

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

### Keeping Enthusiasm For Your Child's Sports Under Control

from the American Counseling Association

Most children have a pretty level-headed approach to organized sports. When they win, they're happy and excited. When they lose, they get sad for a bit. And most of the time, they're just having fun and enjoying the competition.

Unfortunately, many parents don't handle their children's sports activities as well. We've probably all seen reports of (or witnessed directly) abuse of referees and coaches, of fights between parents, and other unseemly parental behaviors.

While parents want their children to do well and be treated fairly, some parents have made their children's sports so important that their emotions override their judgment and common sense.

It's not hard to understand the source of such emotions. The child may not be performing up to the parent's expectations, making the parent feel frustrated. Such feelings can be complicated by the parent's projecting his or her own athletic dreams and fantasies onto the child. In such cases a violent confrontation with a coach, referee or other parent may seem a means of venting that frustration.

When that happens it's often a sign that sports are playing too important a role in family life.

All parents should sometimes step back and examine whether a family's life revolves around the children's sports. It's not uncommon.

Start by asking some basic questions about sports and your children. Are your kids being "pushed" not just to play sports, but to train harder and to excel? Is that happening at the expense of school work and other activities? Do you, as a parent, experience mood swings related to your child's successes or failures in sports? Do you reward a child who has done well, but tease or criticize that same child when his or her performance doesn't meet your standards? Is it possible you're trying to live your life through your child's?

When the answer is yes to some or all of these questions, it's a good chance that sports is indeed playing too important a role in your family's life. And if sports brings out actions, or even thoughts, of reacting violently when things have gone poorly, it's a clear sign that help is needed.

In such cases, try talking to a professional counselor who specializes in family counseling. He or she can help you gain a better perspective on your expectations, and can help you establish a healthy emotional balance between sports and your parenting.

*"Counseling Corner" is provided by the American Counseling Association. Comments and questions to [ACAcorner@counseling.org](mailto:ACAcorner@counseling.org) or visit the ACA website at [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org).*

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