

# 10 Super Sport Parenting Skills

Parents: Get your best game on!



April Clay, Psychologist

*Mental skills for sport and life*

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# About April

**April Clay** is a Registered Psychologist with an independent practice focused in clinical and sport psychology. She draws from a wide variety of experiences working with couples, individuals, adolescents and children in such areas as divorce/separation, blended families, family violence, depression, loss, anxiety disorders, family of origin issues, illness, anger management, self esteem and life-transition. April has also worked as an EAP (Employee Assistance Program) counsellor and thus has practical experience and knowledge in workplace related issues.



April has worked with many types of athletes and performers including: *swimming, wrestling, bmx, tennis, hockey, lacrosse, diving, equestrian athletes, fencing, pentathlon, golf, skiing, soccer, tennis, competitive dance, figure skating, track, highland country games, badminton, synchronized swimming, motocross, squash, bobsled, mixed martial arts (MMA), musicians and actors.*

As an adjunct to her practice, April writes for several local and national magazines, and offers workshops on a variety of topics. As a sports consultant, she draws on some 15 years of experience as a competitive horse show-jumper. April is a member of the **Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP)**. She also works as a service provider for the **Canadian Sport Centre Calgary**.

*Dear Sport Parents,*

*I hope you enjoy the tips. If you have any questions you can contact me directly [april@bodymindmotion.com](mailto:april@bodymindmotion.com) or connect via my [Facebook page](#).*

*And please feel free to pass this along to others you think would benefit.*

*April*

*PS: Don't let your (sport parent) mind train unsupervised. Strive to be conscious of what you're doing and you will have a greater chance at success.*

# ONE: Stay in your Zone

Know your role: it is not as your child's coach; they already have one of those. You're more like the support staff. Providing the transportation, encouragement and general feeding and watering of your child athlete. You are also a role model. Your child will



absorb how you treat everyone involved in your child's sport. If your child sees you being respectful, interacting, and having fun with the other parents and competitors, your child will feel permission to do so as well.

# TWO: It's Not Your Game:

Don't base your self-esteem on your child's participation, or over identify with their experience. Kids know all too well when this happens and will begin to feel compelled to compete for your approval rather than their own pleasure. Parents need to be aware of both overt messages: "you really let me down today out there", and covert messages: riding home in silence after a game.



# THREE:

## Keep your Emotions Separate.

If your child is nervous or fearful, don't join in with your own emotions as you may escalate the situation. Help them process their feelings by staying centred yourself and maintaining a problem solving approach. Teen athletes should be encouraged to try and solve the issue with your support. Ask questions, identify options and offer them the chance to make decisions. It's a real sport and life confidence building opportunity.



## FOUR: Know the Bubble

Don't assume that you need to do everything for your child at a competition. Ask them what their needs are both in terms of physical assistance and emotional support. Younger children will obviously require more assistance. Almost every child has a "bubble" time- a time they want to be alone. Know what this is and respect it. Your child will appreciate it more than you know.



## FIVE:

### Be a Protector of the Love of Sport

What is the most crucial role a sport parent can have? If you want your child to benefit from sport participation, then you must protect the love of (their) sport. Love equals motivation equals fun and advancement.



# SIX:

## Learn How to Turn if OFF

One of the most common complaints I hear from kids and teens is: too much talk. Be sure to have some “no sport talk zones” agreed upon in your family. Too much can feel like pressure, even if it’s well intentioned. Everyone needs a mental break!



# SEVEN:

## Encourage, Don't Push

So what is the difference between encouragement and pushing? We might think of encouragement in supporting terms, while pushing conjures up images of over involved "ugly" sport parents.

