



A GUIDE FOR PARENTS

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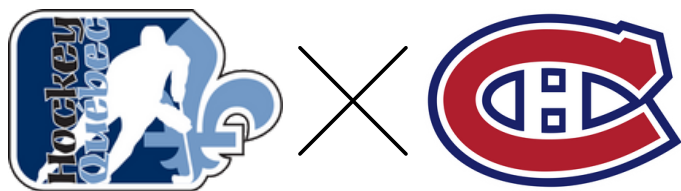
**IN BETWEEN 2 PLAYS:**  
BEST PRACTICES AND  
PITFALLS TO AVOID AS  
PARENTS IN SPORTS

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*HOCKEY Edition*

This document is intended for any parent or person responsible for a child playing hockey who wishes to support their child in a positive way in the practice of their sport.

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# INTRODUCTION



# 01

**As a parent, your behaviours and attitudes affect your child's enjoyment, motivation, and performance.**



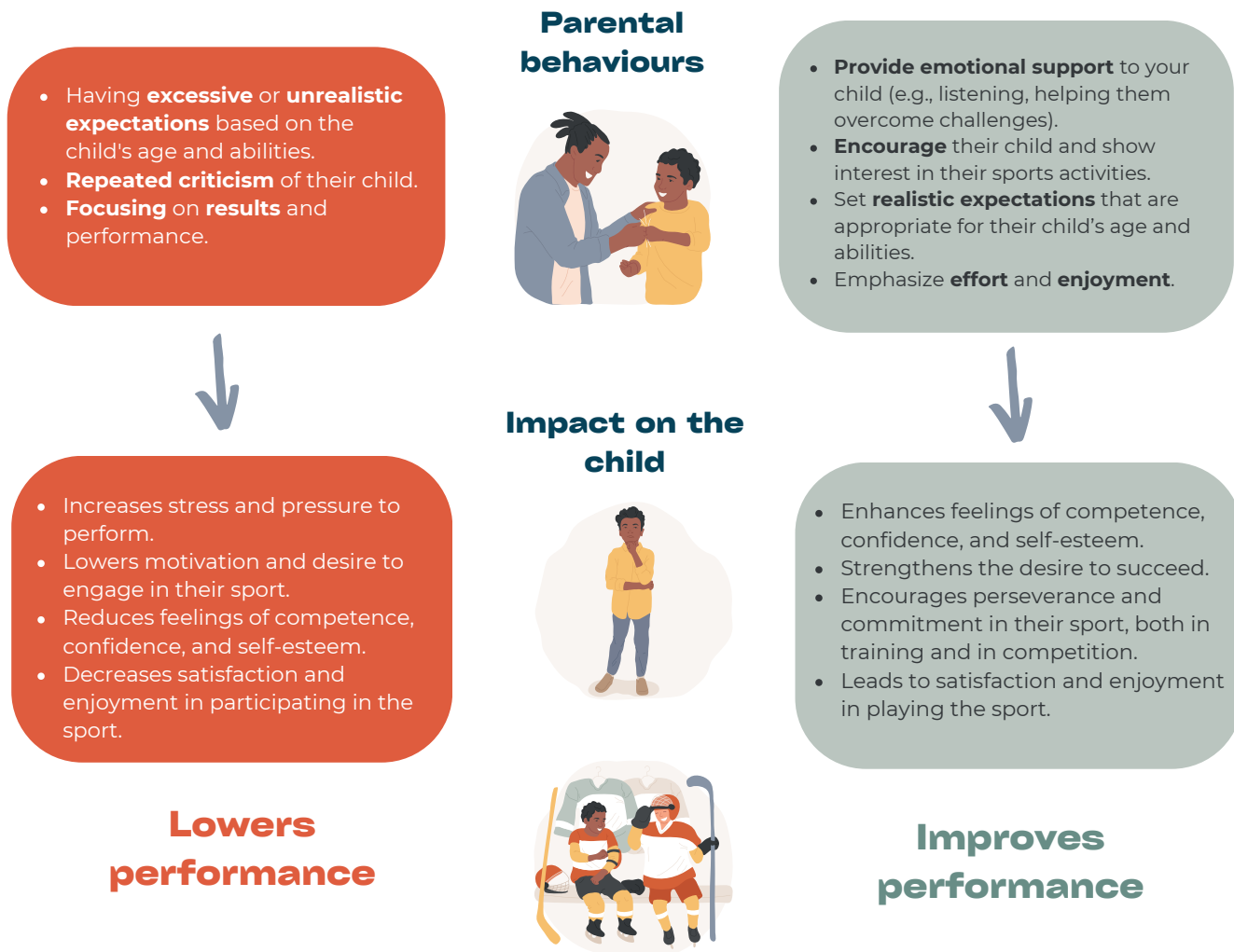
Often, these parents want their kids to succeed in hockey, to make it to the NHL, and these expectations start early—often way too early. The surest way for your kids to quit hockey is by being too demanding and having expectations that are too high. Let them play, let them have fun. That's how they'll improve—by enjoying themselves out on the ice.



