



SUPPORTING ATHLETES



A Parent Resource
to Fostering Growth,
Confidence, and Success
in Gymnastics



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Introduction

As a parent, you play an essential role in your child's gymnastics journey. Your involvement, support, and guidance are foundational to helping them navigate the sport's physical, mental, and emotional aspects. From encouraging them through challenges to advocating for their well-being, your influence can make a meaningful difference in their overall experience and love for gymnastics.

This guide is designed to provide insights for parents of athletes at any level, from recreational to competitive. It explores the roles of parents and coaches, the importance of collaboration, setting realistic goals, and maintaining a respectful training and competitive environment. By fostering a positive relationship with your child's coach and supporting their development in a healthy way, you can help create an environment where they can thrive.

SECTION 1

ROLES OF PARENTS & COACHES

The Parent's Role in Athlete Development

Parents play a crucial role in helping their children succeed in gymnastics. They ensure their child arrives at practice on time with gym bag packed, they ensure their child eats well and has good sleep habits. However, their support extends far beyond physical preparation.

Parents are their children's biggest cheerleaders, a source of comfort during challenging days, and a steady presence through every success and setback. This care helps young athletes grow, while coaches focus on building skills and improving performance.

Understanding the Parent's Responsibilities

The role of a parent in an athlete's journey is multifaceted. The role blends logistical support, emotional encouragement, and a commitment to fostering a healthy balance between competition and personal growth. Parents serve as a steady foundation, offering consistency and stability through the sport's ups and downs. Recognizing the unique contributions of parents helps build a stronger partnership between families, athletes, and coaches.

Providing Practical and Logistical Support

Parents are instrumental in ensuring their child is physically and mentally prepared for gymnastics. This includes:

- **Timely Transportation:** Ensuring their athlete arrives at practices, competitions, and events on time and with a positive mindset.

- **Healthy Lifestyle Habits:** Encouraging balanced meals, sufficient hydration, and consistent sleep schedules to support physical health and energy.
- **Equipped and Ready:** Double-check that uniforms, grips, water bottles, equipment and other essentials are packed and ready.

These day-to-day contributions may seem small, but they form the foundation for an athlete's ability to focus and perform at their best.

Emotional Support

Gymnastics is a demanding sport, both physically and emotionally. Parents are often the primary source of emotional stability for young athletes. Their role includes:

- **Encouragement During Challenges:** Offering positive reinforcement when routines don't go as planned or when progress feels slow.
- **Providing Comfort:** Being a safe space for athletes to share frustrations, fears, or disappointments without judgment.
- **Celebrating Success:** Sharing genuine joy in achievements, both big and small, and reminding athletes to recognize their own growth.

Parents who balance encouragement with understanding create an environment where athletes feel supported regardless of outcomes.

Understanding The Coach's Role in Athlete Development

Coaches play a vital role in an athlete's journey by balancing skill development, safety, and emotional well-being, making them essential for both athletic and personal growth. Understanding their multifaceted responsibilities helps align expectations for a positive and productive environment.

Safety First: Real-Time Decisions and the Coach's Responsibility

Safety is a top priority for coaches, and it extends far beyond ensuring proper technique and physical preparedness. Coaches are also tasked with making real-time decisions that can significantly impact an athlete's immediate and long-term well-being. For example:

- **Routine Adjustments Due to Fear or Anxiety:** If a gymnast is struggling with fear or mental blocks, a coach might modify or simplify a skill or routine during or right before a competition. This decision is not about undermining the athlete's abilities but rather prioritizing their mental health and long-term confidence.
- **Withdrawing an Athlete for Health Concerns:** If a gymnast shows signs of illness or injury, such as flu symptoms or muscle strain, a coach might decide to pull the athlete from an event. This ensures their safety and prevents worsening their condition, even if it's disappointing in the short term.



