

Sport Parent Persona



How to use this document

The information provided is high-level and intended as a starting point to support thinking and development of strategies for engaging parents. We recognise that parents are diverse individuals with different motivations, experiences and needs and that one parent may sit across multiple personas.

This resource has been compiled from both international and New Zealand research and evidence. The document explores different types of parents, their attitudes and behaviours towards sport and subsequent interactions with their children. Ultimately, this document has been developed to support people who work with parents in youth sport settings.

We encourage organisations to ensure local knowledge and the voice of participants are layered into any strategies that are developed.

When applying these persona, it is important to consider the child or young person's age, development level and their individual motivations for participating in sport.

Throughout this resource we describe the impact of various behaviours on the overall experience for the child rather than describing behaviours as 'good' or 'bad'.

A key element of optimal parental involvement is the extent to which parents match their involvement and behaviours to their children's preferences and needs (Knight and Holt 2014).

Impact on Experience

For each of the parent persona, we have described the impact of parent behaviour on their child's experience in sport using 10 different categories:



High stress or high pressure



Empowered



Outcome focused



Process focused



Disempowered



Conflicted



Embarrassed



Unsupported



Supported



Disengaged

Caveats and limitations

1.

Much of the literature is based on international research and it is important that NZ-based insights are developed to better represent our diverse and unique populations (cultural and socio-economic)

2.

Much of the literature focuses on western ideals, middle class, white and dual parenting families and does not appreciate the range of different parenting styles adopted

3.

We have attempted to describe some of the different behaviours that may be present from parents in sport.

Importantly the information provided should be read in context of a wider insights approach and some parent behaviours may cross over several persona.

4.

Consideration should also be given to different gender roles (i.e. mothers vs fathers) and broader cultural family dynamics

Background

We know that if people are physically active, they have better outcomes in life. Sport New Zealand's purpose is to contribute to the wellbeing of every body in Aotearoa New Zealand by leading an enriching and inspiring play, active recreation and sport system.

Sport New Zealand's approach to enriching the sport system in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by the Balance is Better philosophy. To influence changes in youth sport, and through consultation with our partner network, parents were identified as a key focus area.

Parents are critical influencers and supporters of a young person's sporting experiences.

They are the taxi drivers and the side line supporters. Sometimes they're a nutritionist and a mental skills coach. They need to be able to balance the emotional and logistical demands of sport for themselves and their children. They may also be at the other end of the spectrum and have little to no interest in their child participating in sport.

From a combination of international research and what we're seeing at varying levels of youth sport in Aotearoa, there are three statements that apply to most types of parents that we're looking to address with our work.

- 1.** Parents perception of what defines success in sport is overly weighted to performance and winning
- 2.** Parents have a poor understanding of the benefits of sport or place significantly less value on social sporting activities
- 3.** The sports system is unable to connect with parents and is providing mixed or inconsistent messaging

Parents are a diverse group with varying experiences and motivations. Just as we design sport opportunities around the needs of young people, we should be ensuring that we design the way we work with parents based on their individual differences.

It's important to understand how parents differ when it comes to youth sport and consider different approaches to get the most out of these engagements.

International research supports the idea that parents have a range of beliefs regarding sport, why they want their children to participate, and what they hope they will gain as a result (Knight, Dorsch et al., 2016). These beliefs, expectations, and values subsequently influence the specific roles (i.e., coach, administrator, supporter) parents adopt and the behaviours they display.

Do we mean just parents? Or are we including whānau, caregivers and others under the term 'parents'?

At this time, our approach uses the term 'parents', however this term encompasses parents in the wider sense of the word in New Zealand society. It therefore includes caregiver, guardian, whānau or other primary providers of care and support to our tamariki and rangatahi. As we further develop our approach we will address this.

John

Age: 47 Years



Profile

John has 2 children (12 and 9), both are involved in sport with specialist coaching 5 times a week. John was a former provincial representative player and has high expectations for his children. John arranges all of his children's sporting activities and is in attendance at all trainings and games often calling out instructions from the sideline. Winning is the most important thing for John and he puts a lot of pressure on his children to perform.

John's children feel that their father is overly critical of their performances and they will often try and avoid conversations if they feel they haven't performed well enough. They feel significant pressure to win given all of the time and money their father is investing into their sport.



