



Seeds to Stars



Shari Phillips, M.D.

**Training Athlete Parents to
Create Success in Sports & Life**

8%

Level 4 Female Gymnasts Who
Will Progress to Level 10

<2%

High School Athletes Who Will
Receive a College Scholarship

Sources: usagym.org (2009), ncsasports.org (2022)

100%

**Athletes Who Can Learn Valuable
Life Skills Through Sports**

**Do you ever get the feeling your child's sports have gotten out of control?
That your children's sports life is ruling yours?
This just isn't much fun anymore?**

Seeds to Stars is here to help! This monthly newsletter is partnering with AAU Gymnastics to guide parents through the modern youth sports experience. We spend incalculable hours getting our kids coached, but who trains the parents? The vast majority of parents want to help their children be successful in sports and life, but many of us don't have the tools to make that happen.

I'm Dr. Shari Phillips and when my daughter started gymnastics at the age of 4, I never imagined she would be a 5th grader spending 22 hours/week in the gym year round. I would have been stunned at the money spent on hotel rooms and plane tickets to travel for meets. I did not foresee that this sport would consume our lives and become the burning focus of all my parental anxieties. At one point in my daughter's career, I realized this situation was not healthy.

For years I wanted to create the best gymnast, but I knew my job as her mother was to mold the best PERSON she could become. I became educated on successful sports parenting and changed my approach. I stopped focusing on cast handstands and back handsprings and started my own training, as a mom! My anxiety level decreased, my relationship with my daughter improved, and she flourished—inside and outside the gym. I became driven to help other parents and have been advising sports parents since then. Keep reading to learn the skills to create happy, healthy, successful child athletes....

Pressure

One of the first lessons I teach parents is that if they want their children to be successful in sports and life, they need to identify the very subtle ways we put pressure on our children and the very real effects of that pressure. Parenting research confirms that perceived pressure from parents by the child athlete is detrimental to development. The data are clear. Children who feel they are pressured by their parents report less enjoyment of the sport and exhibit delayed development in skills. They also often experience performance anxiety and exhibit lower self esteem and confidence—in all aspects of life.

Most parents are not at home tightening the screws on their kids and specifically lecturing them to perform better or work harder. But there are many ways we all put pressure inadvertently on our athletes that can negatively affect them.



Five common mistakes parents make that put pressure on their kids and inhibit development:

★ Too Much Sports Talk

I get it! You are consumed by the sports schedule and most likely the teammates, coaches and other parents are part of your daily life—including your social life. It can be all-encompassing. But when you don't stop to discuss other topics (ideally you have some to discuss with your child) you convey that the sport is the most important part of who they are. What other activities does your child have? What hobbies do you have? What is something interesting happening in the world right now? When is the next non-sport related family trip? Hint: if you don't have one scheduled, do it now.



★ Comparing your child to other athletes

It's hard not to notice the superstars, right? There are some kids that seem to have it all and it seems like if your child would just focus and work harder, or if the coaches give the same attention to her that they give to Madi, she could be next level. All children develop at different paces and let's be honest: natural talent, work ethic and ambition are not evenly distributed. Remember that your job is to parent the child you have, not the one you want her to be.

★ Distracting your child during competitions

Your helpful "advice" and body language only serve to be a distraction during meets. Your child needs intense focus at this time. Don't be the person that steals that focus.

★ Asking questions after competitions

It's natural to want to connect with our kids, help them process the events and learn from successes and failures. Unfortunately, the hours after a competition are full of emotions that your child is just learning how to handle. They are not ready for the ESPN analysis, certainly not from you. Learn to say "I love to watch your gymnastics—let's eat" and move on. When your child is ready to discuss, they will initiate the conversation (sometimes days later) and you should follow their lead about the topics to discuss.

★ Not asking the right questions

In a quiet moment, remember to ask your child why she does gymnastics and how far she would like to take it? Her answers may be eye-opening. Maybe she just does it because she really likes hanging out with the other girls. Awesome! She is only going to be motivated to have fun. Maybe she just likes the accomplishment of new skills. Great! You can help her achieve that goal. Most of the time, you will not hear her say she wants a college scholarship or to compete on a national stage.

About the Author

Dr. Shari Phillips obtained her B.A. from Michigan State University and M.D. from the University of Michigan. As a practicing family physician in the Charlotte, NC area, she has 25+ years of experience "coaching" athletes and their families into better health. As the mom of a retired competitive gymnast, she has a unique perspective on the challenges sports parents face. She is a Sports Parent Advisor, providing parents with the skills they need to raise happy, successful young athletes. Please email with suggestions for future newsletter topics or for information on parenting seminars.

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