

## **Guide to modern parenting skills to support child's development in sports**

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<b>Degree programme</b> Sports and Leisure Management	
<b>Report/thesis title</b> Guide to modern parenting skills to support child's development in sports	<b>Number of pages and appendix pages</b> 25 + 5
<p>In recent years, there is an increasing amount of research that has been done on sports, especially youth sports. Given the unpredictability of a child's development, there is also an increasing number of people that are looking into research for guidance on how to support a child's development the best they can.</p> <p>However, in most cases, people tend to focus either on coaching or the athlete themselves. If you think about a child's adolescent life, in many cases, their parents are the ones who has the most significant influence and time spent with them.</p> <p>So that brings up the question of, do parents know how to manage the situation between themselves, the coaches and also their child?</p> <p>This guide aims to help bridge this knowledge gap for parents to understand that their behaviour and interactions with their child and the coach will have an adverse effect on their child's development. The guide will serve as a supporting guide for parents, but it is not to be viewed as something that teaches them how to parent their children.</p> <p>This guide will cover five key points, most of them relating to common scenarios parents will face. The guide is formed using already published scientific research ideas and points. It has been compiled and put in common laymen's term for simplified understanding.</p> <p>As for the theoretical part of the thesis, it will give a simple introductory to Finnish volleyball, as well as the youth culture and parents role in sports. It will also provide a more detailed explanation of the points in the guide.</p>	
<b>Keywords</b> Volleyball, Coaching, Parents, Youths, Sports, Development	

## Table of contents

1	Introduction.....	1
2	Top Organizations in Volleyball .....	2
2.1	FIVB .....	2
2.2	Finnish Volleyball Association .....	2
2.3	Junior Volleyball in Finland.....	3
3	Youth Sports in Finland.....	4
4	Different generations .....	6
4.1	GEN Z .....	6
4.2	GEN ALPHA .....	7
5	Parents' Role .....	8
5.1	In the Child's Life .....	8
5.2	In Youth Sports .....	8
6	Effects of Parental Support .....	10
6.1	Positive.....	10
6.2	Negative .....	11
7	Objective of the Guide.....	13
8	Project Planning .....	14
9	Project Implementation .....	16
10	The Description and Result of the Product.....	17
11	Discussion .....	21
12	References .....	22
13	Attachments.....	26

# 1 Introduction

The challenge of child's development in sports is testing and unpredictable. There are many aspects in a child's development pathway. Although there are many interacting factors involved in the development of sport expertise, the most important factor is the practice experienced during childhood and adolescence. (Forsman, H. et al. 2016). Parental involvement entails "the time, energy, and money parents invest in their child's sport participation and includes things such as transportation, attending practices and games, providing instructional assistance, and purchasing sport equipment" (Stein, Raedeke, & Glenn 1999, 592). Parents may not know their influence on their child in sports is much bigger and extends beyond those factors that have been mentioned earlier.

Recognizing the positive and negative influences that different types of parental involvement can have upon children's sporting experiences, a number of researchers, practitioners and sport organizations have begun to develop initiatives to enhance parental involvement in sport (Dorsch et al. 2015; Holt & Knight 2014).

In the book *Parenting in Youth Sport*, it is mentioned that they had first-hand experience of some ways in which parents can make or break their children's experience in youth sport. The most significant influencer of sport performance over a child's lifetime is their parents (Donohue et al. 2007). They are the one that will be constantly be with the child for every step of the way while coaches and organizations might change.

If parents are equipped with knowledge on how to manage in different situations, there might be fewer negative outcomes. This is the reason why I wanted to create a guide for parents who might not be aware that their behaviour could be affecting their child's development in sports. The guide will give the do's and don'ts in commonly seen situations in youth sports, specifically volleyball in Finland, the field I have been working around for past 3 years.

However, the limitation of the guide is that the area of studies in parental influences in youth sports are very new. Therefore, there are many theories that still need to be proven in the future research. I used current published research and scientific journals as my sources when creating the guide and for theoretical references.

## **2 Top Organizations in Volleyball**

### **2.1 FIVB**

The international volleyball federation FIVB (Federation Internationale de Volleyball) was founded in April of 1947 in Paris, France, by representatives from 14 countries. This was after 52 years after American William G. Morgan invented the sport in 1895. (Olympic.org 2015; the FIVB n.d.)

The FIVB consist of five Continental Confederations (Africa, Asia & Oceania, Europe, North America and South America), that in turn help manage the 222 national sub federations. Continental and National federation receive support from the FIVB, which allows them to invest in coaching and athletes, but also in creating the external settings needed for the sport. One of the most notable missions of the International Volleyball Federation is offering standardized training and education for coaches, which in turn helps bringing up the level of volleyball national teams globally. (The FIVB n.d.)

Every national federation can apply for support via the FIVB Projects Platform, which aims to promote the development of players and teams across the world by providing coaching support or volleyball equipment. In 2019, the FIVB received 119 applications, of which 103 were approved, representing an impressive 86.5% approval rate. (The FIVB n.d.)

### **2.2 Finnish Volleyball Association**

The Finnish Volleyball Association is an all-purpose, national- and national-registered society. The purpose of the volleyball Federation is to conduct volleyball competition, training of coaches and instructors, referee activities, top sport activities, social and development services, national team activities, events, circumstance and influence services.