**Rafaël Harvey-Pinard**, winger for the Montreal Canadiens



**Figure - Parenting Practices, Player's Performance and Well-Being**



In the following pages, you'll find ideas for best practices and pitfalls to avoid to better support your child in their sports journey.

We know that, as a parent\*, the attitudes and behaviours you adopt to support your child in their sport are rooted in good intentions, aiming to help them grow as both a player and a person. You are invited to review this guide with a touch of:

- **Curiosity:** a desire to be inspired by from the guide's suggestions and motivation to improve.
- **Open-mindedness:** willingness to consider the ideas offered, even if they challenge your current beliefs.
- **Kindness:** being gentle with yourself. Self-reflection can be challenging, and simply engaging in this process is an admirable step.
- **Sense of humor:** you may recognize yourself in some situations, and that's okay! Nobody's perfect; the important thing is to use this opportunity for growth.



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\*The term parent includes all persons who act as guardians for the child.

**IS YOUR GOAL TO BE  
A PARTNER IN YOUR  
CHILD'S ATHLETIC  
DEVELOPMENT?**



**Q2**


IS YOUR GOAL TO BE A PARTNER IN YOUR CHILD'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

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## The Parent's Role in Their Child's Sports Participation

It's natural to want to be involved in your child's sporting experience. However, it's crucial to understand your role in this specific context and the role of the coaching team so they can perform their duties effectively.

### Your role is to support your child positively:

It's about finding the balance between **supporting them** and **encouraging their independence** (see [democratic parenting style](#);  available in French only).

### To meet your child's **need for support**:

- Your child needs financial support (e.g., equipment, associated costs). They need your help with transportation and punctuality, and, depending on their age, assistance in communicating information about competitions and practices.
- Your child needs reassurance of their worth and importance to you, even if they don't always express it.
- Your child needs to feel heard, understood, valued, and loved, regardless of performance or competition results. They should feel that you love them with both their strengths and limitations.

Being  
available

**Attentive to your  
child's needs**

Showing  
**unconditional  
love**

Providing **support**  
and a **kind  
presence** during  
challenging times

Providing **constructive  
and positive feedback**  
and **encouragement**



To support your child's **need for autonomy**:

- Your child needs guidance and structure to guide their choices and actions (e.g., clear and consistent guidelines and rules) while having the freedom to make their own decisions. **They need to feel they are in control of their actions and can make decisions about their involvement in the sport.**
- Your child must **have opportunities to practice autonomy**. They should be able to explore, face challenges, make mistakes, and discover their limits to grow fully and learn to trust themselves.
- As your child matures, their need for autonomy will increase – but they will **always need to feel loved, heard, and encouraged**.



**Find out more about teenagers' need for autonomy!**

## DID YOU KNOW?

There can be a gap in perception between what parents do and how their child perceives it. Some players **perceive less encouragement and understanding from their parents than the parents themselves report**, while sensing more directive and pressure-driven behaviours. As a result, a parent making an effort to encourage and support their child might not actually be perceived that way by the child.

### Recommendation

Ask your child what kind of encouragement they prefer and what they need to feel supported while enjoying their sport.

## Parental Pressure

This refers to behaviors **perceived by the player** as signaling **high, unlikely, or unrealistic expectations**. The more a player feels pressure from their parents, the more likely they are to practice their sport to satisfy external pressures (e.g., avoiding punishment) or internal pressures (e.g., guilt, fear of disappointing others), rather than for themselves and their own enjoyment (autonomous motivation).