Coaches as Mentors: Building Character Beyond Skills

In addition to teaching gymnastics, coaches help athletes build resilience, confidence, and independence. They teach athletes to embrace challenges and recover from setbacks, both in sport and in life. For example, when a gymnast struggles with mastering a skill, a coach may encourage patience and consistent effort, reinforcing that failure is part of growth. By understanding and supporting the coach's role in balancing safety, skill, and character development, parents can foster a collaborative environment where their gymnast thrives. This partnership is essential for creating an enriching and rewarding gymnastics experience.

SECTION 2

BUILDING A COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIP

Developing a strong, collaborative relationship with your child's coach is essential for creating a positive experience in the gym. Clear expectations, effective communication, and respectful handling of disagreements can go a long way in fostering a successful partnership.

Effective Communication with Coaches

Open and respectful communication between parents and coaches is essential for creating a supportive and productive environment where athletes can thrive. Clear dialogue ensures that everyone involved in the athlete's journey—parents, coaches, and athletes themselves—remains aligned on goals, expectations, and concerns. This partnership not only helps address potential issues but also fosters an atmosphere that supports both gymnastics skill development and personal growth.

When engaging with coaches, parents should:

- **Approach conversations constructively and respectfully:** Focus on clear and solution-oriented communication.
- **Choose appropriate times for discussions:** Schedule talks when the coach is available before or after practice, or during planned meetings, ensuring uninterrupted focus.
- **Avoid addressing concerns during practice sessions:** This prevents distractions and allows the coach to concentrate fully on their responsibilities.
- **Demonstrate consideration for the coach's time:** Select suitable moments to bring up questions or concerns for a more productive dialogue.

Establishing mutual expectations from the beginning is equally important. Coaches will likely have guidelines for parental involvement, support, and commu-

nication. In turn, parents should have a clear understanding of what to expect regarding feedback, progress updates, and their child's development.

Recognize that setbacks and challenges are a natural part of growth, and both parents and coaches must remain united in supporting the athlete through these moments.

Open dialogue and aligned expectations build trust, prevent misunderstandings, and create a cohesive support system. This collaborative approach empowers athletes to feel confident and supported, knowing that everyone is working together towards their success and well-being.

Confidence in the Coaching Process

Having confidence in your child's coach is key for long-term success. Coaches create individualized plans that cater to each athlete's pace and needs. Gymnastics requires time, patience, and perseverance, with progress often being gradual. Coaches may adjust routines or skills for safety or mental readiness, and these thoughtful changes help your child grow, building resilience and confidence. Believing in the process strengthens the coach-athlete relationship and supports your child's ability to thrive.

Addressing Disagreements

If disagreements arise, it's important to approach them with the mindset of problem-solving rather than assigning blame. When addressing issues, keep the focus on finding a resolution that benefits the child's development. Disagreements should be discussed privately and calmly, away from the child, so they don't feel caught in the middle or stressed by adult conflicts. This approach ensures that the relationship between parents, coaches, and athletes remains supportive and constructive.

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Maintaining Professional Boundaries with Coaches

Establishing and maintaining professional boundaries with coaches is key to fostering a healthy and respectful relationship. While it's important to have open lines of communication, there are boundaries that should be respected to avoid putting coaches in uncomfortable or compromising situations.

Avoid Asking for Special Favors

Requests for special favors, such as asking coaches to give rides to and from practice, or babysit your child, can put the coach in a difficult position. Not only can these requests create pressure for the coach to comply and can be a direct violation of club policies as well as, the U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Gymnastics Safety and Response Policies. One-on-one interactions outside of the structured gym environment, such as private lessons or personal favors, can unintentionally lead to breaches in athlete safety protocols, rules and regulation. By refraining from asking for any private, unsanctioned time, you help maintain fairness, uphold safety standards, and protect both the coach and athlete.

Respecting Social Boundaries

In order for coaches to maintain healthy professional boundaries, Coaches need to maintain a degree of separation from their athletes and their families outside of the gym. While parents may be tempted to invite a coach to a birthday party, graduation, or other personal events, it's important to understand that coaches may not be able to attend. If they participate in these events for one family, they may feel obligated to do the same for all, which can blur the lines of professionalism. Respecting this boundary helps coaches maintain equal treatment for all athletes and families.