Volleyball arrived in Finland in the 1920s. Suomen Lentopallokomitea (Volleyball committee of Finland) was founded in 1956 and was accepted into the FIVB a year later. Suomen Lentopalloliitto was founded later in 1959. Nowadays, there are approximately 7150 licensed junior players in Finland (including both volleyball and beach volleyball). Approximately 890 junior teams that participate in the Finnish volleyball federation's leagues. Suomen Lentopalloliitto has approximately 400 member clubs affiliated to it. (Suomen Lentopalloliitto ry 2020.)

### 2.3 Junior Volleyball in Finland

According to the world's largest junior volleyball tournament, Power Cup, every year there are close to 7500 junior volleyball players representing about 850 teams. Of the 850 teams, there are about 200 junior clubs from Finland that are involved. It is meant to be a summer event for children and adolescence who are age 7 to 22 years old. The figure below shows the number of teams participating in the past 10 years which shows the popularity in volleyball for juniors in Finland. (Powercup.info.)

The first Power Cup tournament was held 1985 in Jyväskylä. The number of participants has increased a lot over the years.

	Year	Number of teams
<i>Kuopio</i>	2018	841
<i>Vantaa</i>	2017	865
<i>Hämeenlinna</i>	2016	889
<i>Vaasa</i>	2015	874
<i>Raahe</i>	2014	776
<i>Mikkeli</i>	2013	828
<i>Turku</i>	2012	827
<i>Lahti</i>	2011	847
<i>Seinäjoki</i>	2010	901

Figure 1. (Powercup.info)

### 3 Youth Sports in Finland

According to the Finland's 2016 Report Card on Physical Activity, Finland has more than 10,000 sport clubs, and a substantial number (estimated at 350,000) youth are engaged in sports club activities each year. Although seemingly substantial in number, other reports estimate 49% of girls and 61% of boys aged 7–14 years in Finland to be involved in weekly sports club participation. These percentages dramatically drop as youth get closer to ages 15–19 years of age. (Tammelin et al. 2016.)

In the report of Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2016, they conducted a questionnaire on how active Finnish children from the age 9 -15 are in sports clubs. There were about 6922 participants in the questionnaire which is a solid sample size. Of the results, 51% of the children are actively taking part in sports club on a regular basis. This mean a little over half of the children are very active in their life. Next category is 11% of the children who participate every now and then. This could be due to limited opportunities or other factors who cause them to only participate occasionally. Next is the 25% that do not participate in sport clubs at the moment but have done so before. One quarter of the children in the survey has dropped out of the sport having been doing some sport before. Lastly, 13% do not participate in sports at the moment and they never have which could be due to lack of exposure for sports. Those who are involved in sports clubs, they have usually started the sport between the age of 6 and 7. (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2016.)

According to data collected in 2016, 8 out of 10 children felt that at least one of their parents was supporting them to engage in sports to exercise. However, only a little more than half stated that they have had discussion with their parents about exercising or sports often. While the report states that the discussion between the children and parents about exercising and sport is not common. It is also mentioned that both forms of emotion support - encouraging and discussing - were most common with children age 11. On the contrary, it is least common with children aged 15. It seems that as children grow older, they lose some interest in communicating about sports and hobbies with their parents. (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2016.)

They mentioned in the report (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2016.) that parent's most common instrumental way of supporting the children was paying for the fees that come with the sport, followed by parents driving their children to and from practice, parents attending to the children's practice, matches or competitions. The least common instrumental way of showing support was parent exercising with their children.

It was also interesting result (Valtion liikuntaneuvosto 2016.) that children who were the most active in sport received the most support. This could mean that children who received the most parental support are likely the ones who stayed and continue doing the sport. It is mentioned that on average, boys received a little more support than girls. Boys also seemed to receive more support from their fathers and girls received more support from their mothers.



## 4 Different generations

There are at least five identifiable generations in the modern world:

a) The traditionalists (Silent Generation or the Greatest Generation)

This generation is born between 1928 and 1944. This generation refers is known to value authority and a top-down management approach.

b) The Baby Boomer Generation.

Born between 1945 and 1965, this generation often perceived as workaholics.

c) Generation X.

The generation born between 1965 and 1979 who is viewed as being comfortable with authority and view the work-life balance as important.

d) Generation Y.

The generation born between 1980 and 1995 consist of people who generally grew up in prosperity and are also technology savvy.

e) Generation Z.

They are born after 1995. (Cilliers 2017, 189–190).

The latest to be categorized is Generation Alpha, which refers to babies born after 2010. (McCrindle, Fell 2020.)

### 4.1 GEN Z

Generation Z has been greatly molded by the advancement of technology, issues of violence, a volatile economy and social justice movements. While these issues also have affected those in previous generations, the actual context of these individuals is much deeper than those in Generation Z. The new generation may have never known anything different than what they have heard or seen now. (Seemiller, Grace 2017)

The availability of smartphones, broadband Internet access at home, or an online connection at school, the Generation Z have had access to more information than any other generation at their age. If there are anything they want to know, it is only a click away. However, they also have the ability to recognize threats online, such as identity theft, cyber-bullying, and phishing. Because of these issues, they have learned to embrace privacy in their use of technology. (Seemiller, Grace 2017)

Professionals highlight the fact that Generation Z can function in both the real and virtual worlds. They are able to easily switch between these two worlds. This is because they perceive the two worlds as complementary to one another. (Dolot 2018.)

