

Cultivating confidence

Young athletes will enjoy greater success by assuming full responsibility for how much confidence they take into their games.

It is so important that parents instill confidence in their young athletes.

Why is confidence so critical? Simply put, without confidence, kids can't achieve their potential.

What is confidence? How does it look and feel in the gym, on the court or on the field?

Jonathan, one young athlete, says feeling confident gets him "in the zone."

"You know exactly what you're doing and nothing can stop you," he says. "The adrenaline takes over and you feel like nothing can go wrong."

In short, when kids feel confident, they believe in their physical abilities. They're free of worries, distractions and doubts, which makes it easier to feel totally immersed in their sport.

Some kids are confident because they're naturally talented athletes. They're the fortunate ones. Others derive confidence from practicing and mastering skills.

Here's what some young athletes say helps them feel confident:

"I feel confident because my coach chooses me to play every minute of the game in soccer," says Allison, age 12, who also plays basketball. "Also, the experience of playing so much gives me confidence."

"I feel confident if I'm winning and doing better than everyone else," says Noelle, age 13.

"To feel confident, I have to practice and stretch before races. I'm nervous, but when I get in the water, I feel good and confident if I



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do my routine first," says Kateland, age 14.

First of all, sports parents and coaches should help young athletes understand that they create their own confidence. If kids begin a game wanting immediate results (such as getting the first hit or basket of the game), they're setting themselves up for frustration.

Many athletes have a fragile sense of confidence. They need to understand that it can take years to build up confidence in sports. Many only feel confident when they experience immediate success, especially during a game or performance. Don't let them lose confidence by worrying about achieving immediate results.

What's more, athletes need to understand that they'll be more successful if they assume full responsibility for their own confidence before competition begins. Often, athletes unknowingly wait until the game starts before they decide how confident they should feel. If this is how your young athletes think, they need positive results before they feel confident.

Keep in mind that confidence develops over months and years of practice and play. Remind your child about this. In addition, confidence should come from within. That's why it's called self-confidence.

Your kids should not have to depend on what you say to boost their confidence on game day. They should learn to take personal responsibility for their confidence. **sk**

Award winning parenting writer Lisa Cohn and youth sports psychology expert Dr. Patrick Cohn are co-founders of The Ultimate Sports Parent. Pick up their free e-book, "Ten Tips to Improve Confidence and Success in Young Athletes" by visiting www.youthsportspsychology.com.