

Play It Safe

Many teens are going to play organized sports, but they aren't always aware of the potential for injury. Accept the fact. However, that doesn't mean adults can't be involved in making play as safe as possible for our enthusiastic young athletes. Here are some tips to help make games fun and painless.

A Set Of Helpful Standards

The National Alliance For Youth Sports (800-729-2057 or www.nays.org) has developed the following standards for parents in developing and administering youth sports for children. Involved parents should:

- Consider and carefully choose the proper environment for their child, including the appropriate age and development for participation, the type of sport, the rules in the sport, the age range of the participants, and the proper level of physical and emotional stress.
- Select youth programs that are developed and organized to enhance the emotional, physical, social and educational well-being of children.
- Encourage a drug, tobacco and alcohol-free environment.
- Recognize that youth sports are only a small part of a teen's life.
- Insist that coaches be trained and certified.
- Make a serious effort to take an active role in the youth sports experience of their teen.
- Be a positive role model exhibiting sportsmanlike behavior at games, practices, and home, and give positive reinforcement to their teen and support to the coaches.
- Demonstrate a commitment to their teen's youth sports experience by annually signing a parental code of ethics.

Keeping Sports Fun

- If you decide to let your teen play on a "Select" team, recognize that your teen may face additional pressures, and you may need to take



steps to keep sports at that level in perspective.

- While virtually all coaches want to make sports an enjoyable activity for teens, there are a few coaches who will use their position to exploit children. Following are questions for parents suggested by the Florida branch of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children:

1. Does the organization do a background check on coaches?
2. What is the coach's philosophy about winning and sportsmanship?
3. Are there other adults who supervise off-site travel?
4. Do teens use a locker room to dress, and are there multiple adults present in the locker room when teens are using it?
5. Do you as a parent have input into the sporting activity?
6. Does the coach promise to make your teen a champion player, or want to spend time alone with your teen outside of scheduled activities?
7. Do you as a parent talk to your teen about how he or she likes the coach or the sport?

Where Does It Hurt?

In every sport there is a risk of injury. To reduce the risk:

- Take your teen for a complete physical exam before taking part in any sport. Some teens have serious

physical conditions that can be aggravated by exertion.

- Become educated on the possible injuries that can occur in the sport. Talk with a sports medicine doctor or trainer to develop a fitness plan, and to get guidelines on preventing overuse injuries.

- Begin conditioning exercises before the season begins.
- Make sure your teen has good equipment that fits well.
- Use eye guards and mouth guards for high-risk sports.
- Don't ignore pain. If a teen says something hurts, see a sports medicine doctor.

- Buy a book on sports medicine and keep it handy. It will help you treat minor injuries at home. It will also help you oversee your teen's general physical condition.

- Insist on safe playing facilities, healthful playing situations, and proper first aid applications. Know the answer to these questions: Where is the nearest hospital? How would I get there in an emergency? Who can I call for immediate attention if my teen is injured?

- A trainer, parent or coach trained in CPR, and access to a telephone, should be available near the playing field.

- Teens are especially vulnerable to overuse injuries because of the softness of their growing bones and the relative tightness of their ligaments and tendons during growth spurts. One way to avoid overuse injuries is to never increase intensity, duration, frequency or distance by more than 10 percent a week.

- Watch the weather. Heat illness can occur when it's hotter than 85 degrees with a humidity of 70 percent or more.

- Make sure your teen drinks enough water during a sporting contest. If a teen asks for water, give it to him or her. Their body is sending an important signal. ■