Communication processing among this generation is continuous as they use wide variety of communication devices or social media. It is emphasized by researchers that due to applications they use that support multitasking, being able to be precise or being able to concentrate and even memorize something in the long term has become more difficult for Generation Z (Csobanka 2016.). Generation Z are considered the most educated and sophisticated generation ever. (Dolot 2018.)

## **4.2 GEN ALPHA**

Generation Alpha is the latest generation to be named. Born in the year 2010 and after, the same year the first iPad was released, and Instagram was launched. With the typical generation length spanning 15 years, the last of the Generation Alphas will be born in 2024. (McCrindle, Fell 2020.)

Generation Alpha will be the largest generation as we have a greater population than ever before. They will live for longer and will be more culturally diverse compared to the former generations. As they are exposed to newer technology, they will be the most globally connected generation ever. They are deemed to be more social, global and mobile as they will work, study and travel between different countries and have multiple careers. (McCrindle, Fell 2020.)

Generation Alpha are “upagers” in many ways. Their physical maturity is on setting earlier, so adolescence for them will begin earlier. However, beyond the physical maturity, the social and psychological, educational and even commercial sophistication also begin earlier, which can have negative as well as positive consequences. While adolescence begins earlier, it will also extend later. (McCrindle, Fell 2020.)

The adult life stage, once measured by marriage, children, mortgage and career will be pushed back. This generation will continue educating themselves, start their earning years later and so stay at home with their parents for longer than was previously the case. The role of parents therefore spans a wider age range, still caring at home for their adult kids even into their late 20s. Generation Alpha will no doubt prolong this trend. (McCrindle, Fell 2020.)

## **5 Parents' Role**

### **5.1 In the Child's Life**

According to the book *Unequal Childhood*, the understanding of family sport culture draws from the Bourdieu-influenced sociological literature on the practice of parenting and the materially based on cultural logics of childrearing (Lareau 2003.). These cultural logics are composed of a long list of everyday practices; ways of being, talking, and doing that combine to a specific 'lifeworld' that helps to guide the child towards different activities (e.g. academic learning, cultural activities, or sports) (Lareau, 2003; Reay 1998). To apply that theory to the field of sports, some researchers have employed the concept of "family habitus" to understand how family values and practices influence the sport participation of children and youth (Coakley 2006; Dagkas & Burrows 2016; DeLuca 2016). The starting point of this idea is the family's key role in Stranbu et al. (2020), establishing deeply exemplified motivations, habits, and lifestyles, which in Bourdieu's vocabulary is captured as habitus. The word "habitus" is developed on the basis of 'formative experiences of earliest infancy, of the whole collective history of family and class' (Bourdieu, 1990). Coakley explains that family habitus combines developmental goals and 'the types of activities believed to be helpful in reaching these goals. By implication, family habitus contains activities that parents think will best further the development of their children' (Coakley 2006.). Since participation in sport is often seen as a natural part of growing up in Finland and similar countries, socialization into sport tends to be over noticed. Family habitus is understood here as deeply rooted system of perspectives, experiences and predispositions family members will seek to share. Which in this case, is applied to sports. The advantage of the habitus construct is that it can be used to highlight the reasons of connection between family values and practices and sport participation may continue past the age when youths need their parents' practical support and hands-on involvement. (Åse Strandbu, et al. 2020.)

### **5.2 In Youth Sports**

In research articles, authors like (Holt et al. 2009.) define parental involvement with factors like the level of interest, the degree of their knowledge and the active role that parents play in the participation of sports for their children. Also, according to Hedstrom and Gould (2004), the involvement may vary from just being a driver of their kids to game and practice to a role such as a coach or an official which plays a more significant role.

According to Fredricks and Eccles (2004), also parents can play different roles in the sport life of their children. For example, a provider, an interpreter and a role model. In the text, provider refers to providers of experience. For example, through the ways of reinforcement and level of encouragement and opportunity parents give for engaging in certain sports. Early interest in sports is usually provided by parents. In Finland, parents will provide their children opportunity such as external training camps outside of their club participation. Interpreter refers to parents influencing children ability, perception and involvement through their own beliefs and value. This is crucial as there are several studies that have examined how parents contribute to children's non cognitive development in sport. They fulfil a powerful and fundamental role by providing emotional support and assisting children interpret the competitive sport experience. Parental pressure and excessive support in turn have a negative effect on young athletes. (Côté, 1999; Fraser-Thomas & Côté, 2009; Fredricks & Eccles, 2004)

Lastly for role model, parents can be role models by being involved in sports and it is assumed that their children will follow. They can also influence by being a coach, around the organisation or just for fun. (Fredricks & Eccles 2004.)

In sports, the involvement of parents differs, and it has an impact on the positivity and satisfaction of sport for youth. Higher parental encouragement usually leads to greater perceived competence for youth. Perceived competence is a self- perception of an individual in their own capabilities and ability to manage their environment and situation. (VanYperen, 1995.)

