



## OC Pro's Defiant Disorder, Foster Families, Child Athletes & Table Manners

### Rewarding Athletes

**Q:** My Son is 15-years-old, and has always been passionate about tennis. To support his talent, my husband and I have spent considerable money for his training. His goal is to earn a college scholarship. However, recently we have resorted to a "reward system" just to get him motivated to go to practice. We will grant him privileges if he is ready for practice on-time and has a positive attitude when we take him. Is this a good strategy? What is the most effective way to motivate my son to want to practice? - *Deuce, Irvine*

**A:** What a great question! Our children are motivated by different needs throughout their development, and this can also be seen through athletic preparation. Enhancing motivation before the age of 12 is accomplished mostly with your praise and encouragement, in addition to your child's sense of accomplishment within their sport. After these early years, a child's source of motivation and accomplishment can change. This is often when parents begin to become frustrated trying to keep their child motivated to excel in their previously desired activities, including athletics and academics.

The situation is complicated for athletic children when a loss of interest or motivation occurs because sport parents are also worried there will be a long-term impact on training goals, competitions, and future athletic success. It is common for parents to want to push their children through this phase. The rationale is most often altruistic, "They don't know what they are risking..I'm working to protect their future...They have too much potential to quit." The response is to justify pushing their child athlete are also understandable because families become very invested both monetarily and emotionally in their child's performance and

training. Unfortunately, the consequences for pushing a child beyond their limits can be significant and make an enduring impact on the parent-child relationship.

First, I recommend assessing a situation. Attempt to locate the cause of your child's change in desire, especially if sudden changes in behavior or mood are severe. If a trigger can be found, then an intervention by parents, coaches, or a helping professional are likely to be more effective. Next, hold off before you add rewards to any situation. Research suggests that adding incentives unnecessarily can decrease a person's internal drive. The result is a need to continue the reward indefinitely if you want to keep the desired behavior going! Finally, believe it or not, allowing your child to experience difficulties, or poor decision-making in the earlier stages of their athletic career can be a good thing! Athletes need to develop the same life skills as non-athletes, and it is better for them to do this with the support and guidance of their parents before the independence of college or professional sports is upon them.

– Dr. Casey Cooper