

How significant is
the role of parents
and coaches in
youth sport? ▶



◀ **T**he success of a sport program depends primarily on the quality of adult leadership. Teachers, coaches, officials, spectators, and parents all affect the experience and determine to a large extent whether it will be positive.

However, of all the adults involved, parents and coaches are perhaps the most important. It's their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours which undoubtedly affect the child the most.

The relationship between the coach and the young athlete is critical. How a coach teaches new skills, manages a practice, gives feedback, recognizes effort, and behaves with players and parents is essential to establishing a healthy environment.

Canada is very fortunate to have some of the world's best coaches working with our athletes. Over the last 25 years, the Coaching Association of Canada, in its quest to determine what makes a 'model coach', has developed a central theme — a good coach is someone who creates an environment that allows athletes to succeed. Former president Dr. Geoff Gowan says, "Good coaches build the confidence needed for athletes to believe in themselves so they can perform at their highest level."

The role of parents is to decide what a child's sport needs are, investigate the programs that are available, decide which ones are the most appropriate for the child's age and ability, estimate the quality of the youngster's experience, and decide whether a particular activity lends itself to a lifelong habit of exercise. Parents should also determine whether the coach's philosophy is compatible with their own personal values.

Very few children can participate in sport without the financial and emotional support of their families. Often, family arrangements are made around a child's sport commitments. Research shows that children are more likely to participate in sport if their parents do. A study commissioned by Sport Canada on sport participation by Canadians showed that a mother's participation had a greater effect than a father's on a child's likelihood of involvement.