In most cases, many people perceived the role of the parent as only a financial enabler or mode of transportation, but they actually influence much more than that. Parents also play a big role in a child's participation in a sport by providing encouragement and a support system (Autio & Kaski, 2005). It is also said that it is important for parents who are not as involved with their own physical fitness to support their children to be more active than themselves. In addition, children who get more support from their parents are more likely to have a higher perception of competence, intrinsic motivation and sport enjoyment. (Babkes & Weiss, 1999.)

## **6 Effects of Parental Support**

One of the main issues for sports practitioners and researchers is they feel that youth sport participation should lead to positive outcomes like physical and psychological development and lifelong sport participation, rather than negative outcomes such as anxiety or pressure. (Fraser-Thomas & Côté 2009).

Parents generally should have a positive influence on their children, it would be important to realise they can have a negative influence on their children's sporting development. Common examples of this kind of behaviour are like providing too much pressure, criticism, false expectations, and low amount of physical and social support (Gould et al. 1996). In a lot of cases, when children feel this kind of pressure from their parents, they may not enjoy training or playing the sport entirely anymore. This is the unfortunate outcome for many talented young children. They may start feeling anxiety when going to training because they might be afraid of getting negative comments. The children may also stop talking about their sport with their parents, because of pressure from the parents. This could ultimately drive them to quit the sport.

### **6.1 Positive**

Positive parental support is known to increase the enjoyment and perceived competence. It also affects the children's involvement. Teenagers and children have a higher chance of likelihood to enjoy their sport when they have less parental pressure and more support from their parents. The children's perceptions of what their parents do and think are more compelling to their own psychological responses than parents believed to do and think. Children whose parents believe in their sporting ability have a higher chance to have better intrinsic motivation, greater self-perception of sports ability and greater enjoyment. (Babkes & Weiss, 1999.)

Parent's enrolment of their children in organized sports has numerous reasons and motives. One of the most common reason for enrolling children to youth sports is that the parents want to provide opportunities that allow their children to develop and take up skills and habits that will support a healthy, self-directed, responsible and autonomous lifestyle. (Hutchinson et al. 2003; Kanters et al. 2008.) The findings of research paper of Neely and Holt (2014) has identified motivation in three aspects: personal, social and physical benefits. First aspect is that parents want their children to learn about positive self-perceptions such as, confidence and sense of identity. Secondly, to learn about social skills when forming friendships or cooperating in a team and lastly, to develop

fundamental sports skills and improve their health. These valuable skills learned from doing sport have also been shown it can be transferred and facilitate development in other areas of life, such as school and extra-curricular activities. This skill transfer is more effective when the child has a greater self-awareness of their own life skills. Therefore, parents can use this opportunity to further reinforce the skill development by encouraging their children to think about what skills they are gaining from sport. (Jones & Lavallee, 2009)

According to McCarthy, Jones and Clark-Carter (2008), it was investigated that the sources of enjoyment reported by the youth sport participants are positive parental involvement. This factor was one of the most frequently reported results by both male and female youth participants. This signifies that when the children perceive parental involvement as being positive, they are more likely to enjoy their sporting experiences.

Ulrich-French and Smith (2009) published that football players who indicated having a higher peer acceptance and a higher parental relationship rating, displayed lower stress levels, higher enjoyment, and higher perceived competence in youth sports. It suggests that the way parents or peers engage in sport with their children may have an important significant for sustained participation in youth sports.

## **6.2 Negative**

On the other hand, parents with children participating in sports have also demonstrated to perceive organized sport as a vital activity, mainly due to reason of it being culturally valued and publicly visible. This is especially apparent when youth reach into the age where they have the opportunities to be picked for the junior national team to represent the country. It is believed that it will teach valuable life skills and therefore enables the children to grow into a person that is valued in society.

Parents may also find organized youth sport as an opportunity to utilize good parenthood which proves their worthiness. This means that parents are seen wanting to be worthy of praise and meet their responsibilities when their child succeeds in sports. Alternatively, parents are the ones who get the blame. (Coakley 2006.) This also means that parents may experience societal pressure to help their kid succeed, which may end up passing on some of this pressure onto the children.

Adolescence's and children's participation in organized sports usually associates with competitions, progressive skill development, ranking systems, judging and tests. Other

than regular participation, this sort of measurable activities can give parents valuable information on their children's sporting accomplishments, which in turn gives them the ability to compare their own child with same-age peers. This measurable gauge may satisfy the parent's expectations for the experience they have purchased for their children. (Coakley 2006.) In an example by Berg and Salasuo (2017), it is suggested that youth sports or activities with higher cost are seen as an important symbolic representation of the family's social position. The high cost and readiness to pay are ways of parents to distinguish themselves socially from other families. This way the higher-class families with mutual values and views can raise their children in these socially consistent environments and ensure the continuum of their views and status as "upstanding citizens". This may cause children who just want to do sport to take on unwanted social role just because they are placed specifically in certain activities.

