



PARENT CHECKLIST



FOSTERING A LOVE OF SPORT FOR LIFE

FOR TEENS (AGES 13-17) WHO PLAY SPORTS

Opportunities to play competitively narrow in high school and college, but that doesn't have to mean an end to an athletic career. Here are ten questions you can ask yourself to keep your teen moving into adulthood:

1. HAVE I ASKED MY TEEN WHY THEY PLAY SPORTS?

You might be surprised by their answer. Top reasons given in our [national survey](#): having fun (81%), exercise (79%), learning and improving skills (66%), playing with friends (66%), and competing (64%). Winning games (53%) and college scholarships (39%) ranked lower.

2. HAVE I ASKED MYSELF WHY I WANT MY TEEN TO PLAY SPORTS?

You might be surprised by your answer. And if it doesn't align with theirs, then adjust accordingly. Your job as a parent or caregiver is to help them achieve their goals. To fall in love with sports, own the experience, and stay active as they move into adulthood.

3. DOES THE SPORT PROVIDER HONOR THE RIGHTS OF YOUTH?

To safe environments. To qualified program leaders. To developmentally appropriate play. To share in the planning of activities. To an equal opportunity for personal growth. To be treated with dignity. Ask how the program aligns with the [Children's Bill of Rights in Sports](#).

4. ARE COACHES TRAINED IN INJURY PREVENTION AND MANAGEMENT?

Anyone coaching youth of this age shouldn't be winging it. Too much is at stake amid the intense play, with teens' physical and mental health. Are they trained in CPR and First Aid? Injury management, starting with concussion and knee/joint injuries? Performance anxiety?

5. DOES THE COACH'S PHILOSOPHY ON PLAYING TIME ALIGN WITH OURS?

Distributing playing time in a fair manner is a top priority for parents (and athletes), a Project Play [survey](#) shows. But what constitutes fair? Ask the coach before the season, to set expectations. Most parents aren't unreasonable: Only 1 in 5 expect equal playing time.

6. DOES THE PROGRAM SUPPORT MULTI-SPORT PLAY?

It's OK for an athlete of this age to specialize in one sport, if their goal is to play in college or the pros. But even now, it's not the only pathway. And most teens won't play past high school. So ask your club or school coach if/how they will make room for other activities.

7. DOES THE COACH AIM TO BUILD SKILLS FOR LIFE?

Sport skills matter. But the best coaches build problem solvers. They use sports as a venue to assess and address individual and collective challenges – skills teens can take into adulthood. Ask what training coaches receive in youth development.

8. IS THE PROVIDER TRYING TO CONTROL COSTS?

Youth sport costs have risen [46% since 2019](#), twice the rate of inflation. Parents will do just about anything to keep their child in the game, but it's fair to ask: What are the all-in costs (fees, equipment, travel, camps, etc.)? And can I help by volunteering for fundraisers?

9. DOES THE PROVIDER ASK: HOW'D WE DO?

Like any good business, any good program invites and reflects on feedback. Look for those that seek input from athletes and parents via surveys and other structured formats and use it to improve quality and retention. Some clubs now use [Net Promoter Scores](#) that are shared publicly.

10. HAVE I ASKED MY TEEN: HOW'D I DO?

On the car ride home, at the end of the season and every step along the way, don't analyze their performance. Ask them to analyze yours, as a sports parent. Did I support you in the way you need? And yes, did I behave in games and other settings in a way you prefer?

SCORE/BOXES CHECKED:

9-10 = IDEAL SCENARIO FOR KIDS

6-8 = SOLID FOUNDATION

3-5 = MUCH MORE CAN BE DONE

1-2 = MUCH MORE SHOULD BE DONE

DISCOVER RESOURCES FOR SPORTS PARENTS



Questions distilled from *Sport for All, Play for Life: A Playbook to Get Every Kid in the Game*, by the Aspen Institute's Project Play, which developed its framework with input from 300+ thought leaders.

Additional experts and resources were consulted in the development of the checklists. Background on and resources supporting the checklists are at: as.pn/parentchecklists