Positive attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

This parent demonstrates extreme levels of investment into their child's sport experience (energy, time and financially). They are extremely invested in performance outcomes.

They are very likely to instigate and/or facilitate their child to specialise in a sport early. Much of their own identity and relationship with their child will revolve around sport (and in particular performance outcomes in this sport). Parents demonstrate controlling behaviors and limit choices their children can make.

Demonstrations of affection and love to their child are coupled with achievement outcomes in sport. They will often be critical of their child's performance. They have a narrow definition of success in sport that is focused on performance and winning.

Impact on experience for the young person:



High stress or high pressure



Outcome focused



Disempowered

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)	Messaging (What)	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to inform/educate through influential coaches • Consider timing around child's sport - parents want to be at or engaged in child's training or game • Physical resources as well as face to face should be provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information to appeal to their motivations for success - i.e. "Creating champions" • Evidence to support changes is important to this group • Core messaging focused around the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand that if you want a young person to be successful in the long run (in and through sport) you need to focus on development now - A focus on performance now is likely to hinder rather than support development. - Developing an understanding of the different kinds of support parents provide at different stages of their child's life and experience. - Growing a deeper understanding of their child's motivations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to engage, tend to be resistant to change • Potentially too difficult to change behaviours directly. • Likely requires a disorientating dilemma to prompt them to confront their own belief systems. • Evidence to support need for change and consideration as to when evidence is layered in • How might the messages (explicit and implicit) conveyed by the environment John's children participate in reinforce and shape John's beliefs?

Pania

Age: 46 Years



Profile

Pania drives her children (8 and 14) to all of their practices and games for the 3 different sports they each play. She will often try and have conversations with their coaches during trainings when she feels they aren't progressing or performing well enough. In the car ride home and after games or trainings she will often contradict the messages from coaches.

Pania's children find this behaviour difficult as they feel torn between either following their coaches or their parents information. While the children enjoy the opportunities they have in sport they would like their mother to step back a little and enable them to make more decisions.

Positive attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

Often thought of as a helicopter parent, this parent is over invested into their child's sport experience (energy, time and financially). They are invested into performance outcomes, and will be quick to intervene if they believe they can support better (short term) achievement outcomes (e.g. often undermine coach / selectors decisions), and often will undermine their child's long term development outcome.

They will not necessarily instigate early specialisation, but are susceptible to being enamoured by a system/programme that encourages it.

Their identity as a parent is tied to their child's sport achievement. They have a narrow definition of success in sport that is focused on performance. They will often make decisions on behalf of their child without first understanding their child's needs.

Impact on experience for the young person:



High stress or high pressure



Outcome focused

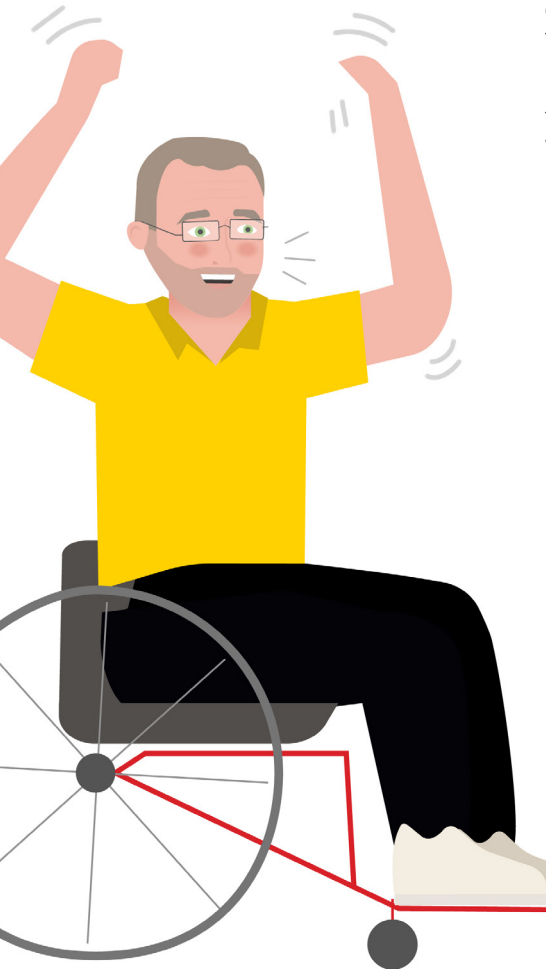


Disempowered

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)	Messaging (What)	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunities to inform/educate through influential coaches • Consider timing around child's sport - parents want to be at or engaged in child's training or game • Physical resources as well as face to face should be provided 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information to appeal to their motivations for success - i.e. "Creating champions" • Evidence to support changes is important to this group • Core messaging focused around the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To understand that if you want a young person to be successful in the long run (in and through sport) you need to focus on development now - A focus on performance now is likely to hinder rather than support development. - Developing an understanding of the different kinds of support parents provide at different stages of their child's life and experience. - Growing a deeper understanding of their child's motivations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult to engage, tend to be resistant to change • Potentially too difficult to change behaviours directly. • Likely requires disorientating dilemma to prompt them to confront their own belief systems. • Evidence to support need for change and consideration as to when evidence is layered in • How might the messages (explicit and implicit) conveyed by the environment Pania's children participate in reinforce and shape Pania's beliefs?

Peter

Age: 52 Years



Profile

Peter has always been really supportive of his children's sport and encouraged them to play multiple sports. He was really proud of his children's success particularly his 2 daughters representing NZ at U17 touch and his son making the 1st XV at school. Peter has always incentivised winning or scoring tries which has created some tensions between Peter and some of his children's coaches who discourage this behaviour (when trying to encourage better team play).

Peter's children all feel really supported by their father and want to do well to make him proud. Unfortunately Peter is always very vocal on the sideline which his children do find embarrassing.



Positive attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

This parent has an appropriate level of investment into their child's sport experience. Their identity is not tied to their child's sport achievement. They are likely to view themselves as child centred. However, they display behaviours that may undermine their child's long term development in sport (e.g. feedback based on outcome as opposed to effort). This is often because of ignorance or outdated knowledge learned from wider social constructs and messages about sport as well as observing norms from other parents, coaches and administrators within their immediate youth sport context (i.e. a club or school). Undermining behaviours are most pronounced just before, during or just after competitions.

Impact on experience for the young person:



Embarrassed



High stress or high pressure



Supported

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)

- Often are already engaged and interested in learning more about supporting their child's sport. Resources that can be taken home and discussed with their child are valued.
- Face to face sessions will have greater impact on this group both to increase their knowledge and confidence but also so they feel supported to champion change.
- Provide knowledge and tools so they can work with / influence constructively other adults to ensure the needs of their children and other young people are best met.

Messaging (What)

Title or initial information that appeals to:

1. Their motivations to continue to best support their child in sport (practical i.e. nutrition, training loads and wellbeing i.e. roles in supporting, emotional support)
2. Their ability to become a local champion.

Core messaging to focus on the following:

1. Sustain child-centred behaviours.
2. Provide knowledge to further rationalise and support these behaviours.

To support this group to become critical internal influencers information should focus on supporting these people to increase their knowledge, confidence and then ability to influence others. Provide knowledge and tools so they can advocate for Balance is Better with peers, community and their relevant systems.

Considerations

Support for this group to feel more empowered and knowledgeable to make (better) decisions in the interest of their child. This includes being able to constructively challenge other adults involved in supporting their child's sport experiences (e.g. coaches, administrators), if the parent perceives that these other adults' behaviours are not aligned to the best interests of their child.

Vanessa

Age: 49 Years



Profile

Vanessa is a former international athlete and has a good understanding of the important role parents and whānau play in supporting young people's sports experience. She has 2 children of her own (12 and 14) and is the primary carer for her niece (7). They are all involved in sport at different levels. She is well known in the community and often has other parents asking her for advice. Vanessa has a good relationship with her children's and her niece's coaches and is able to advocate for them in positive ways.

All of the children in Vanessa's care feel well supported and enjoy talking to her about their sporting experiences.



Positive attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

This parent has an appropriate level of investment into their child's sport experience. Their identity is not tied to their child's sport achievement. They are likely to view themselves as child centred. A wider definition of what constitutes success in sport is prominent in how they interpret, respond and act within their child's youth sport context. The level and type of support they provide their child adapts based on age, stage and motivations of their child.

Is confidently able to challenge the systems and structures where they don't align to a child centred approach. They are often highly involved in their child's life and are responsive to their child's needs.