Parental pressure increases stress for the player, reduces their enjoyment of the sport, and can lead to them quitting altogether.

## Ideas for Best Practices



Be informed about the coach's goals for the season according to your child's development stage. This will help you set realistic expectations and align your efforts with the coach's.

### Development goals

Refer to [Chapter 2 of the Coach's Guide on "Player Development Pathway"](#) (2023, p. 27).

Latest version available in French only



Be open to sharing authority with the coach by avoiding constant questioning of their leadership and decisions.



Show interest in your child's sport by asking questions about their experience. Use open-ended questions to encourage them to share about their sport experience.

Why do you enjoy your sport?

What challenges are you currently facing?

What did you learn this week?



## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)



Discuss your expectations with your child and make sure you share a common vision for their goals for the season and long term.

**Your expectations** should focus mainly on your child's **effort** and **discipline** throughout the season, not on performance results (e.g., making a specific team or scoring a certain number of goals).

**Long-term goals should primarily be set by your child**, as it is their personal experience. Seasonal goals should be set by your child and their coaches.

Are your expectations realistic and aligned with your child's abilities, level, and development stage?

**Be your child's biggest supporter and help them face challenges!!!**

Your child needs your encouragement and wants to make you proud.

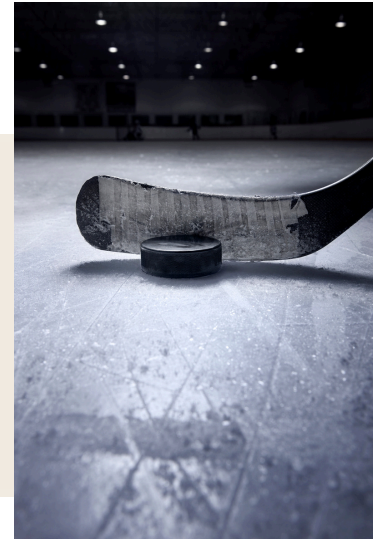


IS YOUR GOAL TO BE A PARTNER IN YOUR CHILD'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

## Pitfalls to Avoid

### Pitfall 01

Making comments focused solely on the importance of results.



### EXAMPLES

WINNING, PERSONAL STATS, RANKINGS



You almost won! You'll get it next time.

You should have easily beaten that team—they're ranked 5th.

You're just three goals away from the top scorer on your team.



### Implied Message

Even if your intention is to encourage your child and show support, the implied message from comments focused only on results is: winning is what matters most!



**Rafaël Harvey-Pinard**, winger for the Montreal Canadiens



It's not by thinking "I absolutely have to score 3 goals tonight, or my father will be angry" that young players will improve. I think that's the worst way to deal with young players. Let them have fun, then they'll develop on their own, with their coaches.



IS YOUR GOAL TO BE A PARTNER IN YOUR CHILD'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

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## Potential Consequences

- **Increased performance pressure**, which can lead to anxiety and stress related to the sport.
- **Decreased enjoyment** in the sport, which harms motivation and encourages **disengagement**.
- **Reduced well-being** and **performance**.



## Tips



Measure success beyond wins and losses:

- Provide feedback based on effort and discipline in the game.
- Highlight good plays, lessons learned, and improvements, regardless of the match outcome.

### Accurate passes

#### Effective zone exit

##### Sportsmanship

A good move to get past an opponent (even if it didn't lead to a goal)

##### Positive attitude

Pay attention to your child's good plays during a game or practice. They may have forgotten them if they're feeling down after a loss, so why not remind them?



## Tips (continued)

- Always keep in mind the importance of enjoying the sport. Take the time to ask your child what they enjoy about their sport at the start and end of the season, and make sure those elements remain part of their experience!



To direct your child's focus to the process rather than the outcome, help them understand the connection between their actions and success:



- Getting good rest by sleeping earlier.
- Trying again after missed shots early in the game.
- Positive attitude after a penalty.



**One thing you can always say to your child, whether they win or lose:**

*I loved watching you play today!!!*

## Pitfall 02

Making comparisons between your child and other players in a repetitive and unconstructive manner.



## EXAMPLES

COMPARING WITH OPPONENTS, TEAMMATES

“ Why do they always get more playing time than you?

