



Parental behavior is an issue that has been debated heavily over the past couple of years. We've seen the death of a volunteer coach by the hands of an angered parent, and the banning of 400 pee-wee parents from a rink because of hostility towards the players and refs. We have either heard of or witnessed numerous verbal and physical attacks on minor hockey officials. We have either heard of or witnessed parents fighting with parents. We have watched as parents shout at kids on the ice, as if destroying another child will make their child seem stronger. This seems to be occurring with alarming frequency and our local arenas are not immune to this type of behavior.

Below is a story I found recently:

I was ten years old when I had my first taste of how an over zealous parent can negatively affect their child. I was ten years old when I first began to dislike the game of hockey. It wasn't the game itself or my love to play it. It was my dad who was unknowingly driving me from the game that I had been so luckily introduced to.

At the time, my dad thought he was helping me, but in reality, he was hurting me. His constant criticism and gestures from the stands where gradually taking the fun out of hockey. The fun is why I played then, and that's why I play now. At ten years old, it was getting to be an unpleasant task rather than an enjoyable activity. His intentions were pure, and he was trying to help me to succeed, to improve. Unfortunately, his actions were doing more damage than good.

I can remember the day when it finally came to a head. We were driving home from a game - my mom, my dad, and myself. As usual, he was critiquing my game and going over what I needed to work on. When he had finally finished and I was close to tears, I said to him "Dad, I don't ever want you to come to another game." I encourage you to take a second to think of the magnitude of that statement. Who as a ten-year-old boy doesn't want their dad in the stands? My dad was a mild over zealous parent compared to what I've personally seen and read about, yet his actions were enough to drive me to ask him to never come to see me play again.

From that moment on, my dad was a model sports parent. He was encouraging yet had the right amount of constructive criticism thrown in to help me develop as a player. Both of my parents came to every game, and I honestly wouldn't have had it any other way. As I got older, I demanded both of their criticism to help me to develop. At ten, I just wasn't ready, and we'd venture to say that most kids aren't.

How many of us as hockey parents, have behaved the same. How many of us keep telling ourselves that it's in the kids best interest? How many of us have justified our behavior as being in the best interest of our child? Why is it that we can't just go to an arena and watch the kids play and enjoy the successes and the failures? Let's stop looking at our kids as \$\$\$ on skates and just be parents. That's what they need most

Sure we have to make huge sacrifices, both financially and personally. The kids appreciate this more than we'll ever know. But that doesn't give us the right to take the FUN out of the game for them. I once had the older sister of a kid playing with my son tell me that "with the money we've invested in him, he had better perform". The kid was a 2nd year novice player. I coached her brother for several years after that, and with each passing year the sparkle in his eyes diminished. He kept playing, but I don't think he played for himself; he played for mom, dad and his older sister.

My point to you is: please let your kids enjoy the game for what it is, a game. Encourage them, help them along with their development, and enjoy the game with them. However, be very cautious to never cross the line that takes the fun out of what they do. Would you berate your child in a classroom if he didn't understand his multiplication tables?

Most importantly, always try to keep in mind how your actions at the rink, and at home, affect your child's love for the game.