Impact on experience for the young person:



Supported



Empowered



Process focused

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)	Messaging (What)	Considerations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often are already engaged and interested in learning more about supporting their child's sport. Resources that can be taken home and discussed with their child are valued. • Face to face sessions will have greater impact on this group both to increase their knowledge and confidence but also so they feel supported to champion change. • Provide knowledge and tools so they can work with / influence constructively other adults to ensure the needs of their children and other young people are best met. 	<p>Title or initial information that appeals to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Their motivations to continue to best support their child in sport (practical i.e. nutrition, training loads and wellbeing i.e. roles in supporting, emotional support) 2. Their ability to become a local champion. <p>Core messaging to focus on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Sustain child-centred behaviours. 2. Provide knowledge to further rationalise and support these behaviours. <p>To support this group to become critical internal influencers information should focus on supporting these people to increase their knowledge, confidence and then ability to influence others. Provide knowledge and tools so they can advocate for Balance is Better into peers, community and their relevant systems.</p>	<p>Support for this group to feel more empowered and knowledgeable to make (better) decisions in the interest of their child. This includes being able to constructively challenge other adults involved in supporting their child's sport experiences (e.g. coaches, administrators), if the parent perceives that these other adults' behaviours are not aligned to the best interests of their child.</p>

Ngaire

Age: 39 Years



Profile

Ngaire is a busy parent with a lot of competing priorities. She has two children (7 and 12) who both enjoy sport. Ngair struggles to get them to practices and games on time. She often drops them off and rushes away to do other jobs (like grocery shopping). Ngair was active herself and enjoyed sport when she was younger but simply doesn't have the time now to really support her children's activities. She has noticed a few occasions where her children don't seem to be enjoying the coaching they are receiving but she doesn't feel confident or knowledgeable enough to have a conversation with the coaches about her concerns.

Ngair's children see other parents on the sideline of games and wish their mother was able to be more involved.



Positive or Neutral attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

Due to competing priorities (lifestyle factors including work, family etc), they demonstrate low to no levels of investment into their child's sport experience (energy, time, financial). For tamariki and younger rangatahi this parent can be perceived by others as using sport as a 'baby sitting service'. They are supportive in principle of their child playing sport. They likely recognise and value sport for the wider outcomes that it provides. They may have a narrow definition of what constitutes success in sport and so may be unsure of what they should expect from a quality sport experience or sport specific context. These parents will typically pass responsibility to others who they perceive to have more power/knowledge i.e. coaches.

Impact on experience for the young person:



Conflicted



Unsupported

Tactics for engaging

(How, when, where)

Due to competing priorities or low value placed on sport it is important that information comes from a variety of sources, that there are resources available to take home and any face to face interactions are done alongside the child's sporting activities. Opportunity to explore innovative ways of engaging i.e. through church groups Important to understand their values and drivers

Messaging

(What)

Easily accessible language and content.
Core messages to focus on the following:

1. Value of sport for their child including information about social or non competitive sport opportunities.
2. Different roles they can play in supporting their child's experience
3. A level of technical information about the sport to support parent to have conversations with their children

Considerations

Short but frequent bursts of information - bite sized content
Consider ESOL or literacy confidence
Identify ways to increase the confidence of individuals to contribute - small ways they are able to support their child's participation
Consider existing systems or structures that enable engagement with this parent group.

Seek to understand more about the parents situation including their perceptions of sport (value), their personal circumstances (whats preventing them from being involved) and how to best engage with them.

Vincent

Age: 45 Years



Profile

Vincent and his family are relatively new to New Zealand and are still learning English. Sport has never been a big part of his life and while he is not negative towards sport he doesn't see the value in participating in sport and as such, sport plays a very limited role in his families life. His 2 children (10 and 12) are enjoying sport at school but they don't get to participate outside of school time.

Vincent's children want to join a local club where their friends also play and would like it if their family were more involved.

-
Neutral attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

This parent demonstrates low level of investment into their child's sport experience. They may have a moderate to low level of understanding about the value of sport. Vincent is not motivated to find out information about sport making it difficult for his children to get involved in the club.

If they value sport they may be disempowered from demonstrating investment into their child's sport experience due to low sport/ sport specific knowledge and experience as well as other social factors (e.g. language).

