

Palmyra Area Recreation & Parks Commission (PARPC)

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Parent's Guide: Introduction [iHoops Parent's Guide – USA Basketball]

A LETTER FROM BILL WALTON

If there is one lesson I tried to impart to my four boys when they were growing up, it was to find something in life that they really loved to do. Chase your dreams, discover what you like doing the most -- because that's most likely what you're going to end up doing in life.

For me, when I was growing up, basketball was what I loved the most. Neither one of my parents were especially athletic -- I can't recall my Dad ever shooting hoops with me -- but he and Mom were extremely supportive of my passion for the game. They knew from early on that playing basketball is where I wanted to be.

With my own kids -- Adam, who played at LSU, Nate, who played at Princeton, Luke, who played at Arizona, and Chris, who played at San Diego State -- I tried very hard to expose them to a number of sports when they were growing up. I can recall them playing youth baseball and soccer, throwing a frisbee around, and even going to the beach and bodysurfing. And all in their own way each came to basketball too.

I made it clear I didn't want them to play basketball just because their father had. I told them they should play basketball only if it was something they truly enjoyed -- not because they felt I expected them to do, or that I hoped they would.

As it turned out, they all developed their own passion for the game. But I was very careful to be supportive, not to push them. I encouraged them to pursue their dreams in basketball, but I also knew their dreams could not be mine. That's an important distinction.

If anything, I felt it was important my kids developed a balanced approach to life. Yes, basketball is great fun, but I knew from my own experiences that you never know what might happen tomorrow. I urged my kids to lead a balanced life -- to learn about life and the world outside the gym.

The lessons basketball teaches do prepare kids for life beyond the game. It's fun to win, but in truth, it's the adversity in the game that is the real teacher.

For a youngster to learn how to adapt his or her play in a close game, or in a game they're losing, they're also learning how to prepare to adapt in life when one's "game plan" changes suddenly. To me, how your child learns to deal with adversity is the real key to finding out how happy they'll be in life as they get older.

This parents' guide will create a road map for your involvement in your child's youth basketball experience. Just remember that basketball is a game -- it's supposed to be fun. If you can always keep that perspective in mind, then everyone will benefit.

Bill Walton

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<http://youth.usab.com/training-room/parents/parents-guide-introduction/>

Parent's Guide: Section 1 Interacting with Your Young Player

What do you want your son or daughter to get out of the experience of playing basketball?

Do you envision your child playing in the NBA or WNBA (not likely)? Are you hoping they will become good enough to get a college scholarship (also, not that likely)? Or, do you think their participation is a wonderful way to enjoy physical activity, learn about team play, and maybe even score a few points?

Whatever your answer, give the question some serious thought. The way you respond will have a major impact on how you support your son or daughter's basketball participation. More importantly, your answer will go a long way toward determining how you interact with your youngster as he or she grows and develops as a basketball player.

For parents of young players there is one guiding principle: If you want your young player to develop a love for basketball, he or she must first develop a passion for the game. To do that, he or she must enjoy the game and see basketball, particularly at a young age, as an activity that comes with a smile. That's where it all starts — nothing more than an activity where the beginning child can bounce the ball a few times, maybe plop the ball into a shorter basket, and so forth. That's how the basketball seed is planted. Once it begins to sprout, it can continue to blossom for years to come, with your care and nurturing, of course.

What do you do during these early formative years?

For the most part, just sit back and share the experience with your child. Sometimes grown-ups have forgotten that basketball is just a game.

What advice should you give to your budding hoopster?

That's simple. Just tell them to play hard, and to have fun. If they keep a smile on their face, they will most likely give a strong effort. And by playing hard they will get better in the process.

Building a Basketball Relationship With Your Child

One of the joys of being a youth basketball parent is being able to watch your child grow as a player. As a proud parent, you'll beam when you see your little one wearing his or her first team jersey and taking those first few dribbles in a game. As your young player grows, so will his or her game. You will be there as they improve. You will experience the sting of defeat as well as the highs of victory. As a parent, your most important and rewarding role will be to share those moments and create a positive basketball relationship.

What About Coaching Your Own Child?

There's nothing wrong with volunteering as an assistant coach for your son's or daughter's team. In fact, it can be very rewarding for you and your child. Just make sure you check with him or her first. Most of the time, they'll love the idea. But they might say "no," too. If they prefer you don't coach, have the courage to respect your child's desires.

If the child says yes, remind him or her that if you volunteer as an assistant coach, it won't mean any favoritism. They have to know you will treat all players equally and fairly. But that doesn't mean being tougher on your child. Remember what you said about treating all the kids equally and fairly? That goes for your own young player as well.

Dealing with Your Expectations of Your Child

Let's assume your 10-year-old enjoys basketball, and that he or she is one of the better players on the team. Is it now the time to be dreaming of a college basketball scholarship or a future NBA or WNBA career?

Dreams are fine, but keep them in perspective. A young player might get turned off early and leave the game if they feel pushed too hard. The best path is to encourage participation, good sportsmanship, hard work and having fun. If they understand those are your expectations from them, then the cream will eventually rise to the top.