At least, they managed to score a goal!

Did you see how they always stand out on the ice?

”

### Implied Messages

Your intention might be to make your child aware of areas for improvement, but the underlying messages in these comparisons are:

- others are better than you;
- your worth is tied to your performance.

## Potential Consequences

- **Reduced self-esteem** and **confidence** in accomplishing tasks or reaching goals—even though your child cannot control others' performance.
- **Increased performance pressure**, which can lead to anxiety and stress related to the sport.
- **Increased unpleasant emotions** (e.g., sadness, disappointment, frustration).
- **Decreased enjoyment, well-being, and performance.**

A child who is compared often learns to see themselves as either inferior (less valuable) or superior (more valuable) to others.

Even if you compliment your child by comparing them to someone performing less well, they learn to value themselves in relation to others.



## Tips



Boost your child's self-esteem and confidence by discussing their **strengths** (e.g., physical skills, tactical abilities) and **qualities** (e.g., curiosity, attentiveness, respect) as a **player** and as a **person**.

Ask them about the strengths and qualities that help them handle different situations and tackle challenges. This allows them to identify actions they can take to improve and strengths they can rely on to overcome challenges.



IS YOUR GOAL TO BE A PARTNER IN YOUR CHILD'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

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## Note

Your child may find it challenging to identify their own strengths and qualities at first. This is completely normal! Support their self-reflection, give them time to think, and remind them that knowing their strengths and qualities is essential for using them daily and recognizing their own worth!

### Pitfall 03

Giving instructions and directives to your child over the coach's, whether before, during, or after a practice or game.



### EXAMPLES

- **Before a game:** Tell your coach to put you on the first line today.
- **During a game:** Pass the puck to Mathieu/Alexia! Skate! Come on, shoot! Get in the corners!
- **After a game** – constantly acting as the coach with technical or tactical feedback: You should've passed at that moment. Why didn't you get in front of the goal? That wasn't a good breakout strategy.

IS YOUR GOAL TO BE A PARTNER IN YOUR CHILD'S ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT?

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## Implied Messages

Your intention may be to support your child's development and help them improve, but the underlying messages in these comments are:

- your coach doesn't know what they're doing;
- you don't know what to do.

## Directive behaviours

Actions that seek to control your child, such as telling them how to manage their game or setting their sports goals for them. These behaviours can hinder their development and impact your relationship with them.



## Potential Consequences

**Weakened trust between player and coach** – if a parent frequently questions the coach's decisions, the child may lose trust in their coach. The child might also develop loyalty conflicts – whom should they listen to and aim to please: their parent or their coach?

## Potential Consequences (continued)

**Reduced focus** – it's hard to concentrate on a task and perform well when processing multiple instructions, especially if they're contradictory.

**Lower confidence** in making game decisions and feeling competent – this hinders the development of their instincts as a player.

**Increase in unpleasant emotions** (e.g., embarrassment, frustration, discouragement).



### Tips



Be mindful of the comments you typically make to your child before, during, and after a game. If most of your comments are instructions or directives, make it a goal to replace some of them with positive encouragements.



Ask your child if they find your feedback helpful and what would make it more useful for them.

## Good to know!

There is a difference between **encouragement** and **praise**!

### Encouragement

A supportive, non-judgmental response to your child's success or "failure." Encouragement **fosters** your **child's self-esteem** and **confidence**.

#### Examples

- Work hard and have fun today!
- That was a tough loss, but I'm proud of you!
- You're putting in a lot of effort, and I can see the results!

### Praise

Is often based on results and can create **pressure**, **anxiety**, or push your child toward **unhealthy perfectionism**, even if unintentionally.

#### Examples

- I'll give you \$5 for every goal you score.
- You really played better than your teammates today.
- I'm proud of you; you scored the goal that led to your team's victory! That's great!
- What a win! Want to go out to eat to celebrate?

### \$5 for every goal

This strategy also encourages an individual playing style where the child focuses solely on scoring instead of reading the game and playing as a team – also known as the notorious puck hog.



