

How is my experience likely to change throughout my child's sporting journey?

Your experiences as a sport parent will change a lot throughout your child's sporting journey, especially as your children move through different clubs and competition levels. Anticipating these changes can help you plan ahead, successfully negotiate key transitions, and ensure that you are able to provide the best possible support to your child.

Starting Out In Sport

When you first start out, being a sport parent usually involves providing opportunities for your child to try a range of different sports and activities. The emphasis is usually placed on fun and enjoyment (with an absence of competitive pressure) and as a result demands on parents are usually relatively low during this stage. However, it can be an adjustment getting used to transporting your child around to sessions and watching them try and master new skills.

Entering Organised Youth Sport Programmes

If your child starts to compete and engage in more intensive training, your involvement will likely increase and you may have to make more sacrifices (i.e., time and financial) to support your child. As a result, you may become more emotionally connected and invested in your child's sport. In some sports, you may also have to organise coaching sessions, enter tournaments, and plan schedules. This can be particularly difficult and challenging if you do not have a background in sport. Working with knowledgeable and supportive coaches is crucial to ensure you can manage these demands and have a positive experience.

Transitioning into Elite Clubs, Academies, or Performance Programmes

If your child is selected for an elite training programme it can be really exciting for them and you as a parent. However, this transition can be difficult as you are likely to have less input, have to adapt to a culture which often requires significant commitment, and face prolonged uncertainty regarding your child's future within the programme. As a parent, seek out information about player development pathways, expected performance and training levels, and how your child will be evaluated at different stages to reduce uncertainty and help you make informed decisions about what is best for your child. Seek out, communicate, and develop relationships with experienced parents (and coaches) who can help to support you.

Based on:

Clarke, N. J., & Harwood, C. G. (2014). Parenting experiences in elite youth football: A phenomenological study. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 15, 528–537.

Thrower, S. et al., (2016). Educating and supporting tennis parents: grounded theory of parents' needs during childhood and early adolescence. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, 5, 107-127.