The SportParent Course shows parents how to partner with coaches, officials, and administrators to provide children with sport experiences that are fun, safe, and valuable. In the process parents will learn how to more fully enjoy the experience themselves. And youth sport administrators will benefit by having parents working in concert with them to make sports rewarding for children.

The SportParent video (included as part of ASEP’s *Youth Sport Training Kit DVD*) raises these issues from children’s perspectives. The facilitator will present his or her program’s philosophy, lead a discussion on the video’s key topics, and refer parents to the SportParent Course resources.

Youth sport organizations can use the SportParent Course throughout the year, conducting courses for parents of children in various leagues and sports.

**Through the SportParent Course, parents learn:**

- why kids play sports,
- what a SportParent’s responsibilities are and how to fulfill them,
- how to communicate with their child’s coach, and
- how to help their child have a fun and valuable experience in sport.

**Inside:**

SportParent Course Resources
About the SportParent Course
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SportParent Course Resources

The SportParent Course has three resources:

- SportParent video (part of ASEP’s Youth Sport Training Kit DVD)
- SportParent Survival Guide (a free download on ASEP’s website, www.ASEP.com)
- SportParent Facilitator Manual (this resource)

The course facilitator – the administrator, a coach, or anyone the administrator appoints – will use the SportParent video to raise key topics that all parents of children in sport need to understand. The video lays the foundation for the facilitator to discuss important points with the parents; it also acts as a stepping stone for parents to learn more through the other course materials.

The next step for parents is to read the SportParent Survival Guide, which provides parents with the nuts-and-bolts information they need to know. This useful reference focuses on key issues that all SportParents need to understand. We recommend that you download the SportParent Survival Guide for parents; these guides are available to you for free by going to www.ASEP.com.

The SportParent Course is really a two-step process for parents. First they attend the meeting that you facilitate; second, they read the SportParent Survival Guide.
About the SportParent Course

Who should conduct the course?
Anyone can conduct the SportParent Course – an administrator, a coach, or someone the administrator appoints. We recommend that an administrator conduct the course, assisted by coaches.

The person conducting the course should be comfortable speaking in front of an adult audience, skilled at leading discussions, and intimate with the program’s philosophy. This person also should have good time management skills.

To consider the pluses and minuses of having an administrator or a coach act as a course facilitator, see “Options for Facilitators” later in this manual.

How long is the course?
The SportParent Course can be conducted in 1 to 2 hours, depending on options you choose. These options are laid out in “Conducting the Course,” which you will find later in this manual.

How much preparation is involved?
You’ll need to preview the course materials and prepare to lead a discussion about issues raised in the video. You’ll also need to prepare what you want to say about your program. This takes time, but you’ll be rewarded with a smoother and better course. For a more detailed look at how to prepare for the SportParent Course, see “Preparing for the Course” later in this manual.

How is the course conducted?
You conduct the course by introducing yourself, showing the video, leading a discussion, and answering questions. You also have options to show a sport-specific video, demonstrate or explain the sport, and discuss program specifics. See “Conducting the Course” later in this manual.

Which resources do I use?
You’ll show the SportParent video (part of ASEP’s Youth Sport Training Kit DVD) and give each parent or set of parents a SportParent Survival Guide. You could hand these guides out at the end of the course.
Options for Facilitators

As we mentioned, the SportParent Course can be conducted by anyone. But most likely either the administrator or a coach will conduct the course. Here are some of the pros and cons of each one’s facilitating the course:

**Administrator advantages**

1. The administrator’s presence lends authority to the course.
2. Program leadership is made evident.
3. Program goals and objectives can be clearly and consistently stated.
4. The administrator can hear parent’s concerns firsthand.
5. Program support can be gained from parents.

**Administrator disadvantages**

1. The administrator can’t answer team-specific questions.
2. Coaches’ expectations of athletes and parents can be only generally addressed.

**Coach advantages**

1. The coach can establish a direct rapport with parents.
2. Smaller parent-to-facilitator ratios may result (if coach conducts course only for own team’s parents).
3. The coach can directly state expectations of athletes and parents.
4. The coach can dispense team-specific information.
5. Parents can become acquainted with the person directly responsible for their child.

**Coach disadvantages**

1. The coach may feel inadequate or insecure talking to peers (especially if inexperienced as a coach).
2. Program goals and objectives may not be consistently articulated.
3. The coach can speak only generally about the program.
4. It may not be fair to ask a volunteer coach to spend the necessary preparation time.

