

# hey parents, leave them kids alone!

By Chris Richardson

This article was submitted by Chris, a member of the [footy4kids soccer coaches forum](#).

I suggest that you hand it out as part of your welcome pack to new parents, at [pre-season meetings](#) or whenever you have a problem with parents shouting 'advice' from the touchlines or asking why their little star isn't getting more of a game.

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When I was a kid one of the lads we played football with often brought his dad along to play in goal as none of the other kids liked going between the sticks (or cones in our case).

Which was great we all thought because Tommy (the kids' father) was a brilliant goalkeeper and would really make us work hard to get a goal where as us lot (the kids) were all rubbish 'keepers in comparison.

However, the downside to Tommy's presence was his irritating insistence on bellowing out instructions to his son and us kids at every turn, never failing to point out to us where we were going wrong - in his eyes - as well as thinking he was refereeing a World Cup Final, when in actual fact he was playing in a makeshift goal during a game of singles and doubles or headers and volleys on a lop sided pitch somewhere in inner Newcastle

between 10-15 kids ranging from the ages of 8 to 13.

Tommy meant well of course, but all us kids wanted to do was play football - our football - where we were the referees, the game was the teacher and adults were not welcome.

It got to the stage where poor Tommy's son would often apologise for his father's, shall we say 'enthusiasm', and others taking up the post as 'keeper against their will just to escape Tommy the referee as he had become known to us kids.

Today Tommy hasn't changed at all, he is still there shouting from the touchline and acting as an unofficial referee waving imaginary yellow cards about and blowing on his imaginary whistle while blasting out instructions like a Premiership manager berating his troops for letting a lead slip.

If your name is Tommy, I have one thing to say to you - **leave those kids alone!** You are benefiting no-one: not your son or daughter; the coach or the other kids. I'm sure you mean well but all you're doing is making a fool of yourself. That's right.

You are not a Premiership manager and these kids are not professional footballers. They are kids and they don't need someone on the touchline jumping up and down like a lunatic as if their very life depended on the outcome of the match or the performance of their child.

- One of the biggest reasons for kids falling out of love with the beautiful game is **pressure**
- One of the biggest headaches for coaches is **pushy parents**
- One of the biggest dreams of any parent is for their

child to become a  
**professional** footballer

- The reason kids play football is because it is **fun**

Take the fun factor out of the game for kids and the depressing statistics prove that they soon get bored with it and give it up and that would be criminal because football really is the beautiful game in the eyes of those who play it. It hasn't become the world's most popular sport by accident!

As a parent or guardian it is very hard to stand there and watch as your kid falls flat on his/her face or lose out to an opponent.

Your instinct is to drive them on and encourage them, but there is a fine line between encouragement and being pushy or exerting unnecessary pressure on your kid. Sadly the latter is quite common.

Those parents who are pushy can force their child into their shell and make them afraid of making a mistake – afraid to let YOU the parent or guardian down!

That is wrong, no kid needs that and no parent or guardian should EVER make a child feel ashamed or embarrassed of their performance, ability or the result of a match they participate in, much less be critical.

Kids are very tough and resilient but by the same token they are also very fragile and need the confidence and belief of their parents or guardians and that can only come from YOU.

In your role as the parent or guardian you can **HELP your child** or *a child* by showing:

- Encouragement
- Patience
- Understanding

- Confidence

You can also **HELP your child** or *a child* by:

- Praise
- Clapping
- Listening
- Showing interest

All these things can help a child not only develop but get more out of the game. With you on their side your child will feel on top of the world and unbeatable. They will draw so much confidence from you any fears or self doubt will disappear.

The pushy parent or guardian on the other hand can destroy a kids' confidence, fill them full of fear and take the fun and pleasure out of playing football that comes naturally to all those participating in the sport, and once that happens it is very hard to reverse or address.

Your role doesn't just stop once a game has finished either, pre and post-match is vitally important too.

### Pre-match

You should never place demands on your kid prior to a match like "score me a goal" or "get stuck in". Instead send them off with "have fun" or "enjoy yourself". That way they go into the match in a relaxed state of mind and with zero expectations placed on their young shoulders – which is very important.

### Post-match

When a match has finished tell your child how well they played and that you are very proud of them. Never be critical or offer analysis. Sometimes kids will know exactly how well they did or how well they didn't do and don't need you to remind them of a

poor performance or equally to indulge them if they had a great game.

Kids have naturally high expectations of themselves and can be their own worst critics. If your child comes off the pitch critical of their performance and upset you must **LISTEN** first and foremost.

Kids know when they are being lied to so it would be wrong of you to tell them they played great when they know themselves that they didn't.

Instead, again tell them how proud you are and try explain to them that everyone has good days and bad days, that they can't always be the best player on the pitch every week and that you have every confidence in them.

When this happens it is vital to NOT allow your child or the child to dwell on such matters.

If your child or the child has had a great game, it is just as important that you don't indulge them. Simple praise and acknowledgment will suffice.

Many parents or guardians often go over the top with praise and can indeed get caught up themselves and the last thing any kid needs regardless of their ability is to be told that they are going to be a star - or worse - a professional footballer!

### **Back to the game**

During the match every kid looks out to see a familiar face if their parent, guardian or someone they know is in attendance and therefore a little smile, a nod, a wink or a thumbs up is all that is needed instead of shouts of "well done" which can distract a kid and make them very self conscious of themselves and that you are somewhere in the crowd watching their every move.

That can, believe it or not, have a negative impact on their game and attitude during the game.

Via subtle encouragement and recognition your child will eventually stop looking for you in the crowd safe in the knowledge that you are there and they don't need to impress you or look for your approval.

This will allow them to concentrate on the game and play an unpressurised match, free to express and to enjoy themselves, to have fun.

**And for kids, fun is the name of the game, always remember that!**

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### **Notes**

Much of this article centres on the parents of those kids who play football matches for teams but many of the principles discussed above still apply to those of you who have a kick-about on parks or in the back garden with your kids or kids under your supervision. Indeed these principles apply to any type of sport or kids' activities. And sadly there are also many coaches out there who need reminding of these principles too, so this article is also aimed at them.

Lastly, if you are another Tommy, you are not a bad parent or guardian because you want success for your kid. By being as involved as you are that to me suggests you are a very good parent or guardian and that you have your kid's best interests at heart.

However, you have to find the right balance between encouragement and being pushy and never forget that for kids, they see football as a fun activity not to be taken so serious, an activity where they can be kids free from adult rule. Please don't take that away from them.