Also, in some cases, parents have been perceived to be overly enthusiastic in their support which resulted in harm and negative influence on their children's sport participation. When parental support becomes exaggerated, they can create high levels of unrealistic goals, set high standards of success, the emphasis on winning at all cost and have bigger expectations for an activity than what the child actually wants. This excessive parental pressure may contribute in conflicts between children and parents, or even possibly between parents and coaches. All the intense demands and high expectations from parents may lead to the children or youth feeling anxious or stressed about perform in competitions or practices. Children and adolescents who participate in a highly competitive level of sport may also experience sizable pressure in attaining results, which may lead to dropping out from the sport or cause mental damage to the young athlete. (Doherty 1999.)

In the article of Hellstedt (1987), some parents expect that their children's success in sports will eventually bring them financial and/or educational opportunities (such as scholarships). This kind of expectations may lead to excessive involvement like monitoring practices and competition by providing higher than necessary financial backing, as well as interfering in coach-athlete relationships. These situations come about because parents with this over-involved behaviour want to make the decisions and play the role of "coach" for their children. This is particularly damaging to the relationships between the coach and the child. Cogan and Vidmar (2000) also portray these parents as those who, during practices and competitions, shout more instructions than the coaches do, criticize and over-demand good scores from their children. Parental over-involvement, pressure, criticism, false expectations, and low amount of physical and social support have been associated with sport withdrawal. (Gould et al. 1996.)

## 7 Objective of the Guide

As mentioned earlier, the aim of the thesis is to bring modern ideas of parenting into the ever-evolving world of society and sports. The children now are not the same as they were in the 90s, 00s and earlier. Parents are also much more involved in their kids sporting life, especially when their parents are ex-athletes or coaches themselves. The guide will support volleyball parents who have children that participate in junior club teams and national youth team setups. It will give the parents various key points of characteristics that they can focus on to help benefit their child in the long run.

I have spent time in Kuortane Olympic Training Center with the volleyball youth teams, mainly with U20, U17 boys but also with U19, U16 girls. Throughout my 2 years working here, I have been intrigued with the interactions between parents, players and also the coaches. There was a wide spectrum of relationships level in between them and I could tell that the majority parents want to be involved in their child's life in the training center as much as possible. From cleanliness in their dorms to coming down just to watch a game, they will go the extra mile just to support their children. However, that is also when I observed some negative influences from parents from time to time. Examples like discussing about lack of game time to both players and coaches, discussing conflicting ideas on certain volleyball topics and pressure coming from the stands in the game itself.

The guide is made for the volleyball community, but it does not limit to just that particular group. I believe it is open for any parents, whether is it team sports or individual sports, who are open to the idea of new ideas and self-reflection.

The guide is not an 'end all', meaning users should not be thinking that if they follow every point here, their child will be in top condition. The guide is to just help parents to understand each individual child's emotional and holistical needs. From that, they can learn how to positively support them. All users of the guide should input their own life experiences and the understanding of their own child together with the guide to help them understand certain situations that may occur.



## 8 Project Planning

Table 1. Timetable of the project

Month/Year	Activity
<b>March 2018</b>	Guest Lecture in Vierumäki Started to brainstorm with the help of Jamie Given (classmate)
<b>April 2018</b>	Thesis plan laid out for teacher advisor
<b>August 2018</b>	First Meeting with then Director of Sport of Suomen Lentopalloliitto to propose idea
<b>August 2018 - 2019</b>	First year in work placement, to get to know the community (Players and Parents) Second year with the same players and more in-depth relationship with volleyball community to understand more about issues
<b>December 2019</b>	Approval from then CEO of Suomen Lentopalloliitto to do a simple guide which they will commission Started to research on theory and get the structure of thesis
<b>August 2020</b>	Got the head of coaches from the training center to read through and feedback on the guide Made the necessary adjustment
<b>November 2020</b>	Sent out first version of thesis

I was first made aware on this area of topic in the university by a guest lecturer, Mr John Anders Bjørkøy from the Norwegian Olympic Committee, who was then the Head of Coach Development. He mentioned that almost all successful Norwegian top athletes have supportive parents. However, he did not elaborate further on it. That left me wanting to find out more and share with others about this phenomenon that often gets overlooked.

In my opinion, the majority of the people who participate in sports, when asked about who or what is important in their sporting career, will often think about coaches, teammates etc. Family will be mentioned but will not be placed on an important level. Also, many parents especially in the western world are very involved in their child's pathway in sports, as I have experienced while coaching youths for three years now. However, in my opinion, many styles of parenting might be working as well as they should be due to the ever-evolving society and teens behaviour in current generation.

While planning around this topic, I have come to a consensus that I want to create a simple guide to help parents support their child's development. Since I am working for the Finnish Volleyball Association, I wanted this to be for them as parents send their children far from home to their training center, which is not an easy decision for them. The theoretical part of my thesis would be to explain the target organization, the importance of parents in sports, the youth culture in Finland and important factors of a child life that parents should take note of.

After I have done the theory part, I have found the few key points that would make up my guide. The process of the guide would be to make already researched materials and make it as hassle free and easy to understand for people to read. It should also contain tips and ideas on how to use these pointers on how to support your child emotionally and holistically.

The content of the guide is also represented in an honest yet not intrusive content. It is not meant to tell parents how to be a parent to their child, but rather what they can do to give their child the best environment to reach their potential. Readers of the guide should also implement their own thoughts and ideas on it.

