

**Family Living
Focus**

by
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Extension Agent

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Sports, Competition and Kids "Play ball" — it's that time of year again — at least for Little Leaguers! Children are playing baseball and softball at all age levels. My own two children are in the midst of baseball and softball practice with the impending competition of games.

While many children are involved in sports competition throughout the year, many parents wonder what affect the competition has on their children. There has been research that indicates that losing in competition can be damaging to a child's self-esteem. Studies have also looked at the stress in young athletes which indicates that those children who are constantly pushed by parents and coaches run the risk of losing interest in sports because of the anxiety and stress associated with competition.

If you're concerned about burn-out in your child, watch for the following symptoms: signs of agitation, sleep disturbances, nausea, headaches and muscle tension. Other signals might include signs of depression, lack of energy, sadness, and loss of interest. Another consideration is that a young athlete under constant pressure is more susceptible to injury. Children may even see injury as an "acceptable" way to avoid the pressure.

Parents and coaches play a major role in helping children develop a positive attitude and a lifelong desire to be physically active by removing the pressure to excel.

I think the first question adults need to ask themselves is if the children are involved in sports because they choose to be, or because the parents want them to

be. From observing parents and coaches over the years, I have seen several trying to fill their own ego needs — the children aren't necessarily playing because they have a strong desire.

Take a positive approach — praising children for their efforts rather than focusing on what they could have done better. Children need to know their parents are proud of them — they can find enough fault in themselves on their own.

Focus on the game, not the score. Be sincere when you say, "Winning isn't everything." Focus on the child's developing skills and not the end score.

Match your child to the sport — self-motivated children are better suited to individual sports, such as running or swimming. A more low-key child may enjoy golf or recreational soccer. Take the time to try a few sports before getting involved competitively.

Have realistic expectations. It's important to keep in mind that not everyone can be a great athlete. Sports can be used as a way to teach children about limits and strengths. This can be an opportunity to set realistic goals. Emphasize the leisure value of sports and long-term health benefits.

Choose a sport matching the child's skill. Quality programs should take into account the developing child by making playing fields smaller and developing playing rules that allow all child-

ren to succeed!

Play with children. Playing with children, not in competition, is also important. Biking, hiking, and catch are a few recreational alternatives to competitive sports that can provide an opportunity for families to play together.

Know when to provide competition. Until adolescence, competition should be low-key and fun. Children should be assessed for their physical growth, and emotional and mental maturity when selecting a sports program.

Provide a variety of sports. Providing children with a sampling of

sports activities helps to round out their physical, social and mental development.

Let the coach coach! Coaches and players all agree that parents are more effective as encouragers, not critics! Let the coaches do their job.

Finally, be a positive role model. By enjoying sports and good health practices for fun and fitness, children will see that competition isn't everything. The health benefits can make everyone a winner!

So, suit up and have fun cheering your child on to an active, healthy, positive lifestyle!

American Agri-Women To Meet

YORK (York Co.) — The mid-year meeting of American Agri-Women will be held from April 20-23, at the Radisson Inn, in Green Bay, Wisconsin.

The session will bring together members from agricultural commodity groups, state farm women's organizations and agricultural leaders from around the nation. AAW is a coalition of over 50 farm organizations representing for the goal of promoting the truthful depiction of the role that American Agriculture plays in strengthening the U.S. economy.

This year's meeting in Green Bay will offer not only a business meeting but also will provide members a chance to participate in a leadership seminar, policy planning, and an ongoing strategic planning session. Key areas of

policy to be discussed by the group will include: 1995 Farm Bill, Property Rights/Land Use legislation, water legislation, food safety legislation and many other critical issue areas that impact American farmers and ranchers.

The participants will also tour a milk processing and bottling plant, and hear from author Chris Peterson discussing her publications on the dairy industry like "Extra Cheese, Please!"

Penn's Agri-Women representative will be Carol Ann Gregg of Mercer County. She heads up the policy papers that will be the centerpiece of the June Fly-In for American Agri-Women. Members are encouraged to attend June 4-6. Call Pat Sueck for information at (717) 862-4386.

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