

10 Ways Parents Can Help Their Gymnast (Hint: It's Not Correcting Their Gymnastics)

Posted by [annejosephson](#)

Parents love their kids.

Parents want to see their kids do well in school, music, the arts or sports—whatever their child decides to pursue.

So it follows that parents want to help their child succeed.

But if help that involves coaching your child at home or requiring her to do conditioning or flexibility training not prescribed by her coach, no matter how well-intentioned, is not a good idea.

First, it's not your role in that very important parent-coach-athlete triad. You are not the coach (unless you are the gymnastics coach, but even then the division between the gym and home needs to be clear, so this still applies).

Second, the gymnast it can be confused hearing corrections that are counter to what the coaches tell her. Not to mention it can build up resentment in the gymnast who just wants home to be home.

Finally, it can be downright dangerous. Unlike a sport like basketball or soccer, where it is perfectly fine to shoot some hoops or go kick the ball around after dinner, gymnastics performed at home can injure your child quite severely. No matter how excited your child is to demonstrate her round-off back handspring for grandma, you are far better off catching it on your phone when she's at the gym and playing it back for grandma.

All of this said parents still want to know (aside from driving and paying tuition and fees) how they can help their gymnast, and I think that is terrific. So I've come up with a list of 10 things that parents can do to support their athlete no matter the sport.

1. **Fill your athletes' emotional bucket.** The best part of the parents' role, in my opinion, is the cheerleader. Lots of hugs, smiles and "way to go-s" are the privilege of being a parent. Even when they are teenagers, and they roll their eyes at your kooky thumbs up signs or constant "I love you"s deep down they both love and need it.
2. **Listen to your athlete's stories about practice, frustrations, and fears with understanding and patience.** Don't try to solve them for her. Just listen. Sympathize and maybe ask a couple of questions, most importantly: How can I help?
3. **Nourish and hydrate your athlete.** The fuel that goes into your athlete not only gives her the energy to make it through a demanding workout but also plays a major role in how she recovers from training.
4. **Make sure she gets sufficient rest.** I know how difficult this one is. The demands on young athlete's lives between training and school can make it impossible for them to get all the sleep they need. Nevertheless, do the best you can to make sure they are going to bed as soon as possible and give them space to get some extra sleep on nights off and weekends.



5. **Pay attention to her health, physical and emotional.** If she complains of chronic pains, take her to the doctor. If a doctor recommends she stop or modify training, either get a second opinion from another doctor or follow the prescription. Make sure that she completes physical therapy. And if you notice dramatic shifts in her weight, anxiety or any other behavior that signifies emotional distress and get help immediately.
6. **Check in with her coaches as needed, but certainly every 8-12 weeks.** A brief check in with her coaches to ask about your child's progress is appropriate. It is an excellent time to inquire what you can do to support their work (i.e. does she need private lessons? New floor music etc.)
7. **Communicate any medical/emotional needs or family changes to the coach.** While I advocate a gymnast navigating her relationship with the coach, when it comes to medical or emotional needs, this information is best delivered by the parents, preferably in writing. If the athlete has limitations, the coach needs to be made aware of that. If she is on medications, the coaches should know and be made aware of times meds might be changing to monitor any unusual behavior at the gym. If parents are separating or a grandparent is critically ill, these pieces of information are useful in the coaches supporting and understanding if the athlete is acting out. Not to mention, no coach wants to have a gymnast try a double back for the first time if she just discovered her parents are splitting up.
8. **Speak to the teachers/principal regarding your child's gymnastics (if needed).** Perhaps getting a dispensation for PE would allow your child to get some homework done, so navigate this with the school administration for your child. Or if, for instance, it would be helpful to get all her homework assignments on a Friday so she can get a head start over the weekend (and it is feasible for the teacher to do so), the parent should be the one to make this request. If the gymnast has to miss school for competitions or medical appointments, the parent can be helpful in informing the school and arranging the makeup work.
9. **Keep the other parts of the gymnast's identity intact.** When a child is heavily involved in a single activity, it can become very easy to be solely focused on that activity to the exclusion of all others. This does not create a well-balanced human being and can cause a major crisis if the athlete is forced to retire (or even if she decides it's time to hang up her grips on her own). So make sure that other dimensions of your child are supported. Perhaps she also is an artist, singer or musician. Or maybe she is part of the Girl Scouts or a faith-based youth group. A good test is if every holiday gift and birthday gift relate to gymnastics, you need to do some re-thinking. And make sure she participates in your family's life, including having chores like her siblings and occasionally going to their activities or games to show her support of them. Ensure that she attends school events and has friendships with classmates. Finally, make sure that there is time for your family to connect as a family.
10. **Make the experience fun.** Get together with other parents to make the experience of being part of a team a fun one. If you have a pool, host a team swim party. Slumber parties. Meals together after meets. Making all the girls on the team good luck grams with other parents. Whatever you can think of, be the social facilitator with other parents to make happy memories outside the gym.