As for the time frame for my project, I initially intend to take a year off the thesis work and focus on my work placement to let me understand the top youth volleyball athletes in the training centre. However, it took also my second year off due to a big change in the organization and additional responsibility given to me as we prepared for the U20 European Championship Qualifier (which was unfortunately cancelled due to the current Covid-19 pandemic). Because of this Covid-19 pandemic, I was able to find time now to draft out theoretical part. However, many of the Finnish theory text are in Finnish, so that took quite a lot of time to get it translated.

## 9 Project Implementation

The implementation stage of the project took a lot of idea changes throughout the process. I initially wanted to do a questionnaire with the parents, however that changed when I realised it could be better to use already researched information. The reason is that there are many research and studies out there which provided better and more accurate information than what I could garner. I decided to use that information that is available and put it to good use.

I was lucky enough to be doing my work placement year in Suomen Lentopalloliitto in Kuortane Institute of Sport. This gave me first-hand experience of day to day operations and living with the best junior players Finland has to offer. It was a unique training center as an assistant coach to the boys' team and we see each other almost every single day. This gave me an insight to their personal life and relationship with their parents. Also, most parents came to games that we play all over Finland, which allowed me to have small conversations with them and learn more about different family situation.

My colleagues were also a great help when it came to giving me insights on each player's history, family background and personality. This allows me to understand more about each player's reasoning for being stress for example. In two and half years, I have met about 100 junior volleyball players whom I have interacted with and that gave me a good sample size to know what are the common situations that came up with regards to parenting.

While it took me more time than I initially wanted to do this project for the thesis, I was happy that it happened because during the time, I had greater understanding of the community which hopefully helped me get a more accurate reflection on the guide that I created.

## 10 The Description and Result of the Product

In the study of Smoll, Cumming and Smith (2011), they mentioned 'the athletic triangle'. It is a social system that parents, athletes and coaches have where they have a complex relationship. From this system, those interactions can have significant consequences for the psychological development for the child in sports. Many parents may not know it, but they have a significant influence on the relationship between the coach and the athletes. This is fairly important considering many parents try to have a conversation with the coaches with good intention of speaking about their child. Not knowing this might have a negative impact in a certain way. Ross, Mallet and Parkes (2015) have done research that showed that via modelling, parent complaints indirectly hindered the coach-child relationship and also obstruct children's resilience development.

Therefore, through my research of many different articles, I have found points I feel that are important in the volleyball community through observations. Before I deliver the points in the guide, I feel that the parents have to do some self-evaluation to know the situation that they are at. However, I understand that it is difficult for parents to self-evaluate considering that they will naturally be biased towards their own child and think what they do will be the best for themselves. Parents will need to be open minded and think about the big picture. Maybe involving their child into this self-evaluation because ultimately this is about the child.

First point in my guide is "Youth sports are not adults". In my observation with my time with the youth national team, who was playing in the adult league, many expected the team was to win and do well. The mind-set of being a team competing in the adults 2<sup>nd</sup> highest league in Finland was for their child to be in the starting line-up. Ultimately, parents should have the mind-set that it is good that their child has the ability to play in an adult league at 16-18 years of age, but it should be about development more than just wanting to be in games and win. Parents need acknowledge the right of each child to develop athletic potential in an atmosphere that emphasizes participation, personal growth and *fun*.

My second point is for parents who maybe under or overly involved with their child's activity, "Give your child some time". I have noticed two extremes ends of behaviour for parents in the volleyball community. First type of parents are the ones who give their child the freedom to develop themselves and only come to one or two games a season and do not communicate much with the coaches. The second type would be the complete opposite. They will come to every game and sometimes even practices to observe. There

is nothing wrong with coming to every game of course, but it could be an opportunity for more negative actions to happen. Parents should decide how much time they want devoted to their children's sport activities. Conflicts may arise when they are busy, which is common in modern day, but it is still important to be interested and want to be there for their children. They should not promise more time than they can actually deliver, neither should they be overbearing and be involved in everything that the children do. It is recommended that when parents do make time for their child to attend their game or some discussion, they should ask about their sport experience and child's opinion. (Smoll et al. 2011.) It will be preferable that they keep things on the positive note.

My third point, it would be "Give your child opportunity to make his or her own decision. Ultimately, it is the child's life and they have to figure what they want to do and who they wish to become. In sports sense, it would be letting your kid make decision within boundaries, for examples like which sport to focus on, if they need extra practice or camps. Every child should accept responsibility for one's own behaviour and decisions as it is an essential part of growing up. Parents should allow their children to make mistakes, be responsible and learn from it. Every parent has ambitions for their child, but they have to accept the fact that they cannot dictate their child's life. Parents can offer suggestions and guidance about sports, but they should let the child go his or her own way within reasonable limits set. This can be a difficult thing to do, as parents may find it hard to 'let go' of their children.

