Teaching Parents the Principles of Peak Performance

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[Competitive Advantage](#)

Most parents who push, or otherwise interfere with the coaching role, do so because they want their child to perform better. They do not understand that their behavior is performance disruptive for their child. By directly teaching coaches to teach parents the principles *of* peak performance i.e. those elements that will insure high self-esteem, continued enjoyment or the sport and consistent performance - parents will be better equipped to work with coaches and not sabotage their child.

1. **HAVE FUN** - Coaches who consistently make the sport fun produce peak performers. When an athlete has *fun,* he will perform well*.* Fun will ensure an athlete's motivation and prevent bum-out. When the fun leaves the sport because of parental pressure, the child will become vulnerable to performance problems. A related concept to teach here is the reason a child plays. The child should compete because he wants to for his goals, not for his parents'. Coaches must be encouraged to explain about the negative, de motivating effects of "bribes" or "bonuses" for certain performance goals.

2. **BUILD HIGH SELF-ESTEEM** - Explain the direct relationship between self-esteem and performance. High self-esteem leads to improved performance while lower self-esteem results in poorer performance. Encourage parents to build self-esteem and not to link a child's self-worth and lovability with how fast he goes or how many games she starts. Encourage parents to "catch their kids doing things right", to focus on the positive.

3. **ENCOURAGE A PROCESS FOCUS VS OUTCOME FOCUS** - One of the biggest causes of "choking" that parents inadvertently contribute to is encouraging an outcome focus in their children. Pre-game thoughts about scoring, beating someone else, or getting a college scholarship all tend to distract the athlete from the game at hand. Parents would not push the outcome so much if they were aware of its detrimental effects on performance. Help them refocus their comments on enjoying the process of training, competing, and playing.

4. **CHALLENGED NOT THREATENED** - Parents who threaten and punish children for not doing well need to understand that these behaviors will hurt their child's performance and sense of self. Fear may produce short-term results, but it has serious long-term consequences. Implicit in a threat is the belief that you do not think the child is capable. Implicit in a challenge (there is nothing to lose should you fail) is a positive belief in the player's ability. Educate parents on the performance effects of threats and how they distract a player's focus, putting them into the future and out of the game they're in. Parents should be encouraged not to use guilt, fear or any kind of threat to motivate their children.

5. **FREE TO FAIL** - Parents need to be taught how to view their child's failure as a positive learning experience rather than as an excuse to demean them. Freedom to fail empowers athletes while the worry of messing up leaves an athlete tied in knots and playing tentatively. Teach parents how to teach

this and the other principles by modeling this appropriate behavior. Failure is an opportunity to learn and improve. It is nothing more than feedback and should not have a value judgement placed on it.

6. **AUTOMATIC NON-THINKING** - In every peak performance an athlete is not thinking. They are unconscious and on autopilot. Their focus is in the experience, i.e. feeling the ground, the motion in their limbs, their rhythm, etc. Thinking slows athletes down. Help parents understand that giving their child something to think about is counter productive. It gets the athlete trying too hard and performing poorly. Teach what pre-game and post-game comments are useful (have fun, relax, you're ready, good job, etc).

7. **RELAXED** - During a peak performance an athlete is relaxed and focused. Any kind of parental comments/pressure will only interfere with this principle.