**ARE YOU SEEKING TO  
HELP YOUR CHILD  
LEARN FROM AN  
EXPERIENCE OF  
ADVERSITY?**



**03**

## ARE YOU SEEKING TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN FROM AN EXPERIENCE OF ADVERSITY?

**Adversity in sports** can take many forms and vary in intensity. Each challenge can be a learning opportunity for your child if they approach it with a growth mindset.

**It's important to encourage attitudes and behaviors that help your child embrace mistakes and view them as opportunities for growth.**

“ For me, obstacles are step number 1 in growing up. If everything's easy, it's hard to grow. When you encounter obstacles, you begin to know who you are. Are you capable? Are you going to work, or are you going to give up? Because people are going to be judged a lot more when things aren't going well than when they are. For me, these obstacles are an opportunity, and they're essential if you want to reach big levels.



**Martin St-Louis**, head coach of the Montreal Canadiens

## Best Practice Ideas

- ✓ Use language that shows adversity as a learning opportunity.
- ✓ Explain that a loss isn't the end but rather a step in their development.

## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)

To **reframe adversity** as a **chance to learn**, you can:

- Emphasize the development of self-mastery (i.e., control over emotions, thoughts, and behaviors) and focus on what has been learned.
- Teach your child to focus on the positives and celebrate improvement and progress.
- Discuss others' success as a learning opportunity rather than a source of jealousy.
- Discuss how certain well-known players have responded to adversity.



### Some good models ...

- Raphaël Harvey-Pinard (see his interview excerpt on [Sport'Aide](#))
- Martin St-Louis
- Marc-André Fleury
- Jonathan Marchessault
- Max Domi
- Jonathan Drouin



Help your child overcome challenges by encouraging them to step back and make a more informed decision.

- Ask your child what went wrong overall and how it could be avoided in the future.

## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)

- Encourage your child to take ownership of the challenges they face while showing genuine concern for their situation. What role do they play in the challenge, and how can they work to overcome it?
- Help them set small, process-oriented goals (specific actions) to work toward resolving the situation. Make sure these goals are within their optimal development zone (see the optimal development zone tool from [Boite@Psy](#); available in French only).

Here are two quick resources for more information on this topic:



- Jonathan Lelièvre's blog "[Comment surmonter une épreuve difficile avec un jeune athlète ?](#)" (available in French only)
- Fondation Jeunes en Tête's resource: "[Helping Your Teen Make Informed Choice](#)"



Give your child space to reflect on their own.

It can be tempting to try to speed up their learning by pointing out what they should improve or do, or by lecturing them on certain situations. However, it's better to let them think things through at their own pace to develop autonomy and the ability to handle different situations.

Give your child the chance to self-assess by asking, for example:

**Did things go as you hoped?**



## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)

- ✓ Teach your child to welcome constructive feedback as supportive advice rather than harsh criticism.

Avoid criticizing your child in front of others or when you're feeling upset. Instead, provide thoughtful, gentle feedback.

## Pitfalls to Avoid

### Pitfall 01

Showing disappointment through non-verbal cues when your child's or team's performance disappoints you. This can distract or hurt your child during their performance.



### EXAMPLES

- Shaking your head in disapproval.
- Avoiding eye contact with your child.
- Showing anger or disappointment on your face.

## EXAMPLES (continued)

**Note:** Many players watch their parents during play to gauge approval or reactions, so it's important to be mindful of non-verbal responses as a parent-spectator.

- Leaving the stands during your child's or team's underperformance, such as after a goal against, a missed play, or leaving before the end of a game when a loss seems likely.

### NUANCE

It's natural to step away briefly to manage your emotions and respond appropriately as a spectator. If you do, make sure to return with positive non-verbal cues to show support for your child.

## Implied Messages

Your intention may be to show your child that their success matters to you and that you believe they can do better, but the underlying messages in these reactions are:

- you disappoint me;
- I'm ashamed of you;
- winning is all that matters.

## Potential Consequences

- Increased **pressure to perform**, leading to anxiety and stress during play.
- **Reduced focus**, as negative self-talk (e.g., "They're never proud of me," or "I'm no good") can occupy their thoughts and distract from the game.
- **Decreased motivation** and **disengagement**, as their sense of competence and confidence are impacted.
- Less enjoyment, well-being, and performance.



## Tips



Pay attention to your nonverbal cues during or after a game.