The fourth point is "Support your child through disappointment". In competitive sport, every child athlete experiences the happiness of winning and the agony of defeat. Enjoying victory is the easier thing to do, but parents are needed to support their children when they are disappointed and hurt. Emotional support is what is needed when children are low on mood. This may mean not to be embarrassed, ashamed or angry when their child becomes emotional after losing a game. Parents should be able to help their children learn from such experiences. It may be the most important lesson in sports to learn from disappointment and failures. Without denying the validity of the child's feelings, parents can help their child see the positive side of the situation and change their disappointment into self-acceptance.

My final point is the most important point in my opinion in Finnish volleyball community. It is called the Reversed – Dependency Phenomenon, which means, trying live through your child or the child being a projection of the parents. In the Finnish volleyball community, most of the juniors are children of ex-athletes. This means many children have parents who have played volleyball either on a professional level or adult leagues. All parents identify with their children to some extent and thus want them to do well. Unfortunately, in

some cases, the degree of identifications becomes excessive and the child becomes an extension of their parents. In extreme cases, parents will begin to define their own self-worth in terms of their children's successes or failure. For example, a parent may try to find through his child the success he or she never knew as an athlete. The parent who was an ex national athlete may be resentful and rejecting if their child does not achieve a similar level of success. The child could think that he or she has to succeed or the parent's self-image or reputation could be let down. This places a huge pressure and heavy burden on these kids to succeed. When parental love and approval is dependent on the adequacy of performance, being in sports is bound to be stressful for the child.

In the final part of the guide, I can real scenario pointers on commonly occurring situations. In many sports, the most noticeable parent-related problem is misbehaviour at games. Parents should watch their children compete in sports, but they also have to meet an acceptable level of behaviour standards. I came up with some basic "Do's & Don'ts" that are easy to follow which are important for parents. First point for "Do's" is for parents to express interest, give encouragement and to support young athletes. This is the most basic point that all parents should take into consideration. Secondly, parents should cheer, not only for good performances, but also to good effort. This helps children feel validated that their effort is being recognized. Thirdly, parents should communicate repeatedly to their children that all they expect is for them to give their full effort, and not emphasize on the results and outcome. Last point is for parent to lend a hand to the coach or officials only if they ask for help.

In the "Don'ts" section, the most important point is parents should not interfere with the coach for the duration of the practice or game. Parents should leave the coaching for the coach and not to overstep their boundaries which may impact negatively on the child and coach. Second point is that parents should not be shouting instructions or criticism to the children in a game. This is extremely disruptive as it may be confusing for the children to hear different instructions from different sources. Lastly, which is a big issue for in certain situations, parents should refrain from making abusive comment to athletes, coaches or officials of either team. This affects greatly on the child who perceives the parent as their role model. It would be sending a wrong message and influencing them in a bad way.

As a result, I made a mini guidebook that people who want to take a look at can easily read through quickly and understand the ideas without much fuss. My aim for the guide was for it to have concise point for people to refer if they encounter similar issue so they can reflect and evaluate their own behavior. Also, I wanted it to be easy to read and understands, which means it should not contain a lot of wordings. However, I added the appendix should parents be interested in in-depth reading. I want the guide to help

parents understand the relationship dynamics between themselves, the children and the coach. The guide is made not to contain judgement and not to teach parents how to parent their child. It is for them to evaluate and reflect on the situation. In return of reading the guide, I would like the parents to tap into what could be a much deeper and greater relationship with their children which hopefully turning into a much successful athlete in the future.

## 11 Discussion

There is still much to be researched on the parental topic in sports, as the society is an ever-changing subject. Whatever that worked 20 years ago, may not be relevant to today's society. The coaching professionals and parents have to be up to date with the latest trends and techniques. However, the limitations of research journals and articles are that they are very new and most of them require more time and research in future.

Therefore, I have linked it with personal experience and interactions to form the guide. My greatest challenge on this thesis was trying to find the right balance between the positive and negative points of parent support. Most people already know the benefits of parent support and that is why I want to bring the negative points across. In at least four to five different sources, brought the issue of parental support by making the negative point known.

Some people will disagree when I mention that parents are the most important influencers in youth sport. However, I think, in most cases, the amount of time they spend with the children is actually the most out of anyone. So if parents could be equipped with the right knowledge and skills for the sport and also interpersonal skills on how to deal with youth athletes, it would mean the young athlete would constantly have a productive and positive atmosphere to grow in.

The final result is a product that is concise and informational. I designed it with Apple pages to give it an appealing look. I delivered all five points and the do's & don'ts into three small pages. The next step for me will be to find someone to translate to Finnish language and then it will be distributed in Suomen Lentopalloliitto and around Finland by the regional managers working throughout Finland.

In conclusion, I hope this will generate more awareness on parental support in the volleyball community when it is translated and published in the future. They can understand that they do not need to coach the children themselves to have a heavy influence on their children, but they just need to be a supportive parent. I truly believe the better parenting influence we have on the next generation will eventually show results.



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## 13 Attachments



## AUTHOR'S NOTE

This guide was produced as a part of a thesis for a Bachelor's Degree in Sports Coaching and Management in Haaga-Helia University of Applied Sciences, Vierumäki Campus. The subject came about when I was attending a guest lecture in school, where it was mentioned that many successful Norwegian athletes have supportive parents. The idea struck me that in youth sport, parents are the ones who spend the most time with the children and also invest the most on the child. Did we ever think if the parents have the knowledge to help their children in their development as athletes? I also have realised during my time working in the volleyball community that there are many passionate parents who love their kids as well as volleyball. This is both a blessing and a curse because there are many factors that have positive and negative impact on the children. I have compiled and simplified this guide from research around the world. The aim of this is not to teach parents how to parent their children, but to help them realise what is the situation with their children and how to help them better. I hope this guide will reach out to parents who want the best for their children and to help them reach their true potential.

