

Supportive soccer moms have better relationships with kids, says study

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(PhysOrg.com) -- There's no handbook on parenting athletes. University of Alberta researcher Nick Holt is trying to help though.

Holt led a study looking at parenting styles of soccer moms and dads in Edmonton. His research team followed two girls' squads for an entire summer season; one under-12 team, the other under-14. They observed behaviour and at the end of the season interviewed 56 parents. They found three different styles; the most common is autonomy supportive. Thirty-two parents from 18 families fell under this category.

"The parents set boundaries for their kids but would allow the kids to make decisions within those limits," said Holt.

The second most common style was controlling parents; 13 parents from seven families set strict rules for their young athletes.

"They expected their orders to be obeyed without explanation," said Holt.

The third was a mixed style that sees one parent as controlling, the other as autonomy supportive; 11 parents from seven families fell under this category. Holt thinks all parents should strive to be supportive for a number of reasons.

"The kids feel they're making the choice, rather than feeling they're forced to do something. When the pressure to act is there, kids tend to

give up," said Holt.

He also says parents will have a much better relationship with their children if they're not as strict.

"Autonomy supportive parents had more open communication with their kids and their kids would ask for feedback after games," said Holt. "The more controlling parents tended to have pretty closed communication; during the car-ride home the kid would not want to speak with the parent and didn't want any feedback."

Holt thinks parents can change from a more strict approach to supportive.

"These aren't personality things; it's just behaviours," said Holt. "We know there's no guideline on how to parent your kid in sport, everyone is just learning by doing it."

Kids can help too. Holt found in this study children often influenced their parents over time.

"For example, if a child showed that they could be responsible, some of the parents said they would be less controlling."

Provided by University of Alberta

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