**Our recommendation**

The administrator introduces the program, shows the video, and leads a discussion about the issues raised (see the “Conducting the Course” section). Then parents meet with coaches to discuss team specifics, such as practice times and places, schedules, equipment needed, and so on. Parents can gain an understanding of the overall program and of the essentials of being a good SportParent; they can also acquaint themselves with their child’s coach and learn important team information. After parents meet with the coaches they reconvene for a final question-and-answer session led by the administrator.
Preparing for the Course

1. **Preview the SportParent Course materials**
   Read the *SportParent Survival Guide*, and view the *SportParent video*. As you preview the materials, consider what information you believe is most essential for parents to learn.

2. **Prepare your portion of the course**
   To open the course, you will introduce yourself and explain your program philosophy, which we will help you prepare in “Conducting the Course.”

3. **Consider course logistics**
   Some administrators might have several hundreds of parents associated with their program. If this is your situation, you can:
   
a. hold the course in an auditorium or another setting that will seat everyone,
   b. offer the course more than once (perhaps grouping parents by last name or team), or
   c. have coaches hold the course for the parents of their own team.

   With a large group, you are likely to get less discussion after the video. The ideal group size is 20 to 25 parents.

4. **Decide when to hold the course**
   Schedule the course as early in the season as possible. If the teams are set, hold the course before the first practice; otherwise, hold it as soon after as possible.

5. **Decide where to hold the course**
   Again, this will depend on how many parents you expect. Whatever the number, choose a site that’s easily accessible, and be sure the room is well lit and has enough space and comfortable seating.

6. **Invite the parents to attend**
   Choose a time when most parents can attend, and invite all parents individually by phone, letter, or email.

7. **Prepare the meeting room**
   You’ll need a DVD player, a television (or a large screen monitor if you’re showing the video to a large group, and perhaps a microphone, depending on the audience size. Test the equipment to make sure it’s working.

8. **Prepare name tags for parents**
   Make the first name larger than the last name on each tag. You may also want to make “table tent” name cards for parents to place in front of themselves to ease recognition. You’ll want to call parents by their first names throughout the course.
Conducting the Course

In this section we’ll show you step-by-step how to conduct a SportParent Course. But before we guide you through the course, we’ll share some tips that will help you begin the course smoothly:

✓ Get to the course site at least 45 minutes before the starting time.
✓ Make sure the course materials, name tags, TV and DVD player are in place (you might set the SportParent materials on a table near the exit so parents will notice them).
✓ Greet each parent with a friendly smile and hello.
✓ Tell parents to pick up their name tags.
✓ Ask early arrivers to take their seats 5 minutes before the scheduled start to prevent delays and to facilitate seating of late arrivers.
✓ Start on time.

1. Introduce yourself (5 min)
   Welcome parents to the SportParent Course and briefly give your background, including your present position and previous coaching or sport administrative experience. If you’re a coach, tell parents why you got involved, your experience in the sport, and what you do for a living.
   Next, describe your program’s philosophy of sport. To help prepare for this, consider the following questions:
   — What is the value of this sport for youngsters?
   — How do you hope young athletes will benefit from participating?
   — What emphasis do you place on winning, having fun, and helping young athletes develop physically and psychologically?
   — What do you expect of the athletes?
   — What do you expect of the parents?
   Your tone will set the mood for the course. Be upbeat and professional.

2. Run the SportParent video (15 min)
   Make sure that all the parents can see and hear the video.

3. Discuss the video’s key issues (15 – 30 min)
   The video should raise parents’ awareness and prime them to talk about four issues:
   — Why children play sports
   — What the SportParent’s role is
   — How parents can relate positively to coaches
   — How parents can help their children have good sport experiences
   Your role here is to lead a discussion that allows parents to express their feelings about each issue and explore what those issues mean for them.
   You don’t need to know all of the answers, but having read the SportParent Survival Guide, you will have a greater understanding of the issues. Refer parents to the Sportparent Survival Guide, too.
The following are some questions and thoughts to help you lead your discussion. Don’t worry about sticking directly to the questions; each discussion you lead will have a dynamic of its own. Allow parents to ask questions and raise side issues, but steer them back on course if the side issues continue too long. Keep the following three objectives in mind:

1. Get parents to express their feelings about the issues.
2. Help parents consider how they can be better SportParents.
3. Spur their interest in learning more about the issues through the SportParent resources.