Play Basketball With Your Child

More than most sports, basketball affords parents genuine on-court interaction with their son or daughter. Whether playing a game of H.O.R.S.E (one player takes a shot from anywhere on the court, and if he or she makes it, the next player has to match the basket or else he or she is assigned a letter until HORSE is spelled), having a free-throw shooting contest, or even playing a simple game of one-on-one, basketball requires nothing more than a ball and a hoop.

But try not to use the opportunity to engage in competition with your son or daughter. If your daughter is 12, compete against her as though you were 12, not a full grown adult. Get in the habit of acknowledging a great shot or pass by your child. Make him or her feel good about their actions. Everybody responds to positive reinforcement – especially kids. And remember children imitate the actions of their parents. If you show them how to respond to a good play, they'll follow your lead.

What's the bottom line? Basketball is one of those rare athletic activities that can transcend gender and generations. And it's also fun!

Parent's Guide: Section 2 Communicating With the Coach

You should always try to have a pre-season conversation with your child's coach no matter how long your child has been playing. In fact, many coaches have a short meeting for parents prior to the season. In either case, this the perfect time to get a sense of the coach's philosophy on such subjects as sportsmanship, playing time and practice, as well as the guidelines and rules followed by the league.

Once you feel satisfied your child is in good hands, give the coach some space and freedom. Allowing them to coach without feeling they have to look over their shoulder will give the coach the room he or she needs to provide a positive team environment for all the players.

One of the major lessons that playing on a basketball team provides to young players is tolerance and adaption to different styles of leadership. Allowing your children to deal with the player/coach relationship on their own will go a long way towards assuring that they benefit from those lessons. If a problem arises, you should be there for your child, but let things play out on the team level first.

Approaching the Coach with a Problem

Sometimes, a misunderstanding does occur. Maybe you feel your son is not getting enough playing time. Maybe your daughter is playing forward instead of guard. Or your child's team seems to be treating its opponents in an unsportsmanlike manner. Whatever the concern, consult the coach in a spirit of cooperation — NOT confrontation.

Some parents get upset and confront coaches in the middle of a game. Not only is this kind of action counterproductive, it embarrasses everyone, including your child. As with any other person, the coach is much less likely to listen if you get in his or her face.

If you do feel the need to discuss an issue with the coach, try waiting 24 hours and then call the coach at home (make sure you get the coach's appropriate contact number prior to the season). Try the following approach — "Coach, perhaps you can help me with a problem my daughter is having. You see, she's always preferred to play point guard, and we see that you have her playing forward. As a result, she is a little confused. Can you help us work through her concerns?"

If you address the coach in a nonconfrontational manner, he or she will most likely be happy to discuss the problem and work out a solution that suits everyone.

What if my Child Isn't Getting Enough Playing Time?

Once more, this is the kind of issue that should be brought up in a calm and private conversation with the coach. Ideally, the coach is keeping track of who's playing how much, and at what positions, during games. But if you and your child are convinced that he or she isn't getting a fair amount of playing time, then it may be time to talk to the coach.

In many youth leagues, there are rules regarding player participation. Prior to addressing the issue with the coach, you should be aware of any guidelines, if they exist. Your preseason conversation or meeting with the coach is the time to find this information out. If you did not, try calling the league director to find the answer. Once prepared with the information (for example, it may be that all players are required to play at least one-half of the game) you will be ready to speak with the coach.

Keep in mind, that with young players in particular, it can be confusing as to who's playing and for how much time. Coaches usually employ an assistant to monitor the playing time of each child. If there is any question about playing time, it's a matter of consulting the assistant coach's score sheet. If your child's coach does not keep track of this, offer to help out and assist the coach by suggesting to do it yourself. On top of helping you keep track of your child's playing time, it will probably help out some of the other players with a similar problem. And who knows, the coach may just surprise you and be happy to receive the help.

Parent's Guide: Section 3 Sportsmanship

Teaching the Basics of Sportsmanship

One of the most common myths in sports is that teaching and enforcing sportsmanship is the sole responsibility of the coach. Not true. In fact, when it comes to behavior, the coach's job is to observe players during games, and to enforce the basic guidelines of sportsmanship.

The real job of teaching good sportsmanship starts with Mom and Dad. It's up to you as the parents to lay the foundation, not the coach.

Be prepared to sit down at appropriate times and have a "teachable moment" with your child. Winning and losing are fundamental elements of any sport, and basketball is no exception. Explain that in basketball there is a right way and a wrong way to behave prior to, during, and after the game, regardless of the outcome. These principles apply on and off the court, and during practices, as well. Usually, the older the child, the more difficulty the player has in dealing

with losing. Make it clear to your child that if he or she wants to be a member of the team, they must abide by the rules of good sportsmanship.

