

How to Help Your Child Enjoy Sports

Playing organized sports can offer a range of benefits to kids' physical health and emotional development. However, some kids simply don't enjoy sports — for any number of reasons — and may miss out on these benefits. While you can't force ...

Part 1 of 2:

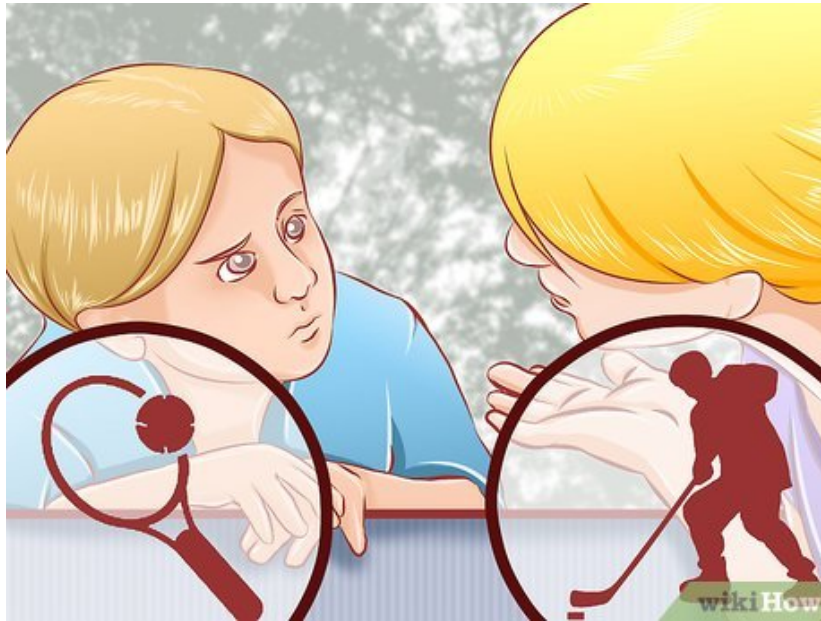
Finding the Right Fit



Be realistic about your kid. Many a parent wants to believe that they have the next tennis champion or basketball star for a child, but the odds of a child growing up to achieve athletic fame and fortune is remote at best. There is no reason to crush their dreams of eventual sports glory at a young age, but you should also realistically assess their physical and emotional gifts as you help guide them into trying certain sports.^[1]

1. For instance, a short, stocky kid may not be ideally suited to basketball, while a tall, lanky kid may not have the easiest time with gymnastics. Children who are overweight or not at an ideal fitness level may find more enjoyment (at least initially) in sports with less running demands — baseball as opposed to soccer, for instance. That said, plenty of short kids love playing basketball, so don't go overboard with your assumptions.

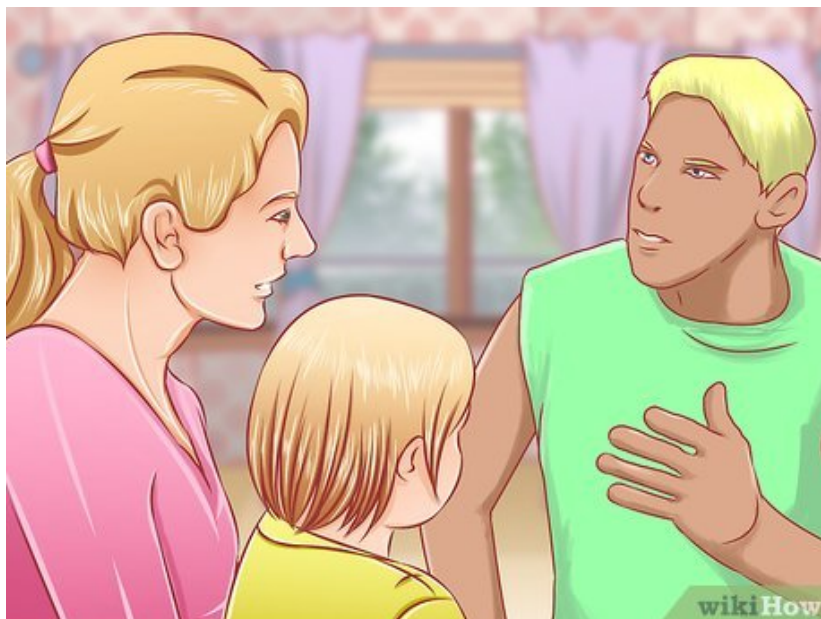
2.