You might begin the discussion by saying how the video affected you. Perhaps hearing a child talk about reasons he might quit playing sports made you consider that issue in a way you hadn’t before. By sharing a few thoughts about the video, you’ll pave the way for parents to do the same.

After briefly sharing how the video affected you, state the four main issues raised: why children play sports, the SportParent’s role, how parents should relate to coaches, and how parents can help their kids have a positive sport experience. Then tell the parents you’ll be discussing those issues during the next 15 to 30 minutes. For each issue we’ve provided sample questions to get the discussion going. You’ll probably have time to ask only two or three questions for each issue; keep track of your time as you move the discussion along so you give parents a chance to discuss all portions of the video.

**Why Children Play Sports**

The first issue the video explores is why kids like to play sports—and what might prompt them to quit. As you’re leading this portion of the discussion, keep in mind the main reasons kids like to play: to have fun, to be with friends, to learn new skills and develop them, and to take part in the excitement that sport offers. And remember why many kids drop out of sports: no fun, lack of playing time, too much criticism, mismatched competition, and competition anxiety (usually prompted by adults who overemphasize winning).

Questions you might ask include:

- How did you feel about the children’s comments about why they like to play sports?
- Did any of the comments surprise you?
- How important is winning in youth sports? Is it the most important thing?
- What is the most important thing in youth sports?

**SportParent’s Role**

The SportParent’s role won’t be clearly defined by the video; the *SportParent Survival Guide* touches on this subject. The video should spark ideas and comments regarding the role of SportParents. Lead this portion of the discussion with the understanding you have gained from the book on some of the qualities of a good SportParent: keeping winning in perspective, having a healthy attitude toward sport, being a good role model, encouraging your child but not pressuring, knowing your child’s goals and providing a supportive atmosphere to achieve those goals, helping your child set realistic performance goals, and putting your child’s development ahead of winning.
Some questions you might ask here include:

- What struck you most about any of the kids’ comments regarding the role of parents?
- What do you think are some of the most important aspects of being a good Sport-Parent?
- Do you think there are ways that parents put pressure on kids without realizing it?
- How do you think parents can provide a supportive atmosphere for their child to achieve goals and have fun?

**Parents and Coaches**

Here again, while the video should stir emotion and cause parents to consider their relationships with their child’s coach, the *SportParent Survival Guide* will provide you with help in leading this portion of the discussion, by examining the qualities of a good coach and how parents and coaches can communicate effectively. Matters of concern include questions to ask your child’s coach, when and how to confront a coach, and how to help your child’s coach. Don’t worry about defending either coaches or parents in hypothetical situations of dispute. Not all coaches are good coaches and not all parents act wisely in confronting them. Stress open, honest communication, with parents supporting coaches when appropriate and talking to coaches about problems when necessary.

Some questions to spur discussion for this portion might include:

- Did any of the kids’ comments regarding parents and coaches surprise you?
- What should coaches be communicating to you – and what should you be communicating to coaches?
- What do you think a model parent-coach relationship should be like?
- What do you expect from your child’s coach – and what do you think your child’s coach should expect from you?

**Making Sports Valuable**

The end result of the SportParent Course is to help parents do what they can to make sport a fun, safe, and valuable experience for children. Your goal during this portion of the discussion should be to point parents in the right direction: encouraging but not pushing their kids, keeping winning in perspective, keeping the fun in sport, building their child’s self-esteem, and so on. What makes sport a valuable experience for children is tied into parents understanding why kids like to play sport and what a SportParent’s role is, as well as parents maintaining a healthy relationship with coaches. It is, essentially, a summary of all that goes into being a model SportParent.

Here are questions to consider for this portion:

- From the last part of the video – “Making Sports Valuable” – which statements from the kids affected you the most?
- Do you think kids value sports differently than you do?
- What are ways you think parents could make sports a more fun and valuable experience for kids?
- What was the most valuable thing you learned from the video – and how will you put that information to use?
Thank the parents for their contributions to the discussion and encourage them to learn more about the issues by reading the *SportParent Survival Guide*.

4. **Facilitator’s option (30 min)**
   After you discuss the video, you have several options. It’s up to you to decide what is most appropriate here. At the least, this is an opportune time to discuss any program specifics.

