

Lockwood's 'Leven Commandments for Sport Parents

After watching my own kids play sports – and watching my fellow parents watch their kids play sports – I devised "Lockwood's 'Leven Commandments." I have probably broken every one of them at least once, so I am a self-appointed expert:

-Robert P. Lockwood

1. **Don't act like a jerk in front of your kids:** While in the stands at a game, refrain from behavior that is silly, boorish or abusive. Simple rule: we don't do anything in the stands that we would not do in front of our child in any other place.
2. **Sports Algebra:** Sports are fun for us and our children in an inverse relation to the importance we put on it. The more serious our attitude toward our children's participation in sports, the less fun it becomes – for us and the kids.
3. **We know that this is true, but let's act like we know it is true:** Our children will not play professional sports. Our children will not win athletic scholarships to college. Period. Ninety-nine percent of all kids involved at the elementary level just do not have that kind of talent and never will, no matter how hard they work. Enjoy what they can do and forget your own fantasies.
4. **Know who is playing:** We are not out there on the field. These are our children playing the game, not us. How our children perform in an athletic endeavor has nothing to do with our self-esteem. It is unfair for our children if we feel – and act – as if their athletic performance is somehow a reflection on us.
5. **Other people's kids are still kids:** Especially when children are young, remember that these are just kids trying to have some fun under difficult circumstances (namely being watched by adults). The other team isn't some collective "enemy" – it is just a bunch of other people's kids in different uniforms. Treat them as kindly as we want our child treated by other adults.
6. **Put up or shut up:** Leave the coaches alone. Understand that they are usually volunteers who give up a great deal of personal time trying to help our kids. They have a whole group of kids to deal with; they are not professional coaches and they are going to make mistakes. If we don't like the job they do, then we volunteer. The same is true with umpires or referees.
7. **The Exception to Number Six:** There are, however, some coaches who watch too many professional coaches on television and decide to emulate them. No coach has the right to treat our children in a disrespectful or abusive manner. We have every right to pull our kids off a team where a coach behaves poorly toward the children. We also have every right to complain to league authorities.
8. **Take the pulse regularly:** Are our children having fun engaging in organized sports activity? Check regularly. Especially at the elementary level, there is only one reason to have our children involved in athletic activities: because it is fun. If the child is not having fun, there's no reason to continue. Many parents argue that once children join a team, they must stay on at all cost to learn the virtue of commitment. They may have a point. However, too often it's merely an excuse for the ego the parent has tied up in the child's sports activity. And again, particularly at the elementary level, this whole business is supposed to be fun. If it has ceased to be fun for the child, what's the point of continuing?
9. **If you don't have something positive to say, don't say it:** The last thing our kids need is a detailed rerun after a game of why they struck out. If they did something well, celebrate it. If something bad happened and they want to talk about it, talk about it – but only to build the child up and put things into proper perspective. Our attempts at amateur coaching will probably not do much good, and are usually the absolute last thing that a child wants to hear from us after a rough game.
10. **You are supposed to have fun, too:** If the "fun" only depends on a win, or on how well our children have performed, then we have got to reexamine our whole attitude. At the end of a game – win or lose – a good time should have been had by both you and your child. If that's not the case most of the time, then something is seriously wrong.
11. **Every kid is his or her own kid:** Some kids like sports, some don't. Some kids are good at sports, some aren't. And it doesn't depend on whether we liked sports or were good at sports. Every child is a unique gift. We never want to define a kid's worth by the level of skill on a playing field.