Impact on experience for the young person:



Conflicted



Unsupported

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)	Messaging (What)	Considerations
<p>Important to understand why this group is disengaged currently. Interactions need to be built around motivations and values.</p> <p>With low value placed on sport it is important that information comes from a variety of sources, that there are resources available to take home and any face to face interactions are done alongside the child's sporting activities.</p> <p>Information through schools and community/ cultural groups have greater engagement.</p>	<p>Easily accessible language and content.</p> <p>Core messages to focus on the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Value of sport for their child including information about social or non competitive sport opportunities. 2. Different roles they can play in supporting their child's experience 3. A level of technical information about the sport to support parent to have conversations with their children 4. Opportunities to connect to the community 	<p>Short but frequent bursts of information - bite sized content</p> <p>Consider ESOL or literacy confidence</p> <p>Identify ways to increase the confidence of individuals to contribute - small ways they are able to support their child's participation</p> <p>Consider existing systems or structures that enable engagement with this parent group.</p>

Barry

Age: 55 Years



Profile

Barry has 3 children (12, 13 and 15) and he has never really been involved in sport. School and music are more of a priority for Barry and he doesn't understand the value of sport. There is very little that could be done to persuade him to step inside a sports club. Barry does shift work and so his schedule varies from week to week limiting his ability to be involved in any extra-curricular activities.

His children participate in sport through school sports days. They would like to have more opportunities but don't feel that their parents would be supportive.



Negative attitude towards sport

Behaviour characteristics

This parent views participating in sport (and active recreation and physical activity) as a low priority activity for their child in comparison to other activities that they and their child can invest in (e.g. academics, work, family, religion). As such they implicitly or explicitly are resistant to or do not ever prioritise investing (time, energy, financial) into these types of experiences for their child. They may also demonstrate behaviours that indicate explicit or implicit disapproval of their child participating in sport, active recreation or physical activity.

Impact on experience for the young person:



Unsupported



Disengaged

Tactics for engaging

(How, when, where)

Unlikely to have many interactions directly with these parents, in particular for parents of rangatahi. Primary delivery to these groups will be through social media. Consideration could also be given to how children can influence their parents and/or programme delivery is focused on 'family' events

Messaging

(What)

Outcome for this group is focused around parents having a better understanding about the value of sport for their child, and therefore is more likely to demonstrate supportive behaviours (including being involved in the experience).

Considerations

Need to consider other sociocultural factors with this parent group.

For non-engaged parents there may be little time/effort put into influencing here with more energy put into connecting with rangatahi and tamariki coaches or peers

Maria

Age: 44 Years



Profile

Maria has no interest in sport (either to participate or to watch). They had poor experiences with sport when they were younger and so has quite a negative attitude towards sport now. Sport doesn't feature at all in the house and this has meant that Maria's 2 children (8 and 12) are not engaged in sport either.

Behaviour characteristics

Maria has an unengaged parenting style (neglectful or permissive) towards sport. As such, they do not demonstrate behaviours that instigate, support or reinforce opportunities for their child to participate in sport, active recreation or physical activity.



Negative attitude towards sport

Impact on experience for the young person:



Unsupported



Disengaged

Tactics for engaging (How, when, where)	Messaging (What)	Considerations
Unlikely to have many interactions directly with these parents, in particular for parents of rangatahi. Primary delivery to these groups will be through social media. Consideration could also be given to how children can influence their parents and/or programme delivery is focused on 'family' events.	Outcome for this group is focused around parents having a better understanding about the value of sport for their child, and therefore is more likely to demonstrate supportive behaviours (including being involved in the experience).	Need to consider other sociocultural factors with this parent group. For non-engaged parents there may be little time/effort put into influencing here with more energy put into connecting with rangatahi and tamariki coaches or peers

Factors influencing parents involvement in youth sport

Parenting in youth sport should not be viewed in isolation of broader social and cultural norms. Using international and Aotearoa literature, the below information adds some additional context and consideration. These factors may go some way to explaining parent behaviours and engagement in youth sport.

