

The Sports Parent Handbook

20 Commandments for Being a Successful Sports Parent

By Greg Berge

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Introduction

Being a sports parent is hard work. Being a parent, in general, is difficult. The beauty of sport for young people is that it teaches them so many life lessons that they cannot get in other aspects of childhood. These lessons last a lifetime. There is so much joy, heartache, pain, and happiness that comes from watching your child and their friends compete. You will deal with injury, tough losses, poor performance, friendship challenges, and poor team chemistry. You will also experience great joy, friendship, awesome performances, and thrilling victories as well. It is all part of the process.

I have written these 20 commandments based on my 30+ years in coaching (all levels and genders), school administration, as well as being a “sports parent” myself. I have written about this topic and so much more online with daily posts on X, in my weekly newsletter, Great Teams Better Leaders 123, as well as in the many books I have written on coaching, culture, and leadership. I am sharing this because sports matter for our kids. Coaches matter for our kids. We are losing so many coaches. They are getting harder to find.

I write to try and help build Great Teams and Better Leaders. I write to ensure that we are doing the best for our kids that we can; Our kids and our society truly depend on it.

On the following pages are **20 Commandments for Being a Successful Sport Parent**. Follow these commandments to ensure a positive experience for both you and your child.

Interested in more?

1. Follow me on “X” at <https://twitter.com/gb1121>
2. Subscribe to my free weekly newsletter, Great Teams Better Leaders 123. Actionable ideas on coaching, leadership, culture, and teams. Delivered for free to your inbox at 7:00 am every Thursday morning. Subscribe here: <https://gregberge.beehiiv.com>.
3. Other free resources, books, and courses? Go to gberge.gumroad.com
4. Check out my website for more: www.gb1leadership.com.
5. **PARENTS:** Give your son or daughter the gift of Leadership! Check out the **Team Leader OS: ATHLETE** version. Get it here: [Team Leader OS: ATHLETE](https://www.gb1leadership.com/team-leader-os-athlete).

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1. **“I Love Watching You Play.”** - Nothing more needs to be said to your son or daughter after they play. Think about that. Just let your son or daughter know that you love watching them compete and be a part of the team. After all, this is what it is all about for them anyway. Here is a list of [10 other positive phrases](#) you can use with your son or daughter.
2. **Accept the Struggle** - Accept the struggle of team sports. This is an important hurdle for parents to accept. Sports are a microcosm of life, and one thing is for certain: there will be adversity and challenges that occur. Your job as a parent is to help guide them through this struggle, not clear the path for them. Don't be a “snowplow” parent - a parent who clears the path of adversity for their child. When you constantly clear the path of adversity for them, they do not learn how to overcome adversity on their own, and when they become an adult, the adversity is harder.
3. **The Car Ride Home** - For some kids, the car ride home is what they dislike the most about being an athlete, and it is one reason that 70% of kids quit sports before high school. Think about what you do as a parent when you question your child about their performance or tell them what they can do better. Let them talk about sports on their terms. Let them bring it up to you. Do not make the car ride home a miserable experience for your child. Watch this great commercial/video on [The Car Ride Home](#).
4. **Don't Be a Sideline Coach** - Do not try to coach from the sideline. Players need to hear one voice when competing. Every player on the team has a certain role to fill. This includes parents as well. The role of the parent is to cheer for and support their child and the team. Parents who yell for their child to “shoot the ball” when that is not the role of the child undermine the team, confuse the athlete, and hurt the culture of the team.
5. **The Ultimate Lab Setting for Life** - I often say that team sports are the ultimate lab setting for life. Where else in the development of a child will the challenges and adversity of team sports surface? Nowhere. That is why team sports are so critical in the successful growth and development of a child. Approach team

sports as an avenue to prepare them for life as an adult. There is a reason that so many CEOs of companies participated in high school sports. The leadership skills learned are critical for life.

- 6. The Process is the Prize** - Youth sports are a journey, a journey that lasts well into adulthood for many. Many athletes continue playing sports after high school, whether it is intramurals, competitive leagues, or just for fun. As your child goes through this journey, focus on the process. The habits that are learned along the way are what matter most. Help your child focus on building great habits and remind them that the process is what matters most.
- 7. No Deposit - No Return** - Help your child learn this incredibly valuable life lesson: everything is earned. Encourage your son or daughter to commit to the process, create great habits, and teach them stick-to-itiveness. This is what “No Deposit - No Return” means. All too often, parents want their child to be that star player with that special role on the team, but what they fail to see is all of the work that goes into the sport behind the scenes. Teach your son or daughter the value of commitment. Teach them that they are going to get out of the sport what they put into the sport. Teach them the mindset that everything is earned.
- 8. The Critic** - We live in a world where everyone has an opinion. Everyone is an expert. Everyone can post whatever they want behind the facade of social media. Coaching is hard. Unless you have done it, you have no idea. You have multiple athletes and parents, many of whom have their own issues and personal agendas. Your job is to bring all of these individuals together to form a team. Don't be a critic. This is not a professional sport. This is not about you. And if you think you can do better, then I encourage you to get into coaching yourself. We desperately need good coaches. We are losing too many coaches because of the unfair criticism from those who have no idea. Read [The Man in the Arena](#) by Theodore Roosevelt for more on being critical.
- 9. Comparison is the Thief of Joy** - One of the worst things you can do for your child or yourself is to compare them to others. Always remember that comparison is the thief of joy. Do not compare your child. Help them focus on being the best version of themselves that they can be.
- 10. Seek First to Understand** - One thing I tell the parents in our school each year is to remember that these are high school kids (or younger), and what they hear and perceive may be different than what an adult sees and perceives. When they come home with something they perceive, make sure you seek first to understand before you judge. Coach your child to talk to the adult, and if you