- Is the message sent through your nonverbal cues **motivating**, **encouraging**, and **positive** for your child and their team? If not, try to gradually improve it by focusing on one element at a time.



## Tips (continued)

- Are your nonverbal cues consistent with your verbal messages?

### Example

If you tell your child that mistakes are normal and that taking calculated risks is essential for improvement, but you look discouraged or disappointed when they make mistakes, they receive mixed messages. On the other hand, they receive clear messages if you continue to encourage them when they make mistakes on the field.

## Pitfall 02

Punishing your child after a poor performance or a costly mistake that affects the team's victory.

### EXAMPLES

- Not allowing them to see friends.
- Enforcing extra training sessions.
- Removing access to a fun activity.



## Implied Messages

You may want to show your child that their success matters to you and that you believe in their ability to improve. However, the underlying messages can be:

- you're disappointing me;
- the only thing that matters is winning.

## Potential Consequences

- **Increased pressure to perform**, leading to anxiety and stress during play.
- **Lowered self-esteem** and **sense of competence**, as self-worth becomes tied to performance.
- **Reduced motivation** and **disengagement**, as enjoyment in the sport declines.
- **Lowered performance** and **well-being**.



## Tips

- Take a moment to cool down (let adrenaline and strong emotions settle) and reflect on the situation before discussing it with your child.
- Put the situation in perspective: What specifically bothers you about it? What message do you want to convey? How could you communicate it differently, rather than through punishment?

ARE YOU SEEKING TO HELP YOUR CHILD LEARN FROM AN EXPERIENCE OF ADVERSITY?

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## NUANCE

If your child displays inappropriate behaviours (e.g., slamming their stick, making disrespectful comments to the coach), it's important to address the issue and implement an appropriate consequence according to the nature of the behaviour.



**IS YOUR GOAL TO  
SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN  
DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT  
WILL SERVE THEM IN THE  
LONG TERM AND IN MANY  
AREAS OF LIFE?**



**04**

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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**Participation in sports can be a rewarding life experience, helping your child develop essential life skills for personal growth.**

There will be many opportunities for your child to build skills such as:

- **Being a good leader** – e.g., setting an example, offering help, motivating the team.
- **Asserting themselves** – expressing their needs respectfully.
- **Managing emotions** – becoming aware of the range of emotions that arise in sports, and learning to express and handle them constructively.
- **Respecting** differences, authority, rules, and competition (opponents).
- **Working as part of a team.**

## Best Practice Ideas

- ✓ Act as a role model through your own behaviours and attitude. Is the way you respond or react to various situations consistent with how you want your child to act in similar situations?
- ✓ Use teachable moments to help your child recognize the skills they're developing in hockey that can transfer to other areas of life.

Ask questions to **spark awareness** and **provide feedback** related to these skills (see examples below).



IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)

### QUESTION EXAMPLES

- How do you manage your emotions at different points in your sport (e.g., pre-game stress, disappointment after a play)? What strategies work, and what others could you try?
- How do you support your teammates to help the team succeed?
- What can you do to regain motivation when it's running low?
- What does your sport teach you or help you develop beyond physical and athletic skills?

You can also use **hypothetical scenarios to help your child prepare** for different situations. For example:

- What would you do if a teammate asked for help?
- How could you show respect to a referee or an opponent during a game?

### FEEDBACK EXAMPLES

- I appreciated your attitude with the referee today; you stayed respectful even though you didn't agree with the call.
- I'm proud of you for reaching out to your coach for help. It's important to express your needs to grow and support your well-being.
- I love seeing you encourage your teammates, even when the game isn't going as you'd hoped.

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Ideas for Best Practices (continued)

- ✔ Discuss how certain skills can transfer to other contexts, like school or interpersonal relationships.

### Examples



You spend hours training before a competition to perform well. It's the same for school—putting in hours of preparation before an assessment is important.

Before a game, you might feel stress. The strategies you use to manage that stress can also help before a class presentation or during a test.

When on the ice, you communicate clearly with your teammates to set up strategies. This coordination is essential, just as clear communication is key for teamwork in school projects.



IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

## Pitfalls to Avoid

### Pitfall 01

Resorting to violent or demeaning language toward your child, other players, coaches, referees, or other parents.

