

# 10 Best Practices for Parents of Youth Lacrosse Players



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## 1 Fun is essential at all levels of lacrosse!

Nothing is more important than fun in youth sports – kids quit sports because they are not having fun. Even as kids get older and fostering competition becomes appropriate, the young athletes should always be reminded that sports participation is all about fun and physical activity.

## 2 Teach sportsmanship early

Teaching strong values such as discipline, integrity, dedication, respect for self and others are the foundation for strong character. Early exposure to and emphasis on sportsmanship will not only foster a balanced athlete, but also, more importantly, will cultivate a healthy and resilient adult.

## 3 Kids are not little adults

Sometimes our kids, because of their size, ability or apparent maturity seem, as if they can be treated as adults. It is important for us to remember that our kids are kids. They are not ready for adult expectations and training regimens, and they need our help to keep the bar at appropriate levels for their age and ability.

## 4 Age-appropriate practice

Although the old adage that “practice makes perfect” has validity in helping players improve their skills, it is important to help our younger children limit the length and intensity of their training. Short practices with brief instruction designed with fun in mind are the key to success at the youth level. And even for older athletes, short, lively, and fun practices serve athletes much better as they protect them from dehydration, burnout and injury.

## 5 Define success appropriately for each age group

As our children move from one age-group to the next, it is important to think about appropriate and realistic goals. In our book, *Whose Game Is It, Anyway?* We encourage parents to keep the following parameters in mind:

- Preschool/Kindergarten – fun, safety, joy of movement
- Elementary School – competency, exploring interests, making friends
- Middle/High School – independence, identity development, achievement

Establish strong connections with mentors (eg: teachers, mentors, coaches)

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## 6 Positive feedback

While many of us parents are not directly involved in coaching our children, there is often plenty of opportunity to offer our thoughts and opinions about how our children are playing. Positive and constructive feedback is the best tool at any level. Praise must be accurate in order for our kids to believe us, but they will play better and feel better about lacrosse if they are getting positive encouragement from us.

## 7 Save specialization for older kids

Parents and coaches should encourage children to try multiple sports before specializing. Consider holding off on specialization at least until after puberty. This is good for their physical fitness as well as their mental health. Strong, versatile athletes, who have never played the game of lacrosse, have been known to pick up the game in high school and even some cases in college. Having a strong, balanced athletic background can enhance the enjoyment of the game, and in some instances, contribute to even better play.

## 8 Don't over train – one sport/one team per season

While there is temptation to enroll our kids on multiple teams to help develop their play, it is often helpful to limit their participation to one team. It will give them more rest and allow their play to be more enjoyable as opposed to a summer vocation. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule as some athletes love playing for multiple teams or feel it will help their chances to play at a higher level. Such goals should be pursued cautiously while keeping an eye out for balance. Kids should have two days off per week and greatly reduce training and playing schedules every two to three months to help prevent injury and burnout. At early ages, children should be discouraged from playing four seasons of a sport—take one season off to rest or cross train.

## 9 Use appropriate equipment – correct size and not outdated

Although it is a great money saver to use hand-me-down equipment, be sure it still meets safety standards and hasn't been compromised by previous uses.

## 10 Avoid "playing up" even if the child is advanced

This tip is particularly relevant for younger athletes. Despite having equivalent skills to older players, differences in size and speed can put some young kids in physically dangerous situations, not to mention may alienate them from their peers and put unneeded pressure on their play and development. Because fun and enjoyment with one's friends is so crucial to younger kids, it may be appropriate to avoid playing up simply because your child has more friends on the younger team.

**ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT THE GAME SHOULD BE FUN!**