

Children are learning their values and attitudes in the earlier years of their lives. Authority figures can greatly influence a child's values and attitudes. Coaches are an authority figure during the years leading into adolescents and can have enormous influence later in life. Coaches should seize the appropriate opportunity to discuss quality of life topics with the child-athlete.



## Influencing Adolescents

With maturing children, peer influences through sports become very substantial in forming attitudes later in life. The coach has a unique platform for influencing "later-in-life" decisions for healthy living. An active lifestyle is a pre-requisite to a long and healthy life. Staying in sports and being substance free are messages that the quality coach must bring into the "team talks" early and often. These three areas are growing and negatively affect athletes at the adolescent ages of 11 to 14 where 70% of attrition occurs, attitudes are shaped for future life experiences.

1. Positive thinking is not a natural response to disappointment or adversity for most but it can become a conditioned choice.
2. Teamwork is a principle of democracy. Sacrificing for the common good must be learned.
3. The value of education is a standard for "later in life" success.
4. Specialization is a social trend of recent times. There has become an accepted myth that children that specializes in one sport leads to higher achievement. It is not true. Specialization leads to burn-out and injuries due to overuse and lack of periods of recovery. Fact is that specialization is a major cause of children "quitting" youth sports.
5. Obsessiveness with performance can lead to the use of enhancing substances such as energy spiking and human growth substances. Every and all research indicates that the side effects of these performance enhancing substances is detrimental to the adolescent.
6. The use of prescription drugs for pain has been associated with extended use and addiction. Monitor your athletes pain management. If pain killers are involved give your athlete counsel on its dangers.