Be Mindful with Gift Giving

While showing appreciation to coaches is understandable, be mindful when giving gifts. Lavish or



frequent gifts can create an unintentional sense of obligation or favoritism. Small, thoughtful gestures are often appreciated, but it's essential to ensure that they don't blur the lines of professionalism. Some gyms even have policies in place to prevent the exchange of gifts beyond token gestures at the holidays or end of a season, so it's a good idea to be aware of those guidelines.

Social Media Boundaries

Refrain from friending or following coaches on social media platforms. This helps maintain a clear separation between personal and professional lives, reducing the potential for blurred boundaries. Coaches need to maintain objectivity and professionalism, and engaging with them on social media could complicate that dynamic. Additionally, be cautious about what you post about the gym, coaches, or your child's experience to ensure that everything aligns with the gym's values and professionalism.

Post-Meet Celebrations and Alcohol

Be especially mindful at post-meet celebrations or team events where alcohol may be present. In these settings, it's crucial to keep interactions professional and avoid behavior that could undermine the coach-parent relationship. Alcohol can lead to relaxed boundaries, so it's important to remain aware of the professional nature of your relationship, even in social settings. Keeping things respectful ensures that trust and professionalism remain intact, both for the sake of the coach and the overall club environment. Further, clubs often set specific policies that prohibit their employees from drinking in the presence of athletes. Parents should be aware of and respect such policies to maintain a safe and professional environment for everyone involved.

SECTION 3

GOAL SETTING & REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Setting Realistic Expectations and Goals for Long-Term Success

Balancing ambition with the realities of long-term athletic development is essential for fostering a healthy, sustainable gymnastics journey for your child. Progress in sports takes time, and setting realistic expectations helps prevent frustration and burnout.

Encourage your child to focus on consistent effort, skill development, and personal growth rather than fixating solely on immediate results or comparisons to others. Emphasizing the process over perfection builds resilience and motivation, allowing your child to stay engaged and excited about their progress.

By reinforcing patience, persistence, and open communication, you can help your child stay motivated throughout their athletic journey. Realistic expectations reduce pressure, foster a positive mindset, and encourage long-term success and enjoyment in gymnastics.

Whether your child is pursuing gymnastics recreationally or aiming for competitive success, aligning with their goals is key.

Collaboration with your child's coach is also key in goal setting. Coaches have the expertise to guide both you and your child in establishing appropriate, personalized goals that align with their abilities and long-term potential.

A successful partnership requires parents to support these goals, athletes to take ownership of their journey, and coaches to provide professional guidance. When all three parties work together, they create a unified approach that fosters confidence, accountability, and a shared vision for success.

Encourage open conversations about their aspirations, supporting their enthusiasm without applying unnecessary pressure.

Areas to consider in goal setting:

- **Time Commitment:** Competitive gymnastics requires significant time and dedication. Practices can range from several hours a week to upwards of 20 hours a week for higher-level gymnasts. This schedule often includes weekends, early mornings, and even travel time for competitions. Ask yourself and your child: Does this schedule allow enough time for schoolwork, rest, and family time? Will they still have time for other hobbies or interests?
- **Social Sacrifices:** Gymnastics training and competitions often conflict with social events, birthday parties, or school activities. It's important to discuss these realities with your child. Are they prepared to miss out on certain social activities? Do they understand that their commitment to gymnastics might mean saying no to spontaneous plans with friends?

- **Other Activities and Interests:** Some children enjoy participating in multiple sports or extracurricular activities. If your child has other interests, consider how those commitments might overlap with their gymnastics schedule. Is there a way to balance both, or will they need to prioritize one over the other?
- **Financial Commitment:** Like many extracurricular activities, gymnastics can involve significant expenses, particularly at the competitive level. Costs may include monthly tuition, competition fees, travel expenses, coaching fees, uniforms, and additional training camps. Families should assess their financial capacity and have open discussions to ensure the

commitment is sustainable over the long term.

