

# Risky business: consent, safety, and firefighter culture

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A child's world is full of violence. It appears in video games, films, and TV programs and many parents in the hope of removing their children from some of this violence are encouraging and sometimes pushing their children into participating in sports. Some parents are losing sight of why these children are playing- and that to the children is what they are doing: "playing." Many parents come to their child's practice or game with their own agenda of win, win, win at all costs.

These unreasonable expectations of winning, not messing up, being the star player, and making mom and dad proud are everything." These parents expect perfection from their children. "(Sachs, 2000, p. 62) The major problem seems to be that these parents are not considering what the children want. According to a "Kid think" survey conducted by Jerry Kirshenbaum for sports, the kids want things like ' unlimited free throws until they miss in basketball, everyone having a turn to play, less violence in hockey, using their hands in soccer, and to have fun"(p. 2). Perhaps the parents should listen to the children on this issue. Originally, the purpose of organized sports for young children was to teach them the basics of the game and skills needed to play, to practice good sportsmanship, and to have fun. If we look back to the beginnings of organized sports over 100 years ago, the purpose then was to get the growing numbers of rowdy children off the streets and to teach them values.

Children's sports are supposed to teach them skills and values-such as fair play, working with others and dealing well with adversity-which kids can draw upon throughout their lives. What has gone wrong with that purpose? Where has this sense of sportsmanship, learning, and fun gone? The incidence of

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violent behavior among sports parents is increasing throughout the United States and Canada and it needs to be stop. The age range of the children observing these incident is 6 to 12 years old, and some as young as 4 and 5 ee these outbursts. Athletic associations and organizers of youth sports are attempting to educate parents on the needs of young athletes, but this effort needs to be expanded to all organized youth sports. (Nack & Muson, 2000; Gardner, 1999) Many organized athletic associations are now requiring parents to attend sportsmanship classes, adhere to parental conduct handbooks, sign codes of conduct, and observe silent Saturdays.

Many groups are working to return youth sports to a time of teaching fundamental skills, developing fitness and promoting the development of positive attitudes, values, and self-esteem. Parents across the United States and into Canada need to let go of their own agendas, and athletic associations need to enforce parental codes of conduct through classes and training. As a result, the world of youth sports can be returned to the children where they can all learn to enjoy a sport, learn the skills of sport, play, and most of all have fun.