

Youth sports and parents' violence



■ What are the reasons for parental violence?

Youth sports should be a place of fun, growth, and learning, but they are often disturbed by parents' violence on the sidelines. This involves aggressive behaviour, verbal abuse directed at coaches, referees, and even young athletes, and, in the worst cases, physical aggression.

The reason for this phenomenon is mainly related to the pressure to win, **exerted** on children by some parents, whose expectations, focusing more on results than on the effort, often spoil the amusing side of the game.

■ The impact of parental violence on young athletes

The consequences on young athletes of witnessing or being subjected to this violent behaviour can be serious and last for a long time. Children may feel an increased anxiety and stress and start worrying more about their parents' reaction than about the game. This can lead to burnout, as they lose the joy of playing, and consequent **dropout**, as they might choose to quit the sport completely. Moreover,

this behaviour teaches children that violence and aggression are acceptable responses to frustration when things do not go on as expected.

■ What can be done to solve the problem?

First of all, the only way to eliminate parental violence from youth sports playgrounds is by having leagues, coaches, parents, and communities fight together against this phenomenon. For example, leagues and sports organisations should start zero-tolerance policies setting penalties, such as immediate suspension, as a consequence of violent behaviour from parents. Moreover, they could require clubs to organise mandatory parent education programs on sportsmanship and correct involvement and support.


As for coaches, they could contribute to reduce parental violence by setting clear rules for behaviour at the beginning of the sports season and actively de-escalating potentially violent situations, helping and supporting officials to keep control of the supporters' behaviour.

However, no action from leagues, clubs, or coaches will be effective if the **mindset** of aggressive parents does not change. What is necessary to do is first to shift their focus from scores and results to effort and enjoyment, and then to lead them to cheer for all children, respecting coaches, officials, and volunteers.

dropout: *abbandono*
to exert: *esercitare*
mindset: *forma mentale*

1  Complete the table with the missing information.

Reasons	Impact	Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pressure to win • Focus on 1. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spoiling 2. • Increased 3. • Worry 4. • 5. and 6. 	<p>Leagues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start 7. by 8. <p>Clubs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organise 9. <p>Coaches:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10. • De-escalate 11. • Help and 12. <p>Parents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change their 13. • Shift their 14. • Lead them to 15. and respect for 16.

2  **GROUP WORK** Have you ever experienced parental violence while playing games? Discuss your experience in a group and share your experience with the class.