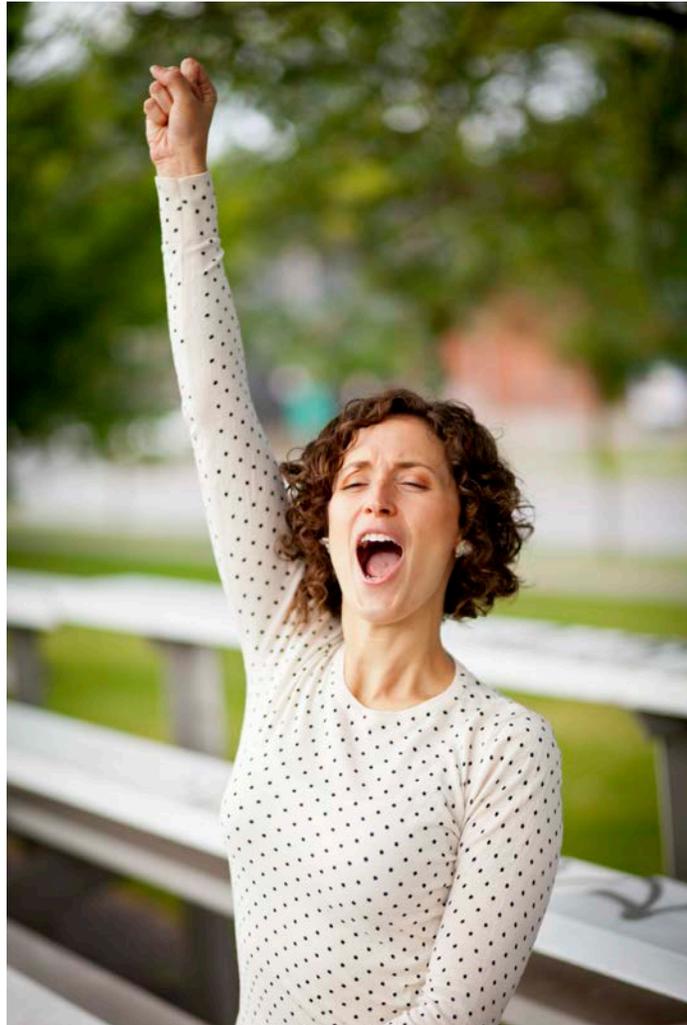
Can an ideal level of push be possible? The authors Lauer, Gould, Roman & Pierce (2010) of a recent study suggest that parents who find a balance between challenging and supporting their children might produce the healthiest results-for sport performance and parent/child relationships. A good rule of thumb? Only hold your kid accountable for what they can control: attending practices, effort and how they treat their teammates.



# EIGHT: Emotional control

Sports are emotionally laden, we all know this. Armchair enthusiasts are just that- very enthusiastic about their sports. They develop a sense of ownership that can easily lead to a blurring of lines. So can your emotions when you're being a spectator or fan at your children's events.

Of course you don't want to end up headline fodder. To do this, the trick is not getting rid of your strong feelings. You cannot hide them, stuff them or toss them aside. This is not good for you or your sport kid. Emotions are a natural part of sport. They need to be acknowledged and managed- just as you want to see your kid doing out on the field.



# NINE:

## Don't Compare

It's never a good idea to compare your child's development or performance. It's hurtful, and also unfair. Remember that kids develop differently. Even within the same sport, at the same age. Your child will have strengths and weaknesses like everyone else. They might acquire one skill quickly and take longer to get another. This does not make or break future success.



# TEN:

## Stay Fun and Funny

Keep your perspective glasses tuned with a little lightness. Keep your sense of humor. If you're having fun and being relaxed, your child will feel free to do so as well!



## **FAQ: Booking a Sport Psychology Session**

### ***What happens in the first session?***

The first session is an assessment of your situation. We will discuss your current concerns and collect the relevant information. Together we will set a clear goal or focus for your/your child's counselling, and establish a time line for our work together.

### ***At what age can my child benefit from sport psychology?***

A minimum age of 10 is usually recommended. Sport psychology will be different depending on the developmental needs of the child. Please inquire.

### ***Will I attend sessions with my child?***

A parent is always present for at least part of the first session, so we can establish expectations. The younger the child, the more likely a parent is to be part of the consulting process. Depending upon the presenting concerns, a parent may also need to modify their role with their child athlete and therefore need a session of their own. We will discuss your situation at the first session, and make the appropriate decision.

### ***If my child attends alone, do I have a right to information about their session?***

The parent or guardian of anyone under 18 has legal access to information about a child's psychological services. Older children and teens require a balance between their privacy and parental involvement. We will discuss and negotiate this in the first session.

If you have any other questions, please don't hesitate to contact me by phone 403.283.5525 or email [april@bodymindmotion.com](mailto:april@bodymindmotion.com)