

# *Great Article for Hockey Parents*

Parental Guidance Suggested - By Lyle Phair

Hockey parents come in all shapes and sizes, a plethora of different ages and with varying degrees of interest and intensity regarding the hockey activities of their offspring.

Some are into it. Really into it. Over-the-top, whacked-out-of-their minds into it. Others are interested, encouraging and supportive, but that's where it ends. And still other are motivated enough to pay for their child to play, and willing to drive them to the rink for games or practices, but nothing beyond that. They don't care who wins or loses, who is in first place or who won't make the playoffs. They are just happy that their kid is involved in a recreational activity where he or she is getting some exercise and has the opportunity to be on a team and get into a little competition.

But at the end of the day, it all comes down to expectations. What exactly is it that parents expect to realize out of their child's involvement in a youth sport?

Years ago, when we baby boomers were kids, our parents were too busy with their own lives and trying to make ends meet to get that involved in our activities.

Sure there were a few dads that were into it, and organized the teams, the practices and the games and more often than not drove a station wagon full of kids to and from them. Many of the other parents didn't even come to the games.

But today's generation of children lead, I mean follow, a totally different lifestyle when it comes to participating in sports. Parents not only organize and schedule their extra-curricular lives outside of school, but many of them take it much further than that.

Some of that phenomenon can be attributed to the world that we live in. It is no longer safe to trust your children to others. As a parent you have to be involved and know where they are and what they are doing. In many respects that is a good thing. But of course, there are always those who take it to the next step, and possibly the next and the next, and soon they find themselves way more involved than they should be. And more importantly, way more involved than their child wants them to be.

Then there are those whose expectations are completely out of whack. At the first sign of success that their child has, even at a very young age, they start to see stars in their eyes and they start to become delusional about scholarships and professional opportunities for their young prodigies.

But as most of them eventually learn, there are plenty of laces to be tied, strides to be skated and pucks to be shot before any of that really counts. No matter how good your player might look, there are literally thousands around the world who are that much better.

And as much as they think they are helping, they might actually be exerting the wrong kind of pressure, and end up hurting their child and their interest in the game. A recent Sports Illustrated article cited that as one of the reasons that extreme and other non-traditional sports have enjoyed recent popularity in our country: “A kid today will often turn to extreme sports for the autonomy the bestow: No parent or youth coach knows skateboarding well enough to project his unfulfilled dreams or adult insecurities onto a rider and mess with the kid’s fun.”

In lacrosse, too, “parents aren’t yelling as much on the sidelines, because they don’t know what’s going on,” says David Morrow, a former U.S. national team player who founded the equipment company Warrior. “Kids can really take ownership of the sport.”

So what are the traits that make up a good hockey parent? How much support and encouragement is enough without becoming meddling, over-bearing and controlling? Not an easy question to answer. It’s tough. We all want our kids to do well, to be successful and to enjoy the game. Not to mention the cost of ice time and equipment. But at what point does a good parent know that their involvement stops and it is time to let the child play the game?

In my opinion a good hockey parent is one who...

Understands and respects the concept of team and knows that on every other team there will be some players who are better than others, but it takes all of them working together to be successful. No individual, no matter how great they have been, has ever has success in a team sport, without the other members of the team.

Let the coach do the coaching. The coach is the leader and has the responsibility of making decisions in the best interest of the team as a whole. Although a parent might not agree with a decision, particularly as it relates to their child, they have to understand and respect the role of the coach and support the course that he or she chooses.

Recognizes that referees will make mistakes from time to time. But more importantly understands that referees are viewing the game from their vantage point on the ice, and with no bias to any of the teams (unlike the parents) and ultimately will make calls that they will disagree with. But at the end of the day, the only opinion that matters is that of the referee, the one who is charged with, and paid for, officiating the game.

Gets their player to the rink on time for all practices and games. In a youth team sport, the locker room time before and after the game can in many cases be more valuable in learning life’s lessons, and unfortunately at times, more fun than the actual game itself.

Understands that whether they like it or not, they are a role model in what they say and what they do while watching from the stands. Negative reactions and theatrical expressions to a coach’s decision, a referee’s call or a player’s mistake on the ice can do plenty of damage to a team and its players.

Realizes that it is the players who have to play the game and if the player on the ice is constantly waiting for directions yelled from the stands or is looking up into the stands at any time during the game for hand signals or a reaction from the parent that the child can't possibly be "into the game" and be listening to be interacting with coaches and teammates and learning to experience and play a game.

Takes their cue from their child on whether they want to talk about the game on the ride to and from the rink.

Understands that just because they choose to pay for child's equipment and ice time doesn't mean that they own it. The game belongs to the players.

Watches the action on the ice in the game, not the scoreboard. Although the scoreboard and the standings are important to a degree, it can be very dangerous to measure success exclusively by scores, wins and losses.

Recognizes that no matter how much they love the game and how much they "want it" for their child, that ultimately it is the child who has to develop a passion for the game and the desire to do what it takes to play it to the best of their ability. It is their game. Let them play it.