



When Your Child Doesn't Make the Team

Parents Can Help Ease Child's Pain After Being Cut

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Q: What is the best advice you've heard for parents on how to handle the situation where a son or daughter is heartbroken because he or she got cut from a team?

A: The best advice I've seen is from the book "The Sports Parenting Edge" by Rick Wolff, a Harvard-educated, former pro baseball player who has kids.

Wolff advises that when the youngster comes home with the devastating news:

1) "Let them talk out their feelings. Make eye contact. Do not have any distractions. Offer strong and sincere sympathy. Let your child simply 'get it all out of their system.' ... Let them have a good cry."

He also says, "Don't go into lecture mode," and "Don't talk about how you dealt with setbacks. Hugs are in order, so give them."

2) Let a day or two pass before you bring up the topic of the setback. Be an active listener and pay attention to what they want to say. Now can be a time "to point out that adversity is a part of all sports."

3) Continue to gauge how your child is handling the aftermath of the setback and continue to give her or him space. Some kids who are passionate about the sport rededicate themselves to it, so don't be surprised if that happens. For other kids, such as seniors who get cut, it can be the end of organized competition in the sport.

Wolff says that if a youngster is determined to stay with the sport, he or she should make an appointment with the coach who cut them and ask what specifically they need to improve to make the team next year.

If getting cut means the end of the road in the particular sport, a parent can encourage the son or daughter to try another sport, preferably a no-cut one. Often, kids are so heartbroken they don't want to try something else. I know a soccer player who could have been a standout runner for the cross-country team at her Eastside high school but refused to participate because the team sometimes ran past the field where the soccer team practiced. At the same school, I know of boys who turned into valued javelin throwers the same spring they got cut from varsity baseball.

Wolff reminds us that what counts is how someone reacts to a setback. He also points out that someone who deals successfully with bitter disappointment like being cut is better equipped for coping with the next major setback life throws at them.

The best description of being cut is in the book, "Another Shot: How I Relived My Life in Less Than a Year" by Joe Kita. Kita was cut from his high-school basketball team. As a 40-year-old author, he was allowed to turn out again, although he was ineligible for games.

Kita describes being cut as "the adolescent equivalent of being fired, except that when you are a teenager you don't have a safety net of self-confidence to catch you. No matter how diplomatically it's done, the basic message is still 'We don't want you.' "

The **Smitty** recommendation if you've been cut (and I was) is to tell yourself this: "I'm due for a huge break in something else somewhere down the line. I'm going to work hard in things that are important to me to help make this happen."

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Team Tryouts: The Mechanics of Your Child's Sports Team...

Your child is trying out for several teams. They know that there's one team they want to make. They tryout, and do not get picked for that team. They're devastated. You're devastated.

It is your job as parents to help your child through these devastations. And yes, they are devastations. When your child gets cut from a team, it's a terrible feeling for you and your child, but you can and should pick up the pieces and move on.

First, before your child even tries out, remind them that anyone can get cut, even the best player. Every time there are tryouts, a "team" is being formed. The coaches are not only looking for talented children, they are looking to create a total team. Many high-level teams consist of players who work well together, a balance of players for specific positions, players with potential for improvement, and many other factors. We understand that getting cut from a team is a heartbreaking experience for any child. It is important that you explain to your child that if they gave their best effort that is what is important. Many good players have been cut at one time or another, Michael Jordan was once cut from his high school team. Players should evaluate the areas that they need improvement in and work at them.

We recently saw a child get cut from a team, and somehow they had the best attitude. The parents had prepared their child for the possibility of getting cut from the team. They told their child that even if he gets cut, it doesn't mean he wasn't good enough. You can't always guess why you didn't make the team. They encouraged him to try his hardest and to move on to his next choice if he didn't make the team. When he got cut, he was prepared to move on to another tryout.

Teach your children to move on to plan B. Always have a plan B. Find the positive in every situation. Your child will have more success in life by learning these important lessons and knowing that every team is looking for something different. They can always try out again next year!