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Parenting Styles and Practices: Promoting Exemplary-Parenting in Youth Sport

Project Summary

Our research question was: How do exemplary youth sport parents support their daughters in competitive team sport? To answer this question, we interviewed 8 coaches and asked them to discuss the best parents they had ever worked with. These coaches then nominated 10 parents of female youth sport athletes, who they considered to be exemplary youth sport parents. We interviewed the parents to learn about how they approached sport parenting.

We broke the results down into three themes. Exemplary parents (a) supported their children's autonomy, (b) built healthy and trusting relationships, and (c) found ways to cope with the emotional demands of youth sport.

These results show that the broader emotional climate parents create around youth sport is important. Being an exemplary sport parent involves more than simple behaviors. "Do's and don'ts" lists of parent behaviors at competitions may be insufficient for helping parents to create a positive emotional climate around sport. More parent education and support will be needed. As such, we are going to create a parent education and support program as the next step in this research program.

Research Methods

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with 8 coaches. Subsequently, we interviewed 10 parents who were nominated by the coaches as being exemplary youth sport parents. We analysed the interviews to draw out themes that captured both *what* exemplary youth sport parents did and *how* they supported their daughters in sport.

Research Results

We broke the results down into three themes. Exemplary parents (a) supported their children's autonomy, (b) built healthy and trusting relationships, and (c) found ways to cope with the emotional demands of youth sport.

These main themes, and the sub-themes, are captured in the figure below:

Results: How Exemplary Parents Parent

- **Support children's autonomy by:**
 - Not forcing a direction
 - Sharing goals
 - Fostering independence
 - Emphasizing effort and fun
- **Build healthy relationships by:**
 - Trusting and communicating with coaches
 - Supporting team and club
- **Cope with emotional demands by:**
 - Assisting child before competitions
 - Monitoring own emotions during competitions

Strengths of this study included the recruitment of coach-nominated exemplary parents. A weakness was, arguably, the relatively small sample size.

Policy Implications

When we combine our research with results of other studies, a key implication is that we need to move beyond providing parents with discrete lists of “do’s and don’ts” that focus on what they do at competitions. To create better experiences for children, we need to educate and support parents on ways to create a positive emotional climate that surrounds all elements of their children’s involvement in sport. We suggest parent education initiatives target the creation of this broader emotional climate. In practical terms, we could describe it as the “atmosphere of sport” that parents create.

Next Steps

We have secured another SSHRC/SPRI grant to take the next steps in this program of research. We are going to create a web-based parent education and support program, tentatively titled The Sport Parent Program. Our work will commence in January 2020, and we would love to work with sport organizations to develop our program.

Key Stakeholders and Benefits

National and Provincial/Territorial Sport Organizations as well as local clubs.
