

# GUIDE FOR PARENTING A JUNIOR TENNIS PLAYER



*This Guide is the workproduct of USTA Tennessee Staff and is a Brand Asset of USTA Tennessee. Please request and obtain permission from USTA Tennessee before reproducing, duplicating, copying, or otherwise using any of the materials.*

# JUNIOR TENNIS PARENT EDUCATION

## OVERVIEW

The role of parents in sports, specifically tennis, can be controversial. Interfering with coaching, avoiding top competition, and pressuring a player are just a few of the parent-induced issues that are recognized by top junior coaches that often result in a player burning out. However, not all parent-player relationships are negative; there are many instances where a parent's involvement is influential to the child's success in the sport. In fact, most players need the support of their parents/family in order to succeed. In essence, a parent is extremely important for a junior player's development.

## RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TENNIS PARENT

One of the first decisions a parent can make is to take their kids out on the tennis court and play. A parent does not have to be tennis professional to introduce tennis to a child. Providing a child with a fun initial experience with tennis is crucial and will affect whether the child will want to play more. As children develop interest and skill, it is beneficial for them to play in clinic situations where they will meet and play with kids their own age. As the child's game improves, he or she will need appropriate individual and group lessons.

### Playing Other Sports

Playing other sports is good for kids and can actually have a positive impact on a child's tennis game. Many of the current top professional tennis players participated in other sports when they were young. For example, Rafael Nadal & Roger Federer both played competitive soccer.

### Modeling Good Sportsmanship

Children are known to be good imitators; they become what they see and hear. Tennis is based on trust and respect among players and coaches as well as adherence to the rules of the game. Good sportsmanship is not always common in the present day sports world. Parents, more than anyone else, affect their children's behavior. To encourage good sportsmanship among their children, parents should speak and act in a manner that will encourage positive modeling.

### Help Develop A Winning Perspective

A parent should make decisions for their child based first upon what is best for their child and second, what may help their child win. Winning is definitely important; pursuing victory and achieving goals are rewards of sports. However, an obsession with winning often produces a fear of failure, which can result in below-average performances and upset/distraught children.

**Helping Your Child Set Performance Goals**

Remember that it is better to emphasize *performance goals*—those that emphasize individual skill improvement, such as foot work or the forehand—than the *outcome goal* of winning. Performance goals are in the athlete’s control and help the athlete improve his or her game, whereas an outcome goal of winning is only partially under the control of one individual. Performance goals should be specific and challenging, but not too difficult to achieve.

**Foster Independence On/Off the Court**

Parents should encourage their kids to take responsibility for their match and practice times as well as for carrying their own gear. As children get older, they should have more and more input into their practice sessions. This will help them to accept responsibility for their tennis development and will likely result in deeper commitment and satisfaction.

**Learning From Losing**

It is understandable for players to be upset when they lose a match as long as they cool down in a reasonable amount of time. In fact, great players always find losing painful. Upon a child losing, a parent should console the child, but also allow him/her to be a little upset. Remember, the learning process is a process. A heartbreaking loss can be a positive turning point if it is handled correctly. Every tennis year will be filled with highs and lows. Keep in mind that only one person wins a tournament each week, which makes the wins all that more rewarding.

**Promote and Encourage Team Activities**

Doubles is a great way to build relationships, and learn proper teamwork. Playing high school tennis or Jr. Team Tennis adds to a positive tennis experience. Not only is it more fun to win and lose as a team, but players also learn that many of their teammates share similar interests and aspirations.

**Provide Opportunities To Watch Tennis**

Attending a high school, college, or professional tournament can provide the atmosphere for a young player to become inspired and motivated by seeing an exciting match. They may also develop a role model for their game style or behavior on the court. Parents should encourage their kids to take friend(s) along with them so they can interact and have fun as they watch.

**WINNING ATTITUDES OF EFFECTIVE TENNIS PARENTS****Constant Improvement, not Comparison**

It is never healthy to make a big deal over little Lisa beating little Maria. Parents who get caught up in the status of “who beats who” can easily negatively affect their child and commonly give their child complexes about playing certain other children.

The attitude should be about improving constantly. Comparison to others is a poor gauge for improvement in the development stages. The most effective parents only compare their child’s performance with their child’s past performance. The idea is to convey a value of “constant improvement.”