- **Emotional Readiness:** Gymnastics can be both physically and emotionally demanding. There will be successes, but also setbacks, injuries, and challenging days. Is your child emotionally prepared to handle these ups and downs? Are you, as a parent, ready to support them through those moments?

By addressing these realities and having honest discussions as a family, you can ensure that your child's gymnastics goals are both achievable and sustainable. This clarity will help set expectations and create an environment where your child feels supported and motivated.



SECTION 4

RESPECTING THE TRAINING & COMPETITIVE SPACE

Modeling Respect and Encouragement for a Positive Gym Environment

The parents' behavior sets the tone for an athlete's experience in gymnastics and contributes to the overall gym culture. By respecting the coach's decisions, the gym's policies, and promoting teamwork, you demonstrate how to navigate authority and cooperation. Patience, constructive feedback, and encouragement for both your child and their teammates foster a supportive atmosphere that strengthens sportsmanship and community. Additionally, by avoiding gossip, being mindful of social media interactions, and cultivating positive relationships with other parents and athletes, you help create a gym environment where every athlete feels valued, which enhances the strength and unity of the entire gym community.

Avoid "Sideline Coaching"

While parental involvement is crucial, it's important to avoid overstepping into the coach's domain. Allow the coach to lead training and decision-making while offering emotional support from the sidelines. Recognize when your involvement may unintentionally disrupt the coach-athlete relationship and trust the coach to guide skill development.

Parents should refrain from giving instructions or corrections during practice or competition, as this can confuse the athlete and create conflicting messages.

Instead, focus on creating a supportive environment at home, where athletes feel heard,

valued, and encouraged to communicate openly with their coach. By doing so, you empower your child to take ownership of their growth and work collaboratively with their coach, fostering a positive and productive team dynamic.

Respect the Competitive Environment

A respectful and supportive environment allows athletes, coaches, and families to thrive in both practice and competition. During meets, avoid sideline coaching or criticizing performances—coaches are trained professionals responsible for guiding and supporting athletes. Trust them to provide feedback and make necessary adjustments.

If you have concerns about scoring, remember that judges evaluate routines to the best of their ability. Publicly questioning scores or reacting emotionally creates unnecessary tension. Instead, encourage sportsmanship by celebrating effort, progress, and resilience.

Additionally, refrain from using social media or public forums to express frustrations about coaches, judges, or other athletes. Negative public displays can damage relationships and impact your child's experience. A positive, respectful approach ensures a healthier, more enjoyable competitive atmosphere for everyone.

Respectful Ways to Manage Concerns

If you have concerns during a competition or practice, it's important to handle them appropriately to maintain a constructive environment.

Respectful Approach to Addressing Issues:

- 1. During Competitions:** If you have concerns about scores or competitive matters, speak with the coach first. They understand the rules and can provide clarity. If further action is needed, the coach can help you connect with the meet director. However, these discussions should take place after the competition when emotions have settled.
- 2. During Practice:** Avoid interrupting training to speak with the coach. Instead, follow your club's communication policy, whether that means reaching out through a manager, front desk staff, or designated channels. Respecting these procedures helps keep practices focused and productive.
- 3. In Case of Emergency:** The only time a parent should contact a coach during a meet or practice is in the event of an emergency where their child is in immediate danger or a family emergency has occurred. For all other concerns, wait for an appropriate time to address them.
- 4. Private and Constructive Communication:** When discussing concerns with a coach, choose a private setting rather than addressing issues in front of athletes or other parents. Approach the conversation with an open mind, focusing on solutions rather than frustrations.

By handling concerns with patience, discretion, and respect, you help create an environment where athletes can grow, coaches can do their jobs effectively, and everyone involved can have a positive experience.

Cheer with Encouragement

Consistent encouragement, whether during training or competition, builds confidence and reinforces a positive mindset for athletes. Support your child and their teammates with positive, respectful cheering. Celebrate their hard work and resilience, regardless of outcomes. Avoid negative or critical comments about other athletes or teams. Your encouragement should foster confidence and teamwork, creating a healthy competitive atmosphere.