need to talk to the coach or adult, then come with an open mind to hear the adult's perspective first. Kids are kids. You should not automatically believe everything that your child says. There is often another side or perspective to the story.

- 11. Trust Coaching** - It takes a village to raise a child. In many cases, a child's coach has more influence on them than any other adult in their lives next to their parents. Trust the relationship that your child has with their coach to help them grow and develop. Work together. Raising kids is not easy, and it takes a village or community of adults to help raise highly functioning kids. I also understand that sometimes coaches are not great, just as sometimes parents are not great. There are always outliers in every bunch. Always keep the end goal in front of you and be trustful of your child's coaches.
- 12. Be Mindful of Tunnel Vision** - As a parent, it is normal to see everything from your child's eyes. That is why we have coaches. Coaches are focused on the team, the big picture, and the totality of the job. While they should work to develop strong relationships with their athletes, they think in terms of team. Also, remember that other players on the team are also affected by any decision that a coach has to make. When your child has earned playing time, another player has lost some playing time. Try to understand your son or daughter's strengths and weaknesses as a player. See the big picture as best as you can, and trust that the coach wants the best team possible.
- 13. Eliminate Easy and Handle Hard** - This is a great phrase to use with your son or daughter. Hard things will happen in sports. Help them "handle hard." We are seeing more and more people struggling to develop resilience and deal with adversity in their lives. Team sports do a great job of teaching kids these skills. Help your son or daughter handle hard and learn that anything that comes easy is probably not what it seems to be.
- 14. Be a Positive Role Model** - A parent is a child's first and most important teacher. Be a positive role model for your child. Lead by example in all you do. When kids have good positive role models and a supportive community around them, they tend to grow into well-adjusted adults. Part of being a good role model is how you treat them in their sport, how you talk about their coaches and teammates, and how you handle yourself at games. Always remember the quote, "I hear what you say, but I trust what you do."
- 15. Ask Questions. Don't Give Opinions** - A good reminder when talking with your child about anything sports-related is to simply ask them questions; do not offer

your opinions. It is their experience, so let them think about it, process it, and answer these questions. Good questioning can do wonders for a child, and you should be able to sense, as a parent, when the questioning has gone too far.

- 16. Be A Gatekeeper of the Culture** - Many people think that team culture is only about the coach and players on the team. That could not be further from the truth. There are many people who are “gatekeepers” of the team culture, and parents are critical ones. When parents bad-mouth the coach, the referees, other players, or parents, this always gets back to their son/daughter and affects the team. Always remember that your behavior and choices as a parent impact the culture of the team and program. Be a part of the solution and not the problem.
- 17. Be a Fan of the Team** - Support your child. Be a fan. Cheer. Bring positive energy. But don't cheer against the opponent. Don't cheer against the referees. Don't cheer against your own teammates. As a parent, don't be envious of other player's success; be happy for the success of others. Practice MUDITA. Mudita is a Sanskrit term that means “vicarious joy in the success of others.” Help model what being a great teammate is all about by being a great fan of the entire team.
- 18. Why Do Some Parents Sit Alone?** Most parents sit alone because they do not want to be surrounded by the negativity, finger-pointing, drama, and ignorance that sometimes occurs in parent sections during games. Don't be this parent. Be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. If you see bad behavior in the parent section, address it or remove yourself from it. Don't encourage or enable bad behavior.
- 19. Always Remember, it is Your Child's Experience, Not Yours** - This one is important. It is critical to remember whose experience this is, your child's. It is not yours. Many parents get caught up in their child's athletic experience because they are re-living what they did not get as a child. Always remember that this is all about your son or daughter and not about you. Their ability or talents are not a reflection of you. It is their experience. Help them have a great one!
- 20. Enjoy the Ride!** Finally, and most importantly, enjoy the ride! Enjoy the total experience. There will be ups and downs, good and bad. But in the end, it goes way too fast, and when it is over, you will miss the car rides, the time spent, the games, the tears of sadness, and the tears of joy. Have a big-picture view of your child's athletic experience and help them create memories that will last a lifetime!