Daryl Tay

October 2020

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Self-evaluation
2. Parent-Athlete-Coach Paradigm
3. Key Point 1 and 2
4. Key Point 3 and 4
5. Key Point 5
6. DO's & DON'Ts



Credit: Suomen Lentopalloliitto

**BEFORE WE GO INTO THE KEY POINTS, SELF-EVALUATION SHOULD BE DONE BY ASKING YOURSELF THESE QUESTIONS.**

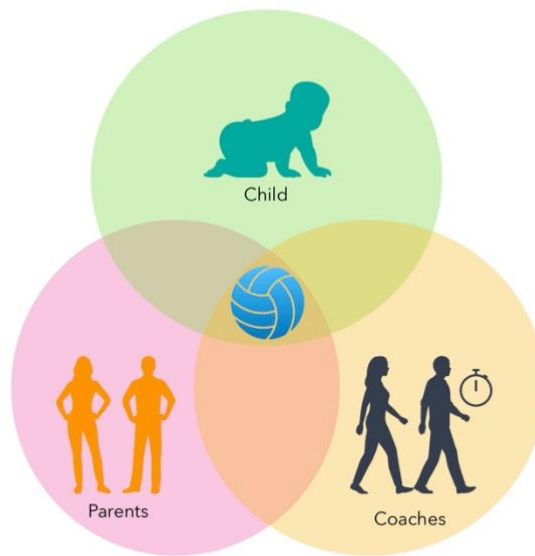


Credit: Suomen Lentopalloliitto

Self-evaluation requires you to assess the situation from a bigger picture. Be open and honest!

- Do I give my child enough space (emotionally/physically)?
- Is my support to my child's sporting development inadequate/sufficient/over bearing? (It can be hard to evaluate this yourself so it would be helpful to receive feedback from family members or close friends.)
- Do I let my child have responsibility to make their own decision with regards to sports?
- Do I take matters into my own hands? (For example, speaking to the coach directly if my child is not selected for a game.)
- Does my child want to be in sport because they want? Or was it something I wanted?
- Is my way of supporting my child positively/negatively impacting him/her?





PARENT-ATHLETE-COACH PARADIGM

In order for the child to have a successful sporting development, the parent, child and coach has to work hand in hand. As parents, you can affect the relationship between your child and their coach.



Credit: Suomen Lentopalloliitto

## POINT 1.

### Youth sports ≠ Adult sports

Each child's ideal environment to develop potential is in an environment that emphasises participating, personal growth and most importantly, fun.

Does your child see practice and games as fun and learning experiences?

## POINT 2.

### Give your child some time

In modern world, it can be difficult to allocate time due to other commitments. How much time do you want to give for your children's sport activity? Be honest with time commitment issues and it is better to not promise more than you can deliver. At the same time, remember to let your child have their personal time and space. From time to time, ask about their sport experiences and make effort to watch some of their games.



Credit: Suomen Lentopalloliitto

## POINT 3.

### Give your child opportunity to make his or her own decisions.

Taking on responsibility for one's own behaviour and decisions is an essential part of growing up. They should be able to go their own pathway but within boundaries set. Parents might have ambitions for their children, but they should avoid excessively governing their children's lives. Understandably, letting go can be difficult.

## POINT 4.

### Support your child through disappointment

In competitive sport, children will experience triumph as well as defeat. It is important that parents support their child when they are disappointed and hurt. Help them learn from the experience. Without denying the efficacy of their feelings, parents can help them see positive side of situation and change their child's disappointment to self-acceptance.



Credit: Suomen Lentopalloliitto

## POINT 5.

### Reversed-dependency phenomenon (Living through your child)

All parents identify with their children to some extent and want their kids to do well. However, the degree of identification can become excessive and the child can become an extension of the parents. This may cause parents to define their own self-worth in terms of their child's success or failure.

If a parent had success as an athlete yourself before, it does not mean their child will attain a similar level of achievement. This sort of pressure placed on the children to excel can be a heavy burden if the child thinks they must succeed or their parent's self image is threatened. This message should be communicated to the child to avoid unnecessary pressure to succeed.



# DO's & DON'Ts

## DO's

- Express interest, give encouragement and support young athletes
- Cheer for good effort as well as good performance
- Communicate *repeatedly* to children that giving their utmost effort is all that is expected
- Lend a hand when coach or official ask for help

## DON'Ts

- Do not interfere with the coach during practice and game
- Do not shout instruction or criticism to the children
- Do not make abusive comments to athletes, coaches or officials of either team



Credit: Tiina Alatalo

## Appendix

Image 1. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 2. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 3. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 4. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 5. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 6. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry. Photograph. Suomen Lentopalloliitto Ry Archives.

Image 7. Alatalo, T. 2020. Photograph. Private home album

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