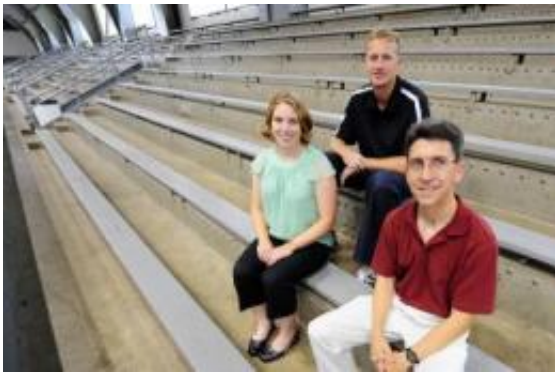


# Children are not the only ones in the game when it comes to sports

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Meghan McDonough, assistant professor of health and kinesiology, Travis Dorsch, doctoral student in health and kinesiology, and Alan Smith, associate professor of health and kinesiology, studied how parents benefit from their children's participation in youth sports. The researchers learned that children's sports participation increased parents' interest and participation in sports and also served as a context for developing new friendships. Credit: Purdue University photo/Andrew Hancock

Parents who sign their children up for sports as part of an educational experience and to learn about teamwork may be learning some of the same lessons themselves, according to new research from Purdue University.

"People often think about how youth sport benefits children because of [physical activity](#), self-confidence and [friendships](#), but we found that

parents also are affected when their children play organized team sports," said Travis Dorsch, a doctoral student in health and kinesiology who led the study.

While children are making friends and learning to work well in groups, parents are practicing the same behaviors in the stands and on the sidelines. Spousal communication also improved as [adults](#) coordinated logistics for carpooling and attending practices and games, whereas other parents noted improving their time management skills. Some parents reported maintaining friendships after their children finished with sports, and others talked about how they experienced an emotional loss when they were finished being a sports parent and no longer had those opportunities for adult "playdates."

One mother even shared that her child scolded her for being so loud on the sidelines. "You know, that made me reevaluate a little how I was looking to the others around me," said the parent, who reported improving her bleacher behavior because of her child's comments.

Other parents reported they were proud of their children and were even motivated themselves to learn about or begin playing the sports their children participated in.

Another parent said that when her child decided to play tennis, she took up the sport, as well. "I never would have done that," the parent said.

"I don't think it's terribly surprising that parents connect with one another, but what was surprising is the intensity of that connection," said Alan Smith, associate professor of health and kinesiology. "Many view themselves differently, as well as their children differently, after exposure to youth sports. This experience was very eye-opening for them whether or not they themselves were previously involved in sports."

Dorsch and Smith, along with Meghan McDonough, an assistant professor of health and kinesiology, looked at how parents perceive that they change from a child's participation in team sports. Their results are published in this month's *Journal of Sport and Exercise Psychology*.

In 2006 more than 57 million children under the age of 18 participated in organized sport programs, according to the National Coaching Report.

"Sports act as a platform for the child-parent relationship, and many parents said [sports](#) gave them and their [children](#) something to talk about," McDonough said. "What we learned from these parents shows that many do not fit the negative stereotype of being overinvolved or acting out."

At the same time, other [parents](#) were frustrated when a child did not make a competitive travel team after time, money and emotional energy had been invested in the child's sport experience over many years. Others admitted they felt guilty for wishing a team would stop winning so the season would end.

Source: Purdue University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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