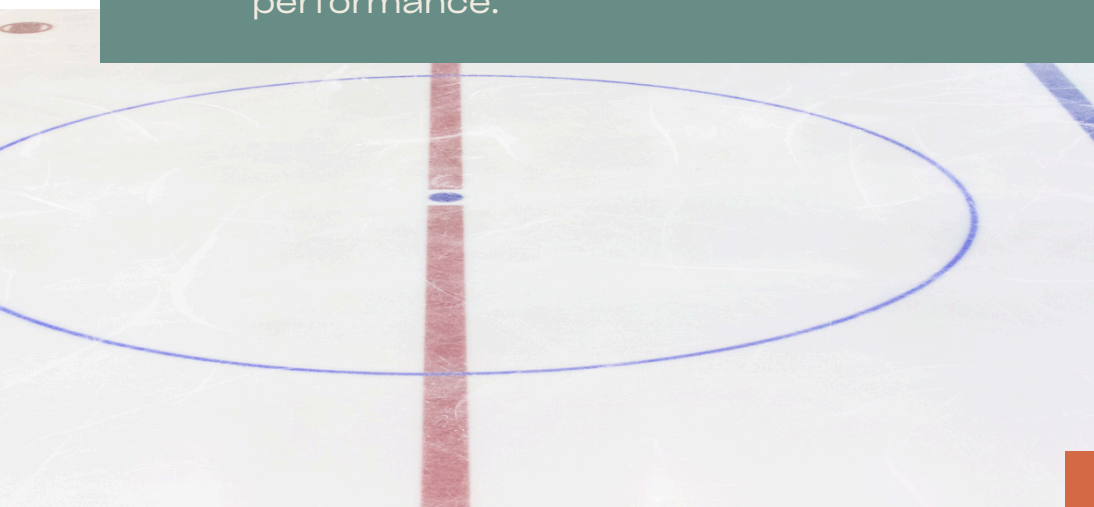


Remember, your child mimics the behaviours they observe.

### EXAMPLES

THREATS, INSULTS, SARCASM

- The ref needs glasses. They shouldn't even be allowed to referee a Timbits game.
- They played like girls.
- Don't tell me you gave it your all to end up with that kind of performance.



IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Implied Messages

You may intend to show support, motivate, or protect your child from perceived injustice (e.g., a ref's decision), yet these remarks imply:

- it's acceptable to defy authority;
- violent or demeaning language is permissible.



## Potential Consequences

**Imitation by your child** – encourages them to use violent or demeaning language toward others to express dissatisfaction. This can harm team cohesion and performance, and foster unsportsmanlike behaviour on the field.

**Normalization of psychological violence**, increasing bullying or disrespect among players.

**Lower self-esteem, reduced motivation, enjoyment, and performance** for the person targeted.

**Increased unpleasant emotions** among team members (e.g., shame, embarrassment, anger), which can impact performance.

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Tips

- Reflect honestly on your words to gradually remove violent or demeaning language from your vocabulary. It can be challenging to engage in honest self-reflection, but it's a valuable skill for personal growth and to be a positive role model for your child.

### **In another context, would you make the same comments?**

- Would you ask a teacher if they got their diploma from a cereal box after a grading mistake?
- Would you insult a young grocery clerk for not bagging an item?
- Would you tell a colleague or supervisor they're terrible for a poor project decision?

- Reflect on the culture of your child's sport and how it might unconsciously influence your attitudes and behaviors (e.g., a 'win at all costs' mentality).

It's important to **stop justifying or excusing unacceptable behaviors** simply because 'it's always been done that way,' everyone else is doing it, or because you went experienced it yourself.

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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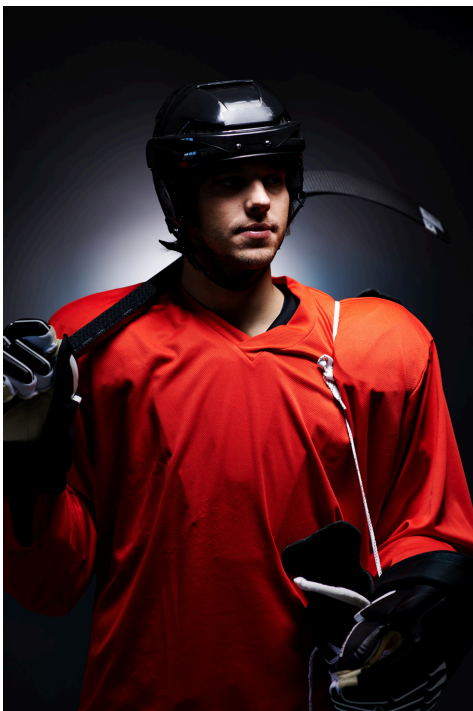
## Pitfall 02

Using physical violence against your child, other players, coaches, referees, or other parents.



