

Parent - Child - Coach Relationships Building the Successful Youth Through Competition -  
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Parent - Child - Coach Relationships Building the Successful Youth through Competition

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I was asked by Dr. Doug Householder to speak on this topic at the Texas Equine Industry Conference in November 1999. The importance of this topic became evident to me when I began coaching children in the early 70's. At that time, I had quit full-time rodeoing and began to show in American Quarter Horse Association shows. They offered classes for young people in 3 age groups and soon I had a barn full of youths and their horses. This was my first experience dealing with the parent-child-coach relationship.

Since that time, I have worked with many youths. Sometimes I have the horse and work with the rider while the horse is in training, and sometimes they bring their horses in to the ranch for lessons. I also deal with this during clinics that I conduct all over the world. I have also had the experience of raising my own daughter up through the world of competition in both arena events and queen contests.

I have learned that it takes a certain attitude for the parents whose children get involved in barrel racing. Over the past 35 years, I have had the privilege of working with many parents and their children. Tragically, I have seen parent/child relationships damaged due to parental misjudgment and wrong attitudes. Parents need to be very careful when trying to coach their own children. Lets look at some of the pitfalls we need to avoid.

First of all, don't rush your child into a young, fast horse thinking the two will grow up together. This is not how it works. Never put a young, inexperienced rider on a horse that is also young or inexperienced. I have seen children bucked off, stepped on and hurt both emotionally and physically by horses that were too young, too green or too powerful for them. Always remember, the younger and more inexperienced the rider is the more he or she needs an experienced and safe horse to ride. The sport of barrel racing should be fun for a child. If it is fun, you can use it as a tool to develop character, commitment and confidence in their lives.

It can be a mistake when a parent steps over the line to become the riding coach for his or her child. It rarely works. The reason is this. A child needs nurturing, encouragement, love and support from their parents. When the parent steps over the line to coach, the child can easily be left feeling the absence of their support. The coach should do the instructing, correcting, and conducting the tedious practice with the student. The parent should be there to do the nurturing, and encouragement, and to love the child the way he or she needs.

A parent/coach can expect too much from their own child. This is the reason why I sent my own children to other people for their lessons when they needed help.

I've had parents bring their children to me for lessons and actually stand at the fence and holler over my instructions. I have had this happen at public clinics also. The child cannot listen to two people at once. They often get confused and want to quit. I try to explain to that parent that their attitude and actions are not consistent with developing healthy self-esteem in a child. Barrel racing should never be used to destroy something precious inside a child.

This sport should be fun and build a child's self-esteem. Frankly, if it isn't doing that, the cost to you and your child is way too high.

Here are some things to consider when you are raising a child in the arena of competition.

1. Whose desire is it for the child to compete? I sometimes see parents living the life they wanted to live through their children. If it is not something the child wants to do, then the interest and necessary spark will be missing. You can develop a child through their interests. Finding their interests is very important. Living your dreams through your child can be very harmful to the child.

2. There is a considerable financial investment in the sport of barrel racing. This can create stress and take the fun out of it. This should be considered before you get into it. Price trucks, trailers, saddles, bridles, bits, boots, clothing, hay, grain, and the necessary barn and ground to work on. Then consider the price of the horse that you need to compete where you want to go. Add training, entry fees, gasoline, lessons and health upkeep of the horse to that, and you can see that this is a major financial investment. The investment will be nominal if used in a way that develops a healthy individual. It is actually comparable in dollars spent to other hobbies and can be much more rewarding because of the opportunities to teach your child that will come up.
3. Are we having fun? If not, why? Children should not be as serious as adults. If the element of fun is missing, then they tend to lose interest. We can use the competition field to teach issues of life, but we lose that opportunity when the fun is not there. We can take a lesson here from Earl Woods when he wrote about "Training A Tiger". He said, "perhaps his savviest stroke was making sure that golf was always a great, fun kid's game for Tiger - and something we could share."
4. Should I coach my own child? The answer to this can vary. If you see you are getting into trouble, you can always find some help. Shop for a coach just as you would shop for anything else important to you. Your coach should be moral and all the things you would want your children to be like. There are many great teachers in this industry. I run onto them all the time. Remember that just because someone won great championships does not make them a great teacher. In fact, some people have a very hard time putting into words what they do to win. Championships do not make teachers. It is a gift that not everyone has.
5. Competition creates stress. Stress in the right way produces growth and is very positive. Stress from an over coercive parent causes a negative emotional state that is not conducive to growth of a child's esteem.
6. You can use barrel racing to reaffirm the simple values of life. One rule I had at my barn was that my child rode her horse every day if she was getting ready for a competition. In other words, I did not do all the work and she had all the fun on the weekends. She learned to plan time in her day to practice on her horse or at least groom, saddle and exercise him. This teaches discipline, time management, and commitment, learning that work is required to be successful and taking responsibility. If she had cheerleading practice, or something she couldn't miss, then I would ride her horse, but we did not make a habit of it. We had to work as a team sometimes to get everything done...another of life's lessons.
7. Competition teaches children how to handle pressure, adversity and little crisis's that can come up. If you have a flat tire on the way, it is an opportunity to handle a small crisis. There are unlimited opportunities to teach them how to correctly respond to things that come up in life.
8. They can be taught sportsmanship, goal setting, persistence and the consistency of doing something whether it is raining, sun shining, hot, cold, or perfect. When there are animals that need to be cared for, chores are a great tool to use to teach consistency in attitude and in action.
9. There is a great education in traveling and meeting other people in the sport.
10. Keep your eyes off the prizes and let the rewards be doing the best you can do. The prizes will take care of themselves.

#### MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (taken from clinics)

1. What do I do when my child is losing? This is a window of opportunity to teach your child about winning and losing. You act the same way you do when they are winning. If you act all down and disappointed when your child does not win, they began to associate self-worth and pleasing you with winning. This is how we produce children that judge their worth by whether they win or lose.

2. What about when they are goofing off? This is an opportunity to teach them that there is a time for everything. You as a parent have a big financial investment. If it is their turn to compete and they haven't prepared in every way to be ready, then it is time for discussing why they were goofing off. Remember that the main objective of most children is play, play, play. Helping them find a balance is your job.

3. What do I do when they are too serious? This is how my daughter was. She was so serious about winning that my role was often trying to back her off instead of motivate her. This is an individual thing. I used to joke that I was the only mother in the stands yelling....."Slow down." Type A personalities often need help to loosen up and lighten up and enjoy the journey. This is where reading about personalities and getting advice helps give us tools. I read everything I could get my hands on to gain insight on how to help her not to become an over achiever.

4. My husband yells at the kids. It is getting to the point that they wish he would stay home when we go to the barrel races. What can I do? This is not an uncommon problem. I read a survey taken by a little league baseball group. About 80% of the kids said they wished one or both of their parents would stay at home and not come to the games. So, this is not something that happens only at barrel races, but in all sports. Here again, the element of fun is taken away when a parent yells. The child's biggest instinct is to please the parents. When they win and the parent is pleased, then all is well. When they lose and the parent is yelling, the opposite happens. Can you see what that is teaching the child? When I win, I am accepted and valuable. When I lose, I am not pleasing to my dad. They become O.K. when they win and down when they lose. Their worth is soon in winning. I can tell when I am working with a child that has been yelled at. They are so busy watching for my re-action that they have a hard time concentrating on what they are supposed to be doing.

You are in a position that is precarious. You will need to have wisdom on how to approach this subject with your husband. I have seen parents get worse when they are called on the yelling and I have seen them stop it immediately. It all depends upon that individual. Pray about how to handle this.

5. How can I know if my kids are pushing too hard? Look for signs of tiredness, confusion, not having fun, starting to dread to go, apathy, and little illnesses like upset stomachs, headaches, etc. If you are tuned in, you will pick up on these signs.

6. What can I do if my child becomes cocky and arrogant? This can happen very easily when a child starts to win. This is an opportunity again to teach that pride goes right before the fall and that no one wants to be around an arrogant person. One of the things that you can do is take them into a tougher competition. This sometimes takes care of itself if you keep going. You can also teach them that they will never arrive and that the road to success is always under construction. Usually when a person gets cocky, it isn't long until they stop advancing. Teach them to learn from great athletes of our time. What keeps Tiger Woods who is at the top of his game from becoming cocky? His restless drive for what the Japanese call kaizen, or continuous improvement. He is always working on his game. No matter how good you get, there is always room for growth. Tiger and his coach, Butch Harmon are working constantly on improving his game - even after winning the Grand Slam and becoming the best golfer in the world. We can all learn from great athletes that have long term, consistent careers.

I pray that you will seize every opportunity to teach your child how to be a healthy person emotionally as well as spiritually and physically. Remember that you are raising someone who will someday become a wife or husband, teacher or worker. What you teach them now will determine how they live their lives. Emotionally abused children do not make good husbands and wives. Emotionally healthy people are so much easier for the world to live with than those who grow up lopsided are. Make sure that your child grows up with a well-rounded life and experiences school activities, church activities and family fun outings without the horses. I hope that this will give you some ideas. I am always reading and trying to improve as a teacher and coach. Some of the best books I have read were written by Dr. James Dobson. You can tap into his online resource center on the web to review his books. I strongly recommend Hide or Seek, Dare To Discipline and The Strong Willed Child. His web address is: [www.family.org](http://www.family.org)

Happy Trails!