Give your child a say. Maybe you love hockey, and have longed to see your kid out on the ice, doing the things you never got the chance to do. Don't let your vicarious athletic dreams get in the way of actually asking your child what sports he or she wants to play, however. A child who has a say in the process is more likely to enjoy and stick with a sport.^[2]

1. It is often around age thirteen or so that some kids get 'burnout' from the sports they've played, leading them to want to quit one or more sports and perhaps try others. No matter the age of your kid, prepare for ups and downs in regards to interest in particular sports, and accept his or her desire to try something new every so often.^[3]

3.



Consider coaches and commitment. Once you've worked with your child to determine which sport or sports he or she will play, you can do some additional homework regarding the best situation for your child. Look into the skill level and time commitment expected in one league compared to another, and even consider the personalities of particular coaches.^[4]

1. For instance, if your kid is just starting to 'dip his toes' into basketball, he or she may find the extensive commitment required to be on a travel team that ventures widely each weekend to be too much. Perhaps a recreational league at your local YMCA or another such option may be a better choice.
2. Likewise, if you know your child is unlikely to enjoy playing for a hard-nosed coach who criticizes regularly, you may want to look into other options. Of course, one of the benefits of sports is learning to deal with adversity, so don't go too far in trying to shield them from every possible discomfort.

4.



Watch for signs of stress. Stress can be a positive thing, spurring us to achieve things we didn't know we could do, whether in academics, athletics, or otherwise. However, excessive stress will impede enjoyment and success in a sport, and can easily bleed into other areas beyond the athletic field as well. Preventing and dealing with negative stress will make it much more likely for your child to enjoy sports.^[5]

1. If your kid keeps making up excuses why he or she can't go to practice, never seems able to crack a smile during a game, performs below capabilities when the pressure is on, or begins having seemingly-unrelated difficulties with academics, social interactions, etc., stress may be overwhelming him or her.
2. If you believe stress is a problem, talk to your child about keeping things in perspective. Look into stress management exercises like deep breathing, muscle relaxation, and visualization. Consider whether your child is involved in too many sports, or needs to consider switching sports.

5.



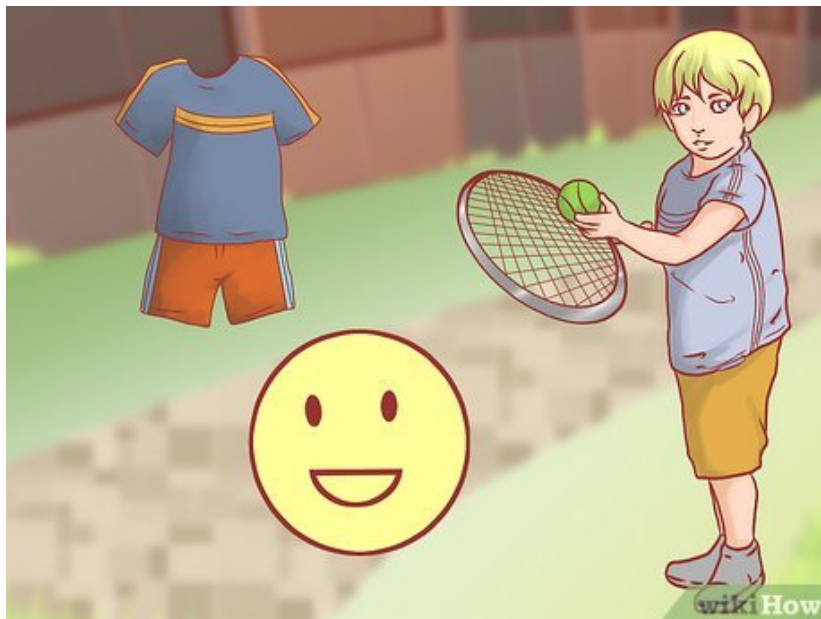
Look into other options. In the end, some kids simply don't enjoy sports, or team sports in particular. Despite the benefits of experiencing a team dynamic, the problems may simply outweigh them. In such cases, you may need to seek out other options for your child, at least for the benefit of his or her health and fitness.^[6]

1. If team sports are simply not in the cards for your child, look into sports with more of an individual focus, like tennis or golf. If the competitive aspect is more of a problem, emphasize aerobic exercises like swimming, running, or biking for the health benefits.

Part 2 of 2:

Keeping Goals in Mind

1.