## EXAMPLES

- Pushing, shaking forcefully, or restraining;
- Blocking the way;
- Grabbing your child by the arm or shirt;
- Preventing your child from drinking water;
- Forcing your child to train while injured;
- Throwing an object at your child or another person.



## Implied Messages

Your intention may be to show your child that their success (or the team's) is important to you and that you believe in their ability to do better. However, the underlying messages in these reactions might be:

- i'm disappointed in you or the team;
- any way of expressing emotions is acceptable, even violent ones;
- winning is what matters most.

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Potential Consequences

**Increased risk of physical and psychological injuries.**

**Normalization of physical violence**, encouraging the use of such behaviours in different situations and other contexts (as children tend to imitate parents; see the Sport'Aide's video "[Parent as Role Model: Take Action Against Bullying in Sports](#)"; available with English subtitles).



**Deterioration of the parent-child relationship**, as the child may feel less loved.

**Increased unpleasant emotions** experienced by team members, including the child (e.g., shame, embarrassment, anger).

**Reduced enjoyment, well-being, and performance** (for the player and the team).



IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Pitfall 03

Displaying inadequate emotional management in front of your child.



## EXAMPLES

FRUSTRATION, ANGER, DISAPPOINTMENT, STRESS

- Expressing your emotions by yelling at players, parents, coaches, referees, etc.
- Making inappropriate gestures toward others, such as giving the middle finger or making a 'loser' sign.
- Sending a hasty, unconstructive text to the coach after the game to express dissatisfaction in an impulsive and thoughtless way.
- Guilt-tripping your child about the sacrifices you make so they can play, with the sole intent of making them feel bad as well.

## Implied Messages

While you may intend to show your child that their success matters to you and that you believe in their potential to improve, the underlying messages in these reactions might be:

- it's okay to react impulsively to unpleasant emotions;
- I'm disappointed in you or the team;
- any way of expressing emotions is acceptable.



IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?

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## Potential Consequences

**Imitation by your child** – encourages impulsive reactions to intense, unpleasant emotions, even during games (e.g., managing stress or anger with aggression).

**Normalization of poor emotional management** – leads others to behave similarly (e.g., other spectators, coaches; see Sport'Aide's clip on "[Managing emotions and negative behaviors in the stands](#)"; available in French only).

**Increase in unpleasant emotions** experienced by team members, including the child (e.g., shame, embarrassment, anger).



## Tips



Learn to recognize the early signs of anger and aggression in yourself to avoid automatic aggressive reactions (verbal or physical).



Practice deep breathing to quickly lower your stress levels and regain calm.

### Laval University Resource:

[Emotional Regulation: Enhancing Your Toolkit](#) (available in French only)



Learn to step away from situations that make you emotional to find calm.

IS YOUR GOAL TO SUPPORT YOUR CHILD IN DEVELOPING SKILLS THAT WILL SERVE THEM IN THE LONG TERM AND IN MANY AREAS OF LIFE?



## Tips (continued)



Intentionally focus on neutral or positive elements instead of dwelling on what's causing the unpleasant emotion.



The “**5-Senses Anchoring**” technique can be especially helpful for redirecting your focus and calming down (available in French only).

**Your child needs you and appreciates your involvement in their sports experience.** This guide offers various practices to embrace and avoid as a parent, helping you reflect on your role in your child's athletic journey.

**You're a role model for your child.** This doesn't mean you have to be perfect—it means recognizing that **your child is naturally inclined to imitate you, so you can give them the best example possible** in everyday situations (e.g., handling challenges, managing stress, interacting with others).

**So, what can you adjust in your approach to be the best role model for your child and help them have a positive experience in sports?**



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