	John	Pania	Peter	Vanessa	Ngaire	Vincent	Barry	Maria	
Factors influencing how a parent is involved in youth sport Individual level	Parenting Styles in relation to sport <small>(adapted from Macobby and Martin, 1983)*</small>	Authoritarian	Authoritarian	Authorative (Autonomy Supportive)	Authorative (Autonomy Supportive)	Predominant parenting style unlikely to reflect interaction with child in youth sport context	Predominant parenting style unlikely to reflect interaction with child in youth sport context	Authoritarian	Permissive
	Prior personal knowledge and expertise in a sport including technical sport knowledge <small>(adapted from Knight et al., 2016; and Dorsch et al., 2018)</small>	High history with sport; High technical knowledge	Moderate-High history with sport; High-moderate technical knowledge	Moderate-low history with sport; Moderate-low technical knowledge	Moderate-high history with sport; High technical knowledge	Moderate-low history with sport; Moderate-low technical knowledge	Low history with sport; Low technical knowledge	No to low history with sport; Low technical knowledge	No to low history with sport; No technical knowledge
	Values sport <small>(adapted from Sport NZ parent education business case)</small>	Sport is a high priority	Sport is a high priority	Sport is a moderate-to-high priority	Sport is a moderate-to-high priority	Sport is a low-to-moderate priority	Sport is a low-to-moderate priority	Sport is a low priority	They are apathetic about sport
	Values and understands benefit of physical activity <small>(adapted from Sport NZ parents education business case)</small>	High value to being physically active High understanding about the benefits of being physically active	High value to being physically active High understanding about the benefits of being physically active	High value to being physically active High understanding about the benefits of being physically active	High value to being physically active High understanding about the benefits of being physically active	Moderate-low value to being physically active Moderate-low understanding about the benefits of being physically active	Moderate-low value to being physically active Moderate-low understanding about the benefits of being physically active	Low value to being physically active Low understanding about the benefits of being physically active	They are apathetic about physical activity Low understanding about the benefits of being physically active.
	Knowledge of developmentally appropriate practices for sport <small>(adapted from Harwood & Knight, 2015)</small>	Misguided knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	High level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices	Low level knowledge about developmentally appropriate practices
	Goals and beliefs about youth sport <small>(adapted from Dorsch et al., 2018; and Knight et al., 2016)</small>	Explicitly places highest value on achievement outcomes, health & wellbeing and psychosocial development outcomes achieved from sport are valued but not as much as achievement outcomes.	Implicitly places highest value on achievement outcomes. Health & wellbeing and psychosocial development outcomes from sport are valued but not as much as achievement outcomes.	Health & wellbeing outcomes and psychosocial development outcomes are of more or equal importance than achievement outcomes	Health & wellbeing outcomes and psychosocial development outcomes are of more or equal importance than achievement outcomes	Would consider health & wellbeing and psychosocial development outcomes more important than achievement outcomes. Likely has not considered before.	Would consider health & wellbeing and psychosocial development outcomes more important than achievement outcomes. Likely has not considered before.	Apathetic to valuing different outcomes from sport	Apathetic to valuing different outcomes from sport

Across all parent types

Questions for working with sport parents

While there are many different types of parents and interactions with young people in sport, there are a range of questions and considerations we can ask ourselves which apply across all of the different parent personas'.

1.

What does their family dynamic look like - including gender roles?

2.

What allows or does not allow the parents from being engaged in their child's sporting experiences?

3.

What are their goals and aspirations for their child from sport AND what do they know about their child's aspirations?

4.

What role(s) does the parent play in their child's sporting experience?

5.

What setting(s) is their child involved in sport - i.e. club, school, representative?

Considerations when developing strategies

1.

What type of parent am I trying to engage with?

2.

What behaviours am I trying to stimulate, promote or discourage?

3.

What are some key personas that we want to target and what are their motivations, barriers and needs?

4.

What are some practical actions that can support the engagement of parents?

5.

What are our current perceptions of parents and do these align with the persona?

This guide should prompt thinking about:

How should messages, resources and support best be tailored to different types of sport parents?

What is the best approach (when, where, by who) when working with different sport parents?

Acknowledgements

Information compiled from a number of research points and literature reviews including:

1. Holt, Tamminen, Black, Mandigo & Fox; Youth Sport Parenting Styles & Practices (2009)
2. Knight, Dorsch, Osai, Haderlie, & Sellars; Influences on Parental Involvement in Youth Sport (2015)
3. Knight (2019): Revealing Findings in Youth Sport Parenting Research
4. Clearinghouse for Sport - Parents Market Segmentation (2015)
5. Sport NZ Parent Education Monitoring & Evaluation project reports 2020
6. Sport NZ commissioned Literature Review: Parent Involvement and Education in Sport; A Literature Review 2018



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