

OFFICIAL FIELD GUIDE FOR SOCCER MOMS & DADS

Parents, probably more than anyone, know all about the importance of preparation. Getting a child ready for each next big step or adventure in life can seem like a full-time job. Fortunately, most parents relish the opportunity, knowing that the better prepared their children will be.

As an estimate 14 million soccer players in America under the age of 18 begin preparing mentally and physically for the upcoming season, we thought we could lend a helping hand to the millions of soccer parents out there who do so much work behind the scenes. Consider this your Official Field Guide for Soccer Moms and Dads – packed with helpful pointers on how to make this a great season for you and your child. From what to keep in mind when getting started to how to handle yourself before, during and after each game, this guide will hopefully assist you as you prepare to shine on the sidelines as your child shines on the field.

GETTING STARTED

Why Soccer? Fun, easy-to-learn and a great sport for learning everything from balance to teamwork; soccer is one of the best activities to help train youth for a lifetime of sports and athleticism. However, while there are many great reasons for your child to play the game of soccer, keep in mind that the decision to play should be your child's alone.

Scope the play. Before signing your child up to participate in a soccer league, make sure he or she is in the right situation-matched to his or her skill level, age and aspirations. One of the keys to growing as a soccer player is engagement-being connected to the ball as much as possible. Look for a league or coach that emphasizes touching the ball, small groups on the field and continuous interaction.

Know the info. Even before the season starts, make sure you ask and get the answers to the important question.

- When and where are practice and games? Your child's coach should provide a written schedule for the season at one of the first days of practice. Make sure that you get directions to the locations of the fields from the coach or other parents.
- What equipment does the team provide, and what equipment do I need to buy for my son or daughter?
Basic equipment your child will need includes:
shinguards, cleats, and socks, and it will most likely be your responsibility.
- How do I contact the coach? Because your child's coach is responsible for your child during practice and games, he or she should be accessible. Exchange phone numbers and email addresses, because schedules can change at a moment's notice.

Buy the right gear. The right cleats, shinguards and apparel can make a big difference in how comfortable and successful your child will be out on the field. Carefully select

high-quality apparel and equipment that provides appropriate fit and comfort for your child.

PREGAME ROUTINE

Nutrition. A healthy diet is essential to your child playing on all cylinders. From a healthy carb-heavy and protein-rich meal the night before to nourishing meals up until game time, proper nutrition is essential for healthy living and peak performance. Fast food before the game is a no-no !

Getting the Z's. Soccer is an incredibly demanding activity, of both the body and the mind. A good night's rest every night will help your child feel and play his or her best. Being lenient on bedtime doesn't do your child any favors out on the field.

Equipment check. Before each game, do an equipment audit to make sure your child has everything they need, cleaned and good condition. Shinguards, Check. Cleats, Check. Apparel, Check. Athletic Cup, Check. It helps to keep your child's equipment in the same spot between washes so nothing gets lost in the shuffle of the season. And don't forget yourself. Make sure you have all you need to enjoy the game from the sidelines. Armchair, Check. Snacks, Check. Drink, Check.

Be on time. It's important your child show up on time for practices and games, so he or she will have plenty of time to warm up, stretch and be ready for play. Teaching proper on time-management will help your child in other facets of life from school to work.

Stretching. Stress the importance of stretching before and after play. Warm, limber muscles reduce the risk of injury during the game. Stretching after the game is essential for muscles to remain loose and heal properly. The tighter the muscles, the easier it will be to tear or strain the next time out.

ON THE FIELD

Hydration. It's essential that our child stay hydrated throughout each game and practice. Make sure he or she drinks plenty of water before, during and after practice. Make sure he or she drinks plenty of water before, during and after play. Electrolyte-rich drinks are helpful, but beware of the sugar content. You can't go wrong with water.

Leave the coaching to the coach. Giving pointers and constructive feedback to your soccer player is one thing. Directing your child over the coach during the game is another. Trust the coaches that they know their stuff, so that your child will respect and learn from them.

Respect the Ref. Authority on the field belongs to the referee and linespersons. You want your child to respect authority – yours and other. Don't argue or question their authority or your child will follow suit.

Support. Remember, you are your child's biggest fan. Cheer for and be there for your child every step of the way. He or she will need your support through all the triumphs and the failures.

Good sportsmanship. This is a time for your child to learn how to play with, work with and respect others. Playing by the rules, winning and losing with dignity, and considering others are all part of practicing good sportsmanship. Stress it and teach it by example. If you can't get along with coaches and parents, you can't expect your child to do the same with the other children.

Proper perspective. Win or lose, your player is out there to have fun and enjoy the game. While you want your child to be successful, never let the heat of competition get the better of you or your child. Competition should challenge your child to do better, but it shouldn't be top priority. This isn't the World Cup. No need to act like it is.

AFTER THE GAME

Encourage and reward. You play a significant role in helping keep your child motivated, interested and having fun playing soccer. Reinforcing positive behavior is the best way to help your child achieve his or her goals. Reward your child for all the hard work with a trip to get ice cream after the game or with his or her favorite MLS jersey. Point out the good things your child accomplishes and teach the importance of learning from, not dwelling on, mistakes.

Practice. Practice, Practice. It doesn't have to be gameday or team practice for your child to hone his or her soccer skills. Give your child the opportunity and encouragement to play and practice when he or she wants to. Get some practice cones and/or a soccer net so your child, friends, and even you can play together when the mood strikes.

Volunteer. Offer your time to help out at games and/or practices. Volunteer at the snack stand. Help out the coach if he needs an assistant that day. If teaching the game isn't in your blood, volunteer to coach next year. Do what you can to contribute to the overall experience of all the children involved.

Communication is key. Ask your child about the game, his or her day, worries and aspirations, etc. Ask if he or she is having fun, and if not, ask why. Your child will appreciate your interest/concern and look forward to sharing his or her experience with you. And whether it's a comment, question or concern, keep the lines of communication open with the coach also, so that you'll know how your child is progressing and what skills he or she may need to work on in his or her free time.

Yes, as a soccer mom or dad, you're much more than a chauffeur; you're a motivator, a teacher, a cheerleader, and equipment manager-just to name a few of your roles. We hope this guide will help you successfully navigate your way through the upcoming season. And remember, with your love, help and support, no matter the score, your child can't lose.

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