

Ten Tips to Being a Good Baseball Parent

Perhaps you have heard some horror stories about the overbearing "Little League" parents and coaches. A good baseball experience for your child begins with us: the parents of each player. It is up to each of us to make being a youth more enjoyable, and to make baseball season a greater learning experience for the kids. After all, no matter how much we enjoy it too, Baseball is for the kids.

The Board of Directors would like to share 10 thoughts on how to make this a better learning experience for you, too. We believe that these ideas will help to make the next few months more fun for your children, more enjoyable for you and a heck of a lot easier on those people who volunteer their time and skills.

We hope these ideas can help!!

1. Work with your child. There really is little more satisfying than going out at least a few evenings a week and playing ball with your kids. This gives them quality time, and helps your child improve his/her skills (and, trust me, the better your child can play, the more she/he will enjoy the Baseball experience!). Someday, your child will look back fondly on the spring evenings spent playing catch with mom and/or dad.
2. Get involved with IFPAA. The program is run on a volunteer basis, and we can use all the help we can get. Anything you can do will help all the kids, from helping out at registration or tryouts, to scorekeeping or field preparation, to umpiring. If your child sees that Baseball is that important to you, he/she will learn that it is important to the kids, too. Amongst the board members are those that have helped out contributing with field prep, scheduling, scorekeeping, umpiring, equipment and uniform management, snack bar operations, and fund raising. Everyone can find a place to help.

If you love the game of baseball, but can't be available often enough to coach, umpiring is a great way to volunteer. In addition to making baseball a more satisfying experience for you (all of a sudden there are no more bad calls!), you will be able to teach your child some of the things that others (umpires!) look for in a game. IFPAA provides all of the training anyone needs. Some people worry that they are not qualified. Nobody is until they get trained. If you make a mistake remind them that you didn't get the job because you are uniquely qualified for it — you got it because you volunteered. Besides, even coaches and players make mistakes...the point is to learn and to have fun, and to teach kids that you care!

Different coaches have different philosophies. Some believe in having players play all the positions. Some want players to become good at one. Some coaches place more emphasis on winning (and we can tell you, from experience that players and parents tend to have more fun when they are winning). It is **IMPORTANT** to remember that your child's coach is not being paid and he/she is working for the love of the game and the kids. Let him/her be the coach!

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Don't argue in front of the kids and criticize in the background if you think your child is being treated unfairly. As parents, it is natural to be very protective, but most coaches aren't discriminating. If you think there is a problem, discuss it with the coach AWAY from the ball field; chances are that you will see his point of view. The important thing is not to make an issue in front of the players; along with baseball, they are learning to work as a team and to respect authority and experience...work not to ruin this teaching.

3. Show up for the games AND the practices. In today's busy world it is sometimes hard to juggle schedules, but this is your child! We've seen many who never tried to excel at baseball, and invariably these kids were dropped off at practices and picked up afterwards, without the parent(s) ever watching a single practice. It's only a couple of times a week, a couple of months out of the year! The most irritating are the parents who don't ever watch practice (and, therefore, never understand the coaches philosophy), but will question (yell!) a coaches decision during the game. Most people wouldn't dare to not show up for work and still tell the boss what's wrong with the company, but they will turn around and do just that with their child's' coach.
4. Respect the rules. This is one of the most important things the kids should be learning. If you don't agree with an umpires call, keep it to yourself. You did not buy a ticket and with it a right to complain. If there is a team rule that bothers you, well, it's their team...not yours. If you think there is a serious problem, take it up with the coach or a League official on your own time, not your child's'. Rule of thumb: during practice or games, don't speak unless spoken to (except, of course, to cheer on ALL the kids).
5. Don't create pressure. Just about every father dreams of his son becoming a major league star, but they are only children *and deserve to enjoy the game as children*. Don't expect more than they can deliver. Give positive encouragement, and be there when they need you. Besides, often a child in early years will lack certain skills, and blossom later on.
6. Losing is a normal result of competition—help your child learn to accept it. No one likes to lose, but the nature of a team sport is that one team always loses. Teach your child that he/she didn't lose, the team lost. And they lost to a team that just happened to play better that day. There is always next time, and the important thing is to learn from the defeats. One of life's most interesting truisms is that we learn more in failure than in success. It's okay to analyze why your team lost, and how they can do better next time. It's never okay to place blame!
7. Have Fun! Baseball should be a positive experience for everyone: kids, coaches, support staff, and parents. Winning is nice, but losing is inevitable. Being a star is fun, but being a bench player is just as important.

As a coach don't get focused on winning as being the only way to have fun. If you can't enjoy the game without winning you are missing out on some of the best things about coaching. One of the most rewarding experiences possible is to take a player with little baseball skill, no confidence in himself, and help him develop over the course of the season to the point he looks forward to his turns at bat

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because he knows he can succeed. That player who came to practice with his head hanging, now stands tall with pride and a big smile on his face. Take the opportunity to enjoy your child's childhood, and to teach some important life lessons!

8. Don't panic if your child is injured. Although baseball is considered a 'non-contact' sport, there are occasions when players collide, or non-contact injuries occur. We are all concerned about our children's safety, but if your child suffers an injury, remember: kids are able to sustain a lot more than adults; and, coaches are probably familiar with the usual baseball injuries. Let the coach handle the situation...he doesn't need a panicked parent to deal with. Do make sure your coach has your current health insurance information.
9. The program only gets better if you volunteer. We can't stress this enough: VOLUNTEER...we need you. One of the biggest irritants we see is those who will not give their time, but are quick to criticize. If you can't be part of the solution, don't be part of the problem. If you think that something needs to be changed, get involved so that you can change it.

Here are a few examples of how the program has been improved over the years by people who had an idea of how it could be better and stepped in and made it happen:

- One person thought it was bad that 11-12 year olds were playing night games on school nights. He took over the scheduling and eliminated those games.
 - A few years ago somebody decided that games would be more fun with fences around the fields. He became the Field Director and he arranged to rent the fencing that made it happen.
10. Speak up if you think your manager is not being fair. One of the most frustrating things for a board member is to have a parent come up to us after the season and say, "Great program, but my son's manager kept doing something that really bothered me." A manager/coach cannot address problems if they don't know the problems exist. Don't assume they know you are unhappy because they may have no idea. League Commissioners and the IFPAA board can't resolve problems it never hears about.

Most managers/coaches will welcome your input. These people are putting in lots of effort and very much want every boy to have a good experience. If you don't make progress check with your league commissioner or any board member and chances are we have resolved similar problems in the past.