

An Open Letter to Every “Sailing” Parent in the World

By Wayne Goldsmith - <http://www.sportscoachingbrain.com/>

(and adapted and edited, with permission, for the sport of sailboat racing by Tom Coleman)

Dear Sailing Parent,

Firstly let me thank you for being a sailing parent. Without you – we have no sport. There is no sailing without you. Programs and coaches could not exist without your support. I appreciate everything you do – the early mornings, the late afternoons, the rush to get dinner ready at night for hungry, tired kids, the long weekends of regatta travel. For everything you do, I thank you.

I wanted to write and show my appreciation by giving you something in return; to thank you for all you give the sport. I am going to give you some ideas and advice to help you be the best sailing parent you can be and to help you help your kids enjoy their sailing to the extent of their talent and to the limits of their dreams.

Your child.

Your child is *not* a sailor. They are a *person* who sails. And as a person, *who they are* impacts on every aspect of their sailing. Real progress in sailing comes not from heredity, strength, skill and hard training – it comes from the development of the whole person: the character, their values, their personality AND of course their genetics, strength, skill etc etc. The training alone is not enough – the development of the person is far more important and far more enduring.

Speed, strength, endurance, power, flexibility and technique are all important. But not as important as integrity. Or honesty. Or sincerity. Or humility. Or courage. Or a strong work ethic. Or the ability to accept responsibility for their own actions. Or the ability to work cohesively with others to achieve a common goal. Or self discipline. Or the ability to maintain a sense of humor under pressure and stress. These things not only impact positively on your child's sailing but on every aspect of their life. And not just now, but for the rest of their life and in everything they do.

I love sailing. And I would love your child to be a world record holder and Olympic champion. But I would prefer that your kids become better people through the experience of being involved in this great sport. If they happen to also sail fast.....that is a bonus.

Your child's coach.

Coaching is a tough business. Early mornings. Long weekends. Late evenings writing programs and developing coaching strategies. Coaches are passionate souls who live for the opportunity to work with like minded sailors and families intent on achieving success and enjoying involvement in a great sport. Coaches want to change lives – sailing is just the avenue. Great coaches possess the communication skills, empathy and compassion to change people – they just chose to use sailing as the vehicle to do it. You, your child and your coach form a team. A team with a single goal – to provide the opportunity for your child to enjoy all the sport of sailing has to offer. And as with any team, achieving this goal is dependent on all members of the team working cohesively, honestly and with unconditional trust.

Choose your coach carefully. Meet with them. Talk with them. Regularly communicate with them (away from the program and outside of training times). And once you have made the decision to entrust the development of your child to a particular coach, give that coach 100% total commitment, dedication and support. If you can't...find another coach. Partial support will not withstand the ups and downs of competitive sailing. 100% committed support – the same support you give your child and the same 100% committed support you want FROM the coach must also be given by you TO the coach.

Your role as a sailing parent – how you can help.

Let the coach do their job but there are some things you can do to help your child that only you can do. Let me tell you a story about a sailing family I know.

I was asked to stay with the family and enjoy a few days with them. The kids both sail and asked me if I would be interested in getting up early with them the next morning for practice. Of course I said “yes”. I set my alarm for 5 am, got up and dressed. It was then the strangest thing happened. Another alarm went off.....in the mother's room. Mom got up. Got dressed. Rushed into the kitchen and made a cup of coffee for herself and two mugs of hot chocolate for the

children. She then rushed around the house gathering up **sailing** gear, towels, **spray tops**, **bailers** and filled water bottles. She then put all of these things in the kids' **gear** bags and put the bags near the front door. She then tapped gently on the kids' bedroom doors and said, "Darling, it is time to go **sailing**". The kids responded, "I'm not going. I hate **sailing**. It's too cold" and some other stuff. Mom then reversed the car out of the garage, carried both **gear** bags out to the car. Meanwhile one of kids was still in bed and had rolled over and gone back to sleep. The other was sitting on their bed saying "I'm tired. I'm tired" over and over again. Mom helped both kids out of bed, helped them put on their **rash guards** and **boots** and helped them out to the kitchen table. The kids weren't even drinking their hot chocolate....they were sitting and moaning and groaning and complaining about **sailing** and being cold and how it was "too early". Mom then helped the kids into the car – one laid down in the back seat and went to sleep while the other put his head on the car window and fell asleep. Mom and I talked about this and that on the way to the **club**. When we got there, Mom jumped out, helped the kids out of the car and carried their bags **down to the dock**.

The kids trained ok and I enjoyed watching the practice while Mom went off doing something else. After training, Mom came back, embraced the kids with "Hi my angels. How was practice?" The kids answered, "OK" and then sat quietly all the way home intent on their **personal video games**.

When they got home, the kids went in to shower, while Mom emptied their **gear** bags, made their **dinner** and ironed their clothes for school **the next day**. I was a bit surprised she didn't also do their homework!!!!

Sound familiar? I suspect these scenes or something very similar were also played out in your own home **many days**.

You don't **sail Optimis**. Your kids do. Don't do it all for them. If people get opportunities easily they do not appreciate them and never take full advantage of them. "Holding the hand" of your kids may seem like the loving, caring parent thing to do but it isn't. It does not teach them self responsibility or self management or self discipline. All it does is teach them to expect life to be unrealistically easy.

The most important thing you can do to help your child achieve their **sailing** goals is to help them develop as a person with real independence and self management skills. You prepare them for life.....let the coach prepare them to **sail** fast. The three of you – parent, coach and child – working together is an unstoppable force!!!

Once again sincere thanks for your involvement in this great sport and on behalf of everyone in **sailing**, my appreciation for your contribution and ongoing support.

Yours faithfully,

Wayne Goldsmith (and Tom Coleman!) <http://www.sportscoachingbrain.com/>

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**India Johnstone
blasting to weather.
Dave Hein - photo.**