### **It is About the Child's Journey, not the Parent's**

Parents can become too emotionally invested in their child's tennis, resulting in the parent living vicariously through them. One sign is when the parent says: "WE won the tournament on the weekend."

The most effective parents do not attend every practice and competition. They openly communicate with their child about what they are going through and support them win or lose as long as they give their best effort.

### **What They Do in Practice is More Important than Who They're with**

Parents often times get caught up in the fallacy that their child always has to be in groups with better players. This attitude can kill any group program at a facility. What if the other "better" players in the group have the same attitude?

There are benefits in the top, middle, and bottom of training groups, just like there are benefits in playing stronger, same, and weaker level players. All these experiences are important in development stages. The most effective parents respect their child's coach, communicate with them clearly, and avoid "lobbying" their coach to place them in certain groups.

### **Process Over Results**

Winning in the developmental stages does not ensure success in the future. The goals set and the activities performed to accomplish them are what truly matters. Too many parents become content with the status and accolades when their child is winning at younger ages. If they don't train solid fundamentals, it could lower the chance for future success.

The most effective parents help their children to take the focus off winning and place it on the process of setting and accomplishing improvement goals. They reinforce what the coaches emphasize.

### **Attitude**

The most effective parents don't let poor behavior or sloppy training habits slide just because the child wins. Use tennis to make a great individual first and a tennis player second. Tennis trophies are temporary, but character lasts a lifetime. They use tennis to develop their child's character and leave the tennis to the coaches.

## **POSITIVE PARENT-PLAYER INTERACTIONS**

- Encourage your child to play tennis, but don't pressure them.
- Understand what your child wants from tennis, and provide a supportive atmosphere for achieving those goals.
- Set limits on your child's participation. Don't make tennis everything in your child's life.
- Make sure the coach is qualified to guide your child through the tennis experience.
- Keep winning in perspective, and help your child to do the same.
- Help your child set challenging but realistic performance goals, rather than focusing only on "winning the game."
- Help your child understand the valuable lessons tennis can teach.
- Help your child meet responsibilities to the team and the coach.
- Discipline your child when necessary.
- Turn your child over to the coach at practices and matches—don't meddle or coach from the sidelines.

## POSITIVE CONDUCT FOR A TENNIS PARENT

- ✓ Remain in the spectator area during competitions.
- ✓ Do not advise the coach on how to do the job.
- ✓ Do not coach your child during the contest.
- ✓ Help when you're asked to by a coach or an official.
- ✓ Show interest, enthusiasm, and support for your child.
- ✓ Do not make insulting comments to players, parents, officials, or coaches of either team.
- ✓ Maintain control of your emotions.
- ✓ Thank the coaches, officials, tournament director, and other volunteers who conducted the event.
- ✓ Read the code of Conduct with your child

## 7 POSITIVE PARENTAL BEHAVIORS

1. Provide unconditional love and support
2. Provide logistical support
3. Hold child accountable for behavior on the court
4. Provide financial support
5. Emphasize positive attitude
6. Model Values
7. Provide appropriate discipline for poor sportsmanship

## ROLE OF TENNIS COACHES

### Finding the right coach

At a certain point when your child displays the desire to pursue tennis seriously, the role of a parent will change and you will need to find a coach. Take Tiger Woods for example. His father introduced him to golf and coached him until it became obvious that he needed more advanced coaching. He helped find Tiger a coach and stepped back and let the coach take over.

The parent's role now becomes one of support and guidance: financial, emotional, and logistical such as planning tournament trips, worrying about meals, booking hotel reservations, and providing transportation.

Coaches have a strong influence on young athletes and affect how much players enjoy the sport as well as how they develop psychologically and socially. They are powerful role models and therefore, face tremendous responsibilities. Since much of tennis is one-on-one interaction between coach and athlete, the impact of the coach can be extremely significant.

## KEY RESPONSIBILITIES OF A TENNIS COACH

**Role Model:** The coach needs to be a good role model who teaches and models behavior that reflects desirable basic values.

**Communication:** Coaches need a communication style that allows both player and parent to feel comfortable raising concerns and expressing needs. They should use non-threatening language and adapt teaching methods to meet the needs of each individual so that he or she can reach maximum tennis and growth potential.

**Knowledge of Technique:** Coaches should be able to understand, distinguish, and explain the impact/benefit of the fundamentals of technique for each stroke and be capable of guiding the player to learn those skills.

