting to play

Undesirable, abusive coaching practices

An overemphasis on winning that creates stress and reduces fun

Over-organization, excessive repetition, and regimentation leading to boredom

Excessive fear of failure, including frustration or failure to achieve personal or team goals

Mismatching relative to physical size and maturation

If the youngster has decided that other activities are more important, his or her priorities should be respected. However, it is wise to provide a reminder that a commitment has been made to the program and to teammates and that athletes owe it to themselves and to others to honor commitments and to finish out the season. This gives the youngster an opportunity to feel good about himself or herself by fulfilling the obligation through the rest of the season—even if the activity itself is no longer pleasurable.

If the decision to quit is based on one or more of the negative factors listed above, there is a legitimate problem. Again, it is very important that you listen to your child and offer understanding and support. Beyond that, you may discuss some ways to resolve the problems that are affecting the desire to participate. As a last resort you may wish to take some active steps to correct the difficulties. This way involves speaking to the coach or league administrators. In talking with your youngster, you should evaluate how intolerable the situation is to him or her and whether the problems can be worked out. In all but the most severe cases, you can point out that a commitment has been made, and you can encourage your youngster to finish out the season.

If the problems are sufficiently severe, the decision to drop out may be in the best interests of the child. In this case, you would want to communicate to your child that although it is important to live up to commitments, you understand that the principle is outweighed by the nature of the problems. If the child does drop out, there may be other opportunities to play in a sport program that doesn't have the negative factors that prompted the decision to quit.