Make sure it's fun. Most kids who enjoy sports want to be with their friends, get a nice uniform to wear, and have lots of fun. A kid who isn't having fun isn't likely to enjoy playing a sport, and is more likely to quit or resist. If you have one of the rare sports prodigies out there, your priorities may be a bit different, but for the most part your primary goal should be to help make sports fun for your child.^[7]

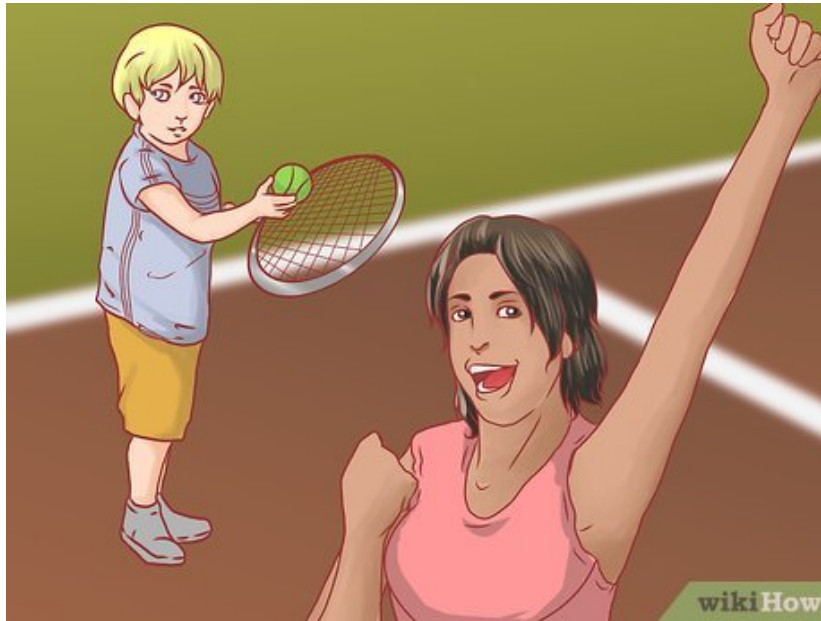
1. Let your child know that it is good to want to win, and to try your best to win, but that you should be able to have fun win or lose. Don't talk about the results of the game as much as the fun your child had during it.



Talk about the benefits of sports. Talk to a reluctant child about why you are encouraging him or her to play sports. Don't make it seem like you're just forcing them to try something without a good explanation. Let your kid know about your own positive experiences playing sports, but place the primary focus on the good things being active in sports can offer him or her.

1. You probably already know that sports can help teach important qualities like motivation, discipline, commitment, cooperation, perseverance, and resiliency. Talk to your kid about how developing these skills can help with schoolwork, making friends, dealing with good and bad days, and other day-to-day experiences. Don't forget to mention the health benefits as well — things like increased energy, for instance.^[8]

3.



Be a positive influence. Some parents seem like they can't help but try to relive their athletic lives through their children. Perhaps they see an opportunity to achieve the success they could not quite reach. This can lead to pushing a kid to start or keep playing a certain sport, shouting negative comments during games, and harsh criticism afterward. Allow your child to play the sport for him or herself, and be vigilant about remaining a positive, supporting influence.^[9]

1. After a bad game, don't let the first thing out of your mouth be 'How could you drop that fly ball?' Instead, take a positive, instructive track: 'I like how you hustled after the ball when things went wrong and kept your head in the game.' Offer a little one-on-one practice time. Let your kid know that effort is more important than results. 'Winning is everything' is for the pros.

4.



Coach, don't criticize. Coaches for kids' teams should be instructors and cheerleaders, not drill sergeants. If you are coaching your kid's team, or are evaluating potential coaches for your kid, look for a ratio of at least three positive comments ('Way to go!' 'Great effort!') for every one constructive criticism ('Let's work

together on that free-throw motion some more.')[10]

1. Don't be afraid to talk to your kid's coach if he or she is being too negative or is sapping the fun from the game. Some youth coaches can get caught up in the 'tough guy' image they think coaches are supposed to have, and can lose sight of themselves. Sometimes, it may just be best to remove your child from the team and find a better situation. If so, explain why this is necessary and is not the same as 'quitting.'



Accept quitting with conditions. Sometimes, despite your best efforts and those of your child, you'll find that a certain sport is simply a bad fit. If your child really wants to quit, first talk about the importance of sticking things out for the rest of the season, as a way to honor the commitment he or she made to his or her teammates. Immediate quitting should be saved whenever possible for times when your child's physical or emotional health is being affected.^[11]

1. Be clear with your child that if he or she does quit, that time needs to be replaced with a beneficial activity — not sitting on the couch. Consider other sports, or some other type of physical activity — a dance class, ice skating lessons, etc.

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