

**PLAY LIKE  
A CHAMPION  
TODAY**

Character Education Through Sports

# CHAMPION PARENT NOTE

## The Hidden Disorder in Youth Sports



Maybe it's not so much hidden as it is under-recognized. The American Psychiatric Association doesn't list it in their latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistic Manual of Mental Disorders. The American Psychological Association has yet to publish a single peer-reviewed article on the topic.

"Google" it and you'll be lucky to find one solitary article devoted to the topic. But make no mistake, it is real and it affects thousands of adults annually. What is "It"?

### **Sports Parent Burnout (SPB)**

#### Where Does Sports Parent Burnout Come From?

Like all parents, sports parents can often feel torn in many directions. There are only 24 hours in a day, and we could easily fill them with the tasks related to just one of our roles - being a sports parent. Multiply that if you happen to have more than one child playing sports. Multiply it again if you happen to be one of the approximately 13.7 million single parents in the United States today (U.S. Census Bureau Report 2011). Add in all our other responsibilities (regular parent, employee/employer, cook, homework checker, shopper, housekeeper, chauffeur, comforter and motivator), not to mention the pressure of constantly trying to be in two (or more) places at once; it's a recipe for stress. So, if you're feeling exhausted, or unmotivated, or feeling as if you're not very good at ANY of your jobs, you could be burning out.

#### **Watch for the Warning signs of SPB:**

Sports Parent Burnout usually doesn't come out of the blue, but slowly builds up. There are some signs to look out for, such as:

- constant irritability that doesn't seem to have a specific cause
- resentfulness and frustration toward your children and their needs, no matter how basic
- feeling inadequate in your job as a parent or as though nothing you do is good enough
- withdrawal or emotional detachment from your children
- taking it personally when your child doesn't perform well (e.g., "After all I do for you, and you still strike out?")
- basing your own happiness on how well your child performs (e.g., "It would

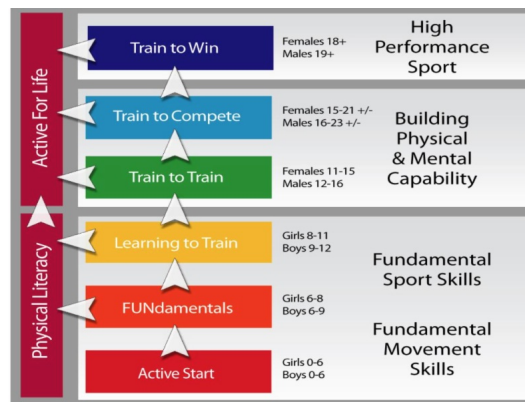
make me so happy if you just showed a little hustle once in a while.")

Some sports parents have a higher risk of burning out than others:

- parents with infants in addition to their young athletes risk burnout because meeting the physical needs of an infant and the lack of sleep on top of meeting the sports needs of a young athlete can be exhausting.
- parents of teenagers risk burnout because the demands of keeping up with their teen's schedule and their mood swings can be overwhelming
- single parents or parents who feel they don't have enough support from their partner
- parents who put their child's needs above all else, including adult relationships, hobbies, or a job
- parents of children with special needs
- parents with chronic physical or mental health (or substance abuse) problems
- parents in poverty, unstable relationships, or with other significant circumstantial stresses

### Ways to avoid sports parent burnout

Despite the demands of parenthood, sports parent burnout isn't inevitable. Being informed about long-term athlete development (LTAD) and how children develop as athletes will help you understand what your children are capable of and what their athletic needs/behaviors will be like at certain ages. Knowing what to expect can help give you some control in your own life as a sports parent.



[Click to Learn more about LTAD](#)

[Healthline Newsletter](#) lists these other ways to help avoid sports parent burnout:

- Taking care of your own needs: Parents often put their needs last, but a well-rested, well-nourished parent with interests and friendships of their own is not only a good role model, but a happier parent.
- Managing stress: Parenting is stressful and so are other aspects of life, such as work, school, friends, and other family members. Find ways to relax, whether it be meditation, exercise, or having someone to talk to about your worries.
- Cultivate a support network: Asking for help isn't weakness; it's a sign that you know your limits. Never underestimate the power of friendship or the importance of babysitters.
- Be realistic: You can't expect to do everything, and sometimes you may have to say no when your child asks to add another activity to an already full schedule.
- Avoid comparing yourself to other parents: Someone you know may look like they've got it all figured out, but you have to figure out what works for you and your family. If you constantly compare yourself to other parents, you'll never feel that you're doing a good enough job.

## Gratitude and GROW for Parents

Sport Parents, take a deep breath and appreciate simply the fact that your children have the opportunity to play. Thank God for that gift.

Then, to help put sports in the proper perspective and to keep it in perspective, remember Play Like a Champion's **GROW** model that works for your young athlete can serve you equally well:

**G = GOALS** Set realistic goals for what you can accomplish as a sports parent, and resist the temptation to compare yourself to other sports parents. Everybody's situation is different.

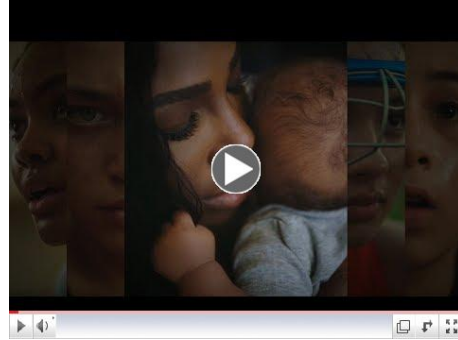
**R - RELATIONSHIPS** Bond with the team, the coaches and most importantly the parents of other players. You will likely feel better and less burned out if you have good social connections. This could mean deepening your relationship with other sports parents (which makes it much easier for you to help each other out).

**O - OWNERSHIP** As much as they are developmentally able, give your young athlete responsibility/accountability for their chosen sport(s). Teenagers should be able to wash their own uniforms and keep their equipment in good shape. Kids from about 10-years-old can contribute proportionately to equipment purchases, carry their own equipment bags, etc.

**W - WINNING** Keep winning in perspective. This isn't a race to see who can be the best sports parent ever. All that's within your control is being the best sports parent you can be. That can't happen if you let yourself burn out.

***"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."***

*~ Philippians 4:6-7*



Watch Serena Williams encourage her daughter to simply PLAY for the goodness of all that sport can be.

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