**Evaluate and Improve Technique:** The coach needs to be able to evaluate and analyze stroke production for technical errors and deficiencies, determine the cause, and help the player make corrections using the appropriate principles of learning.

**Learning Progressions:** The coach should know appropriate learning progressions in tennis and systematically instruct players as they progress developmentally in the skills of tennis.

**Sports Medicine:** A coach should always be aware of the health status of his or her players to prevent over-training, injury, or illness and be able to apply proper first-aid treatment when needed

## NEGATIVE PARENT-COACH INTERACTION

- Speak negatively about coach in front of the child
- Disrespect the coach
- Change coaches frequently
- Have high demands that place pressure on the coach

## POSITIVE PARENT-COACH INTERACTIONS

- Trust the coach,
- Support the coach
- Provide positive logistical and environmental support (e.g., scheduling, transportation, picking up balls)

### **COACH RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TENNIS PARENTS**

1. Talk less to your child about tennis off the court
2. Never talk about money; the child should have no understanding of the finances involved in his/her tennis
3. Control your reactions to the outcome of the match...treat wins and losses the same
4. Develop the view that my sacrifice for my child's tennis is normal/don't expect a return on your investment

### **PROBLEMS PARENTS CREATE FOR COACHES**

1. Parents live through the child's tennis
2. Parent goals for child are not the same as the coach
3. Parent philosophy and values are not consistent with values of the coach
4. Parent undermines coach's discipline of the child
5. Lack of open and honest communication between parent and coach
6. Parent result-focused because of high-financial costs of the game
7. Parent doesn't support coach's decisions

### **TOURNAMENT COMPETITION**

Trying to develop one's potential without playing competitive tennis is not recommended for aspiring young players. This is because it is rarely done successfully. The overwhelming majority of players who reach the sport's higher realms do it by proving themselves at each different level of competition.

As soon as young players are ready to commit to competing in tournaments, a number of choices need to be made. There isn't a set path to follow that will ensure them of fulfilling their potential; there's no one-way approach to player development. Rather, a major factor in determining the ultimate success of young players is the tournament schedule they choose to follow.

## BENEFITS OF PLAYING TENNIS

### The Psychological, Social, & Intellectual Benefits of Tennis

- Because tennis requires that the player prepare to compete by practicing skills, checking equipment, and making line calls during a match, your child will learn how to accept responsibility.
- By learning to play within one's abilities and realizing that managing and minimizing mistakes in tennis (or life) is critical, your child will learn how to effectively manage mistakes.
- By adjusting to the elements (wind, sun, etc.), while managing to compete at the highest possible level, your child will learn how to manage adversity effectively.
- By accommodating physical, emotional, and mental stress in a tennis match, your child will increase his or her capacity for dealing with all forms of general stress.
- By adapting to the stress of a point and the recovery between points, which is similar to the stress and recovery cycles of life, your child will learn how to recover and recapture energy.
- Since tennis requires learning how to anticipate an opponent's moves and plan countermoves, your child will learn how to plan and implement strategies and tactics.
- Since preparation before serving or returning a serve to begin a point is critical, your child will learn positive pre-performance rituals for competition. These skills can transfer to taking exams or making a presentation in class.
- Since competition is one-on-one, your child will learn good sportsmanship skills and how to compete fairly.
- Through the interaction and communication before, during, and after a tennis match, your child will develop outstanding social skills.
- Since successful doubles play depends on the partners' ability to communicate and play as a cohesive unit, your child will learn teamwork.
- Since tennis requires working on skills during practice and controlling the pace of play in competition, your child will develop discipline.
- Because improvement through lessons and practice reinforces the value of hard work, your child will develop a great work ethic.

## References

Gullikson, Tom. "USA Tennis Parents' Guide." United States Tennis Association. 2000.

[http://assets.usta.com/assets/1/USTA\\_Import/USTA/dps/doc\\_437\\_2.pdf](http://assets.usta.com/assets/1/USTA_Import/USTA/dps/doc_437_2.pdf)

Gould, Daniel, Larry Lauer, Christina Rolo, Caroline Jannes, Nori Sie Pennisi. "Understanding the Role Parents Play in Junior Tennis Success." Institute For the Study of Youth Sports. Jan. 2005.