

# Kicking without the screaming

## 5 simple rules of soccer-dad etiquette

Twenty million kids in the United States play organized sports, but “between the ages of 10 and 13, 70 percent of them drop out, mainly because it’s just not fun [for them],” says Jim Taylor, Ph.D., author of *Positive Pushing: How to Raise a Successful and Happy Child*. Pressure from overinvolved parents is a major factor, says Taylor. So use these expert tips to exorcise the most common game-day demons. AMY LEVIN-EPSTEIN

### Give ‘em the thumbs-up

Many children, particularly those under 12, can come to believe that if they mess up on the field, they’ll lose your love off it. When your kid looks to the sideline for your reaction, smile and applaud regardless of how he performs.

### Don’t coach the coach

Talk to the coach away from the game to discuss playing time, but be prepared to hear that your kid just isn’t good enough yet. If that’s the case, “talk to your child about patience and hard work,” says Taylor. To keep him inspired, mention that Michael Jordan didn’t make his junior-high basketball team, and even professional athletes see bench time.

### Flag your kid’s penalties

If you witness your child playing dirty, sit him down with the coach and explain that you have instructed the coach not to play him if the behavior continues. “[The message you need to get across] is that playing sports is a privilege. If you abuse that privilege, you will sit out,” says Rick Wolff, author of *Coaching Kids for Dummies*.



**PENALTY KICK** Will your kid cause a Pelé melee?

### Chill out a mad dad

When a fellow soccer dad loses his temper and threatens to go all British hooligan on you, stand him down by standing up. Make good eye contact with him and then raise your hands with your palms facing outward in the universal sign of neutrality, says self-defense expert Bill Kipp. Don’t lean away or invade the other parent’s space. Stand your ground and use a “bad dog” tone of voice, neither aggressive nor passive, to say, “Let’s not fight. Let’s calm down. This isn’t worth it.” If that fails to calm a hothead, walk away. If your child gives you grief for backing down, explain that a cool dad leaves the game in his own car, not in a squad car.

### Let the chips fall

“Sometimes kids need to endure a bad situation and take their own lumps,” says child psychologist Dan Kindlon, Ph.D., author of *Raising Cain*. If you’re the one who smooths things out with difficult referees, coaches, and opponents, you’re handicapping your child’s coping skills. When he whines, “The ump’s a chump,” tell him that there are some things in life he can’t control, but he needs to take responsibility for those he can. Instead of making excuses, he should concentrate on his game. A few bad calls can’t derail greatness.

## RAINY-DAY RESCUES

CREATIVE ANSWERS TO THE “I’M BORED” CHALLENGE

### PLAY DEAD-FISH SOCCER

Set up goals with cones in the basement and roll up a bunch of heavy wool socks to create an unwieldy “soccer ball.” Since it rolls about as well as a dead fish out of water, it’s hard to pass and score with.

### MAKE PAPER AIRPLANES

Spend the afternoon helping your kid make aerodynamic origami. All you need is some heavy paper or Styrofoam and *The Great International Paper Airplane Book*.

### COOK A SPECIAL MEAL

Whip up Banana and Nutella French Toast, concocted by executive chef—and father—Mark LoRusso, of Tableau, at the Wynn Las Vegas. You’ll get bonus dad points for the banana, a good source of potassium. Find this recipe and other rainy-day dishes at [BestLifeOnline.com](http://BestLifeOnline.com).

### GO TO A COOL MUSEUM

A planetarium show or an Imax film will appeal to his love of technology.

### MAKE A HIGHLIGHT REEL

Using video you have on hand, compile the team’s best moments. With Windows Movie Maker 2.1 (a free download at [microsoft.com](http://microsoft.com)), you can edit clips, add fades and dissolves, and sync music files. Then break out the Jiffy Pop and watch it together. A.L.E.