   **If you are a youth sport administrator…**
   1. Discuss program specifics, including schedules, league regulations, equipment needed and so on.
   2. Show a short sport-specific video that will help parents understand and appreciate the sport.
   3. Demonstrate and explain some of the conduct, scoring, and rules of the sport.
   4. If you have invited coaches to attend, have them meet with parents to discuss team specifics.
   5. If coaches do not attend, dispense copies of team information to parents.

   **If you are a coach…**
   1. Show a sport-specific video.
   2. Demonstrate the skills, scoring, and rules of the sport.
   3. Discuss team specifics (practice times and places, game schedules, equipment needed, and so on).

   You may also want to review the Parent Orientation Agenda, which is a free download on the ASEP website, [www.ASEP.com](http://www.ASEP.com).

5. **Hold a question-and-answer session (10 – 20 min)**
   You’ve done much of the talking up to this point. Now it’s time to let parents ask some questions. If no one raises the following topics, you should. We’ve provided comments to help you prepare your answers (not all questions pertain to every sport).

   Having read the SportParent Survival Guide will help you greatly in leading this session. Here again your skills in leading discussions and managing time will come into play.

   **Should my child have a medical examination before competing?**
   Administrators should make this a requirement. The American Medical Association recommends that a child have a medical exam at least every 2 years.

   **Should boys compete with girls?**
   Before puberty there is no reason why boys and girls shouldn’t compete together. Girls, in fact, tend to be a little more mature physically than boys and often play quite well against boys of the same age.
What is the risk of injury?
Injuries do occur, more often in contact and collision sports than in noncontact sports. Many potential injuries are prevented by coaches who teach proper skill techniques and who check equipment and facilities to make sure that they’re safe for use. Most injuries are minor in nature, such as sprains and strains.

Who decides when my child is ready to return to competition after being injured?
The parent decides, though if the injury is serious enough it may be up to a physician. A coach has the prerogative to withhold an athlete from competition if he or she believes the athlete is not ready to return.

How involved should I get in my child’s sport participation?
Parents should attend games, encourage their children, practice with them occasionally, and help the coach if needed. They should provide a positive and supportive atmosphere and help their children keep winning, and sports, in perspective. Signs of over-involvement include being too concerned with the outcome of a game, demanding that a child put in extra practice, and critiquing a coach’s strategy and decisions.

What should my child eat before a game?
An athlete should eat a well-balanced meal at least 3 hours before competition, avoiding foods high in fat and sugar.

How should I communicate with my child during games?
Don’t coach from the sidelines or say negative things to any player. Praise athletes’ efforts, not the outcome.

What if my child is upset after a game?
Sports will evoke a range of emotions in both children and parents. Children might cry after a difficult loss or performance; parents should help them understand the emotions associated with sport, let them feel their feelings, and then help them move on.

What do you expect of parents?
Both administrators and coaches need parents to support the program’s objective. You might specify what you consider to be appropriate behavior for parents at contests. And mention the role parents play in encouraging their children and helping them understand the significance of winning and losing and the emotions associated with sports.

What if my child complains of a problem with the coach?
First the parent should determine if it’s necessary to talk with the coach. Many problems are simple miscommunications that can be straightened out with the child alone. If a parent does need to discuss a problem with a coach, it shouldn’t be right after a game. When in a calm frame of mind, the parent should contact the coach, explain the problem, and listen to the coach’s response. If a conflict can’t be solved, a parent may have to talk the matter over with the coach’s supervisor.
6. Wrap up the course (5 min)

✓ Repeat the main points you want your parents to remember. For example, you might remind parents to

- maintain a healthy sport perspective.
- encourage but don’t pressure their child, and
- communicate effectively with the coach.

✓ Pass out the SportParent Survival Guide.

- Ask for the parents’ support throughout the season, tell them how they can get in touch with you, and thank them for coming.

SportParent Resources

- SportParent video (link TBD) (found on the ASEP Youth Sport Training Kit DVD)
- SportParent Survival Guide (a free download on ASEP’s website, www.ASEP.com)
- SportParent Facilitator Manual (this resource)

Additional Resources

- Directing Youth Sports Programs online course
- Coaching Youth books and videos
- Coaching Youth online courses

For more information about the American Sport Education Program (www.ASEP.com), the SportParent Program, and additional resources, call toll-free 1-800-747-5698, or write ASEP, P.O. Box 5076, Champaign, IL 61825-5076.