

# Preparing a child with the possibility of not making a team.



## Kids who don't make team need support, realism

Every fall, the hopeful warriors of tryout season stampede gyms and fields across the country. Whether they're upperclassmen hoping to make the leap to varsity or seventh-graders facing the selection process for the first time, each student faces the possibility of rejection.

"My coaches say that's the hardest thing they do, having to cut kids," said Terry Cooper, athletic director of Mountain Brook Schools in Birmingham, Ala.

Unlike grades that can be raised over the year, team cuts are quick, blunt and final. In today's parenting climate of positive reinforcement, not making the team may be the first time a child is told he is not good enough. What to say, then, to the sullen, sweaty child who slumps into the car outside the gym?

"Allow the kid to talk and find out where they're at emotionally," said John Murray, a sports psychologist in Palm Beach, Fla. "If it's a serious problem, find out from the coaches what to do next time."

Murray cautions parents against lashing out at coaches too quickly. He likens trying out for sports to a job hunt. Rather than retaliate, ask what you would need to do to be considered next time.

Students also might want to consider the reasons they wish to join the team.

"Sometimes I find it's to be with friends, to please parents or to beat out others," Murray said.

"Parents should do their homework (because kids) may not be as exuberant about the sport as they think."

From those conversations, create a backup plan. Whether it's playing the sport on a team outside of school or finding a new sport, it's important to stay in shape and not lose the athletic drive.

Cooper encourages those cut from selective teams to play "non-cut" sports such as cross-country. Mountain Brook Junior High can have as many as

200 students on cross-country, many of whom have been cut from other sports but use running to train for next year's team.

Remember, part of playing sports is learning how to lose, Murray says: "When you don't succeed in reaching your objective, you learn more."

### Advice for parents

Sports psychologist John Murray offers these tips for parents of students who may not make the team:

**Be realistic:** Before tryouts begin, ensure your child is going into it with a healthy perception of his or her skills and the possibility of not making the team.

**Be a parent:** Sports may teach toughness, but a child should still feel accepted at home. "Kids want to be loved for who they are, not what they do," he said. Don't add to the feeling of failure at home.

**Keep a cool head:** Before you call the coach, wait a few days and ask for objective feedback.

**Keep it up:** Encourage your child to use the season to build strength and skills with other teams or sports.

**A backup plan:** Talk about alternatives for physical activity outside school.