Make it clear that every game has a winner and a loser (and sometimes, events transpire that may seem unfair) but that defeat --no matter how emotional --is not an excuse for acting out. Explain that blaming an official for a bad call (or the coach or a teammate for a bad decision or play) is unacceptable. Even in victory, good sportsmanship is important -- bragging or making fun of an opponent after a win cannot be tolerated.

The real test of character is always more apparent in times of difficulty. Help your child through your own responsible leadership. They will benefit over the long-term the lessons they learn, both in basketball and in life.

The Golden Rule

Young players should treat teammates, coaches, opponents and officials the same way that they would like to be treated -- fairly and with respect.

How to Teach Good Sportsmanship if the Coach Does Not

This is an interesting, and difficult, dilemma (and hopefully, one that you will not have to encounter). You may notice that your child's coach acts in an unsportsmanlike way. Maybe he or she argues too much with the officials or yells at the opposing coach and players. Your best tactic in dealing with this is to reinforce to your child that good sportsmanship is important (without criticizing the coach, if you can --be careful of undermining the coach's authority, even if he or she is a screamer).

Review the rules of good sportsmanship with your child and remind them that you are watching how they behave. If the coach's behavior continues to bother you (and sets a bad example for your son or daughter) then it may be time to switch teams, if possible. Let the league director know your concerns and see what remedies can be found. If you take the approach that, "maybe the coach is not right for my child," as opposed to "the coach needs to be removed," you will enhance your chance of a positive outcome.

What About Trash Talking?

Has trash-talking become an acceptable form of behavior? First, let's define "trash-talking." Sometimes the opposing players will be good friends off the court. The friendship encourages aiming some good-natured ribbing and jocularities at one another. That's fine.

However, any kind of verbal exchange intended to taunt, humiliate, or embarrass a player from another team is NOT to be tolerated. There is a very clear difference between a playful exchange and verbal intimidation. If you witness either your son or daughter participating in the latter, inform the coach immediately (and then reinforce your disappointment with your child at the appropriate time). Let the coach know you don't want your child or any other child on the team to participate in that kind of negative activity.

Parent's Guide: Section 4 Parental Do's and Don'ts

As a parent of a young basketball player, it's your job to foster a positive environment for your child — and that takes discipline on your part. Here's a quick checklist to help you do just that:

1) Avoid the P.G.A. (Post-Game Analysis) Within minutes following the end of a game, players are usually in the family car heading home. It's during the ride home that some well-meaning parents provide a post-game analysis of what the youngster did well, or not so well, during the game.

"Why didn't you shoot more when you were open?"

"You need to move more on offense so your teammates will pass the ball to you."

"It looked like the other team's defense had you flustered a bit."

"You didn't hustle on defense much today; were you tired?"

From the parent's perspective, these observations seem like very valid points to discuss.

"Besides," says the concerned parent, "It's important to go over what my child did in the game while the game is still fresh in his or her mind."

The problem is that these P.G.A.'s can quickly ruin the fun for your basketball player. **After all, who wants to be analyzed or criticized moments after leaving the court (and if friends are in the car, it can be even more demoralizing)?** That's the coach's job. Mom and Dad, give your youngster a break — save your "constructive criticism" for later on in the evening or the next day and bring them up in a two-way conversation about the game. After the game is the time to be positive and brief.

2) Don't position yourself as the "perfect example." "Here, let me show you how I used to play the game." Have you ever said something like that to your child? Did you notice them roll their eyes, as in "Oh-uh, here we go again." Relax. If you're like most parents, you want to help teach your child the basics through the benefit of your own experiences. But how do you do that without sounding like a know-it-all old-timer? In the mind of most children, there's a fine line between teaching them the basic skills and trying to show off. Always remember that you're supposed to be there for your son or daughter — not the other way around. Next time, wait until your youngster comes to you and asks for guidance. That's the most effective approach for you and the child.

3) Avoid screaming or yelling from the sidelines at games. If you have to make noise, make sure you are offering praise and support. There's not a young player on the court who wants to hear their parent yelling at the officials, the coach, other players, or worse yet, themselves. Set a good example for other adults by praising good plays on the opposing team, as well. In other words, somebody has to be the grown-up at these games — it might as well be you!

4) No need to provide a "play by play" broadcast from the stands. Ever hear a parent literally directing every play on the court? "Okay, Johnny, bring the ball up...now, find the open man...that's right, pass it to Mark...Mark, take the shot! Max, be sure to get in position for the rebound!" You get the idea. Drop the play-by-play. Just let the kids play. They really don't need your instruction while they're playing and enjoying the game. And, it can make it difficult for your child's coach to direct the game. After all that is the coach's job, right?

5) Don't take the game more seriously than your child. Your job, as the parent, is to provide positive support for your child; regardless of how well they play or who wins. Whether they sink the winning basket, or they end up on the wrong end of a lopsided score, give them a sincere pat on the back. Your child is going to monitor your reactions to their performances. If they see your mood go sour after a bad game, they're going to pick up on that and react in a similar fashion. Teach them to maintain an even balance in the face of victory or defeat, and both of you will benefit.