

PARENTS: ASSISTING IN YOUR CHILD'S TENNIS DEVELOPMENT

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*This is an adapted extract from Peter Farrell's new book **Directing Tennis Programmes**. For further information, contact Peter at peter.farrell@tennisireland.ie*

Children can only play tennis with their parents support. Who else is going to pay for their club membership, equipment and coaching? Parental support is crucial in getting children interested in tennis in the first place. Once a young player has become involved in the game and the club, parents are still hugely influential in getting their child to sign up for events, tournaments, and coaching, then transporting them to the venues. Some parents will be experienced players who have been around tennis for many years. But for others the game will be a `foreign field`, and they will need support and guidance to negotiate the difficulties ahead. Nobody would criticize a child for not knowing how to read on the first day of school – why would anyone expect parents to know exactly what to do and not to do from day one?

SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

1. *Keep winning and losing in perspective.*

It is easy and tempting to equate success in tennis with the number of matches won and lost, and to assume that losing is always bad. In fact winning too much as a junior can actually harm a player's development – constant winners have no yardstick with which to measure what they need to do in order to improve.

2. *Make sure tennis is fun.*

I always remember an article I read many years ago, shortly after Bjorn Borg retired in his mid 20's. When asked why he had given up at such a young age, he said "it wasn't fun anymore". If it needed to be fun at his level, it certainly needs to be fun at junior level!

3. *Emphasize the achievement of individual objectives.*

Ambitions in tennis can range anywhere between wanting to win Wimbledon to getting some exercise once or twice a week. It is up to each player to decide what they want to get out of the game, and each decision is perfectly valid for that individual.

4. *Keep your child involved in tennis.*

Progression to a competent level can be a mid to long-term goal for some players. If a child is struggling with the game, a parent must find ways to keep him or her involved and interested. Always stress that tennis is a sport for a lifetime – in the USA there are tournaments for player's aged 90 and over!

5. *Be sensitive in what you say to your child after a match.*

Win or lose, it is generally best for a parent to give a player some time alone after the competitors shake hands. While parents are often anxious to make what they see as relevant points, most players like to reflect for a while on a match before discussing it.

6. *Get on court!*

Children love the fact that they can rally with and against their parents. Make sure you use the correct ball for your child's age and standard (see www.tennisplayandstay.com for details).