

The Youth Sports Parent's Promise.

"As a sports parent, I will remember that the No. 1 goal of youth sports is to have fun. I will tell my child to "have fun" without adding any ifs, ands or buts. I will not say to my child, "Have fun ... but if you don't score a goal, find your own ride home."

As a sports parent, I will support my child in positive ways. I will buy nutritious foods so that my child is well-fueled. I will not try to increase my 11-year-old's muscle mass by feeding him protein powders and supplements. I will not limit my young gymnast to a diet that's better suited to rabbits. I will make sure my kid gets enough sleep, eight hours minimum. If my kid has trouble balancing school, family, sports and sleep, then something needs to change. (Hint: The ability to read and add numbers is usually of more lifelong value than the ability to hit the cutoff man. Usually.)

I will not ignore injuries. I may encourage my child to "toughen up" and not cry over a small scrape. However, I will not tell my kid to "quit limping, you wimp, and get back out there." If my child sustains a bad head smack, I will not allow him to return to practice before being evaluated. "He's probably OK, and we really need him to play the championship game" is not an acceptable evaluation.

I will make sure my child has the proper equipment for her sport. I can save money by buying well-maintained, second-hand equipment. I will not try to save money by borrowing Cousin Harry's lacrosse helmet, the one that is two sizes too big and cracked down the side from his third concussion. I may choose to buy expensive sports equipment, but only as my child improves or shows commitment to a sport. I will not buy \$654 Edea Icefly figure skates for a kid who just won a gold medal at the Tiny Tots Basic Skills competition.

I will allow my child to be responsible for her own equipment. I will not be a pack mule or caddy for my child. On occasion, I will gladly help my child lug her gear to the field, but this is an exception, not an expectation. I will expect my child to keep her sports equipment in good shape and free from smelling like a dead skunk at low tide.

Through youth sports, my child will learn commitment to a team. I will make sure my child is on time to practices and games. If my child cannot make a game or practice due to family obligations or illness, we will let the coach know as soon as possible. If my child misses a practice, I will not expect her to get as much playing time at the next game. If that means she misses her Kerri Strug or Doug Flutie Hail Mary moment, so be it.

I may not be at every practice, and that is OK. I will see more improvement over time if I'm not scrutinizing every drill and workout. When I am at practice, I will not coach from the sidelines. If I do coach from the sidelines, I give permission for the real coach—the person who is actually called

"coach"—to smack me. I will also not sideline-coach during games. Either I trust my child's coach or I don't. If I don't, then I need to have a conversation with the coach. If I find myself having the same conversation with the coach over and over again, then I either need to 1) chill out, like, majorly, or 2) find a different coach.

I will not listen to or spread gossip in the stands. I will not yell at other players. I will not harass the refs or judges. I will not slap other parents, even when they're really asking for it. I will not yell at my child before games or during games. Toughest of all, I will not yell at my child on the car ride home from the game. Many kids quit sports because their parents are miserable, nagging, overbearing crazy people. I will remind myself that most kids--even athletically talented kids--will never play for the NHL, NFL, NBA or MLB. Even more kids will never get to the Olympics. Even the kids with crazy parents.

I will insist that my child spends time away from her sport. I will make sure that she has downtime and an off-season. I will remember that my relationship with my child is more important than my child's involvement in sports. And if I find myself pushing my child in sports harder than she's pushing herself, that's not right. That's not fun. Maybe it's time to get my butt off the bench and go play a sport myself. Maybe it's time to put my sneakers--or skates, cleats, flippers--where my mouth is."

You can email Josette at josetteplank@gmail.com or like Josette on [Facebook](#) and you should because how awesome is she?