

What should parents watch for during a game or practice? ►



Sitting on the sidelines, parents and spectators are in a good position to determine whether the sport experience is a good one for children. Dr. Geoff Gowan, a former Olympic athletics coach, developed this checklist for parents.

Practices should be well-organized and purposeful. The coach should be in charge and well-prepared for practice. Equipment should be set up and the children organized quickly into groups to practise different skills.

Every practice should have a high level of activity and involvement for all children. Children don't like to stand around waiting for their turn to kick the ball. They should be active — most of the time!

Every practice should progress from known skills to new skills. After a proper warm-up, the children should begin familiar drills to improve or maintain their skills. Then the coach should build on these skills by introducing new ones to the group.

A good coach communicates clearly. A picture is worth a thousand words. New skills should be clearly introduced with a demonstration. If the coach notices the skill has not been absorbed, he or she should stop the practice and ask the children to watch while another demonstration is given as a reminder.

A good coach makes encouraging comments to the group. Coaches should encourage their charges by praising their efforts. Children like to be told they are doing a good job and working hard.

A good coach provides specific instruction to individual children. “Just try to open those fingers a bit more when you catch the ball, Gregory.” “Watch where you're throwing that ball when you throw it to Caroline. Try and throw it right into her tummy. That's good. That's a lot better.”

A good coach provides opportunities for feedback and questions from the children. Children should never be discouraged from asking questions.

A good coach lets everybody play. Sign up with a coach who believes everybody should play even if it means missing the playoffs. Everybody goes up to bat whether they are good batters or not.

A good coach has happy children. Children who enjoy working with a good coach leave practices happy and satisfied, ready to come back the next time.