Be a Positive Role Model

Respect the space and roles of coaches, judges, and officials during meets. Emphasize effort, personal growth, and lessons learned during the competition rather than fixating on scores or placements. A parent who demonstrates respect, sportsmanship, and self-control, you create a positive experience for your child while contributing to a supportive gymnastics' community.

Statements of Support

General Positive Encouragement Statements

1. "I'm so proud of you for giving it your all!"
2. "You worked really hard for this, and it shows!"
3. "Remember to have fun out there; you've got this!"
4. "Every time you compete; you're getting better and better!"
5. "You're doing amazing! Just trust yourself and your training."

Supportive Statements for Setbacks

1. "It's okay; every great athlete has their ups and downs!"
2. "What matters is that you gave it your best shot—let's learn from it!"
3. "You showed so much courage out there; I admire your spirit!"
4. "Remember, every experience is a step toward improvement!"
5. "You've learned something valuable today; I believe in you!"



Conclusion

Your role as a parent in your child's gymnastics journey goes beyond cheering from the sidelines—it involves fostering a positive and respectful environment that supports their development. By understanding the roles of parents and coaches, building a collaborative relationship, setting realistic goals, and respecting the training and competitive space, you help create a foundation for long-term success and enjoyment in the sport.

Gymnastics is a journey filled with growth, challenges, and achievements. With your encouragement, patience, and trust in the process, your child can develop not only as an athlete but as a confident, resilient individual. And while fostering growth is essential, ensuring their well-being is just as important. For strategies on helping your child navigate challenges, maintain wellness, and stay safe in the sport, refer to Guide 2: Navigating Challenges and Ensuring Wellness.

Additional Resources

Abuse Prevention Policies and Resources:

- [USA Gymnastics Safe and Response](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport](#)
- [Make a Report](#)
- [USA Gymnastics Permanently Ineligible & Ineligible Members and Participants](#)
- [USA Gymnastics Suspended & Restricted Persons](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Centralized Disciplinary Database](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Parent and Guardian's Handbook for Safer Sport](#)
- [U.S. Center for SafeSport Training Catalog](#)
- [Parent Guide to Cyberbullying](#)

Educational Resources

- [Parent and Coach Self-Assessment](#)
- [Parents: Supporting Socioemotional Development of Your Athlete During Meet Season](#)
- [Positive Coaching Alliance Development Zone Parent Resources](#)
- [Health and Wellness Resources](#)

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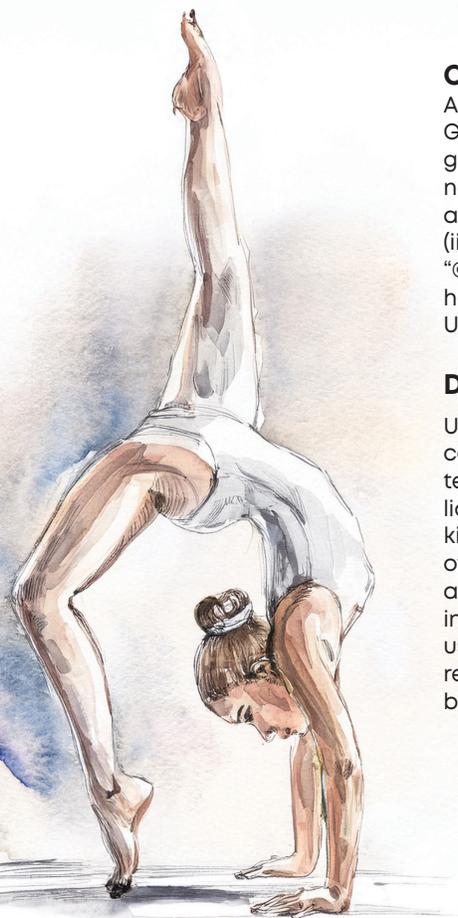
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