

# PARENTS GUIDE TO 10 & UNDER TENNIS

A RESOURCE PRODUCED BY INSPIRE2COACH



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International Tennis Federation



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inspire2coach is a leading coach education company based in the UK. As well as being the largest trainer of Level 1 and Level 2 coaches in the UK, inspire2coach also works closely with the International Tennis Federation and many tennis federations around the world to provide experts, training and resources to help coaches and others involved in tennis.

*“The primary role of tennis parents is to be supportive, interested, encouraging and caring”*

Dr Jim Loehr, Sports Psychologist

## INTRODUCTION: PARENTS AND MINI TENNIS

As your child develops from a toddler to a child of school age, so the world of opportunities develops. By the age of 4 or 5, your child has branched out, developing friendships, favourite activities and games, and showing a keen desire to learn through constant activity. As their confidence grows, they may well start to look for new and different sports to play. Tennis could be one of them!



But tennis is a whole new world for both you and your child. It

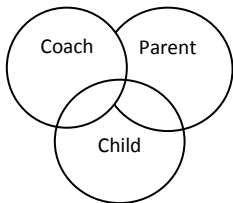
may be your child's first experience of structured sport, and it may be the first time your child has been taught by anyone other than the family or a school teacher. It may also be the first time that your child enters a competition. It's a wonderful game and a game for life, but it's important to

start on the right track. There's a lot for you both to learn!

This booklet helps you as a parent of a young child to understand Mini Tennis, and your role in helping your child to learn and love to play tennis. This booklet helps you to understand:

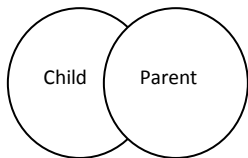
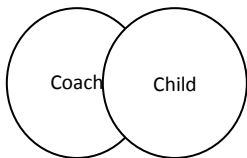
- how Mini Tennis is structured
- what to expect from a Mini Tennis programme
- happens in Mini Tennis lessons and why
- how you can be positively involved during lessons, in competition and at home
- do's and don'ts for you when your child is playing and competing

## CHILDREN, PARENTS AND TENNIS



In an ideal world, the relationship between children, parents and coach would look like this, with all three parts actively involved.

Clearly, the relationship between child and parent will be the strongest, whilst the relationship between parent and coach is often the weakest. Often, therefore, there are two relationships, which can look like this:



In many cases, the parent-coach relationship is missing.

It is very important for all three that the coach-parent relationship is also a good one. Coaches and parents should discuss progress and decisions about the child frequently and openly, and respect the fact that they should work as a team in the child's best interest.



## WORKING TOGETHER

Developing a good relationship with your child's tennis coach needn't be difficult if some simple guidelines are followed.

Parent	Coach
Let the coach do his job, and never undermine him	Be professional and have the child's best interests at heart
Ensure that your child practices what the coach asks him to do	Explain your methods and what you are working on to the parents
Make sure your child is given plenty of encouragement	Coach in a positive way which helps the child enjoy and develop
Don't criticise anyone's children or any parents	Don't criticise anyone's children or any parents or fellow coach
Respect the coaches decisions, but by all means ask why a certain decision has been made	Be consistent and fair in your decisions and selections, and explain them to the parent face to face

## TENNIS 10s



Tennis 10s is the ITFs worldwide programme for 10 and Under tennis. The game is often referred to as Mini Tennis.

From 2012, the International Tennis Federation (ITF) has changed the rules of tennis to ensure that no child aged 10 and under is allowed to compete anywhere in the world using the wrong balls on the wrong courts.

Young children should be playing Mini Tennis. This means using slower red, orange and green balls, smaller courts and shorter rackets up to the age of 10 years old. This allows the child to progress in an environment proportionate to their size, strength and ability, to make tennis easy and fun at an earlier age. The diagram below shows how the game develops as the child gets older, bigger and more experienced.





## WHAT TO EXPECT FROM MINI TENNIS AND THE COACH

There's an awful lot for a young child to learn before he can play tennis on a full sized tennis court. As a result, you should expect to see the following in Mini Tennis lessons:

- smaller courts and slower balls being used by all children aged 10 and under
- lots of different equipment, which will stimulate and add interest for young children. Much of the equipment used is not traditional tennis equipment, and many of the exercises may not resemble the game of tennis that you know.
- different activities which involve the development of different physical skills, targeting the development of gross and fine motor skills. A key priority at a young age is the development of ABCS (agility, balance, coordination and speed). Expect to see activities which help to develop these ABCS.
- your involvement with your child. The coach may ask you to get involved in many different ways by being your

- child's partner, or perhaps by throwing or feeding balls for him to catch or hit.
- tennis lessons for young children should be in groups, although as your child gets older and improves, individual lessons may be suggested. Expect to see activities for individual, pairs and groups, which allow young children to develop independence, sharing and social skills all at once
  - activity within tennis lessons. Lessons should be fun and active, with children playing together. Coaches should not be placing your child or any other in a queue!
  - learning how to play tennis. You should expect to see your child improve rallying skills, but the improvement will be slow, gradual and in line with his physical, physiological, emotional and social development. The coach should be teaching more than just technique
  - learning how to compete. Once players can rally, they can play competitive games and little matches. All competition should use slower balls

and smaller courts until the children are at least 10 years old.

Your role in your child's learning is crucial. At different stages it might involve:

- providing familiarity and a hand to hold in a strange environment
- reassurance when things are difficult or aren't going well
- you showing your child what to do
- positively encouraging them every step of the way
- helping your child and his coach in lessons, or helping your child to practise between lessons

## SUPPORTING YOUR CHILD'S LEARNING

Your child cannot learn without your support. Being a tennis parent can be a roller coaster. In the good times, you will:

- see your child love to play tennis
- have fun with their friends learning a new game and new skills
- see your child improve and start to play well
- learn to compete, and even to win a

few matches

But at times you can also expect to see your child:

- find learning new skills difficult
- appear to make little or no progress
- get beaten by bigger, faster and stronger children
- lose more matches than they win

They are all part of learning for both child and parent, but the important thing is to keep things in perspective. After all tennis is a game, and it is your child, whom you love very much!

The best things you can do to help your child to enjoy their tennis are to:

- encourage but don't force. If they don't want to, don't make them.
- talk to them and the coach about their progress, what they are learning and how they are getting on
- reward effort rather than success. Fun, learning and enjoyment matter at this age; results will come later if the child keeps learning

- support them and be there when they need it, but leave them to play without you if they want to
- do other things, so that tennis does not become an obsession too early

If your child is happy, he will want to play more and he will learn.

### **“WHAT IF MY CHILD IS TALENTED?”**

All parents want the best for their children, and love to see them succeed. There will inevitably be some children who are better than average at a certain age, and your child may be one of them. It's easy to get excited about having a talented child. Here are few simple rules to help you know what to do:

- parents shouldn't decide if their child is talented. The role of the coach is partly to look out for and encourage children with ability, and the coach will know what to do in such cases
- a talented 8 year old is still an 8 year old! Nothing should change in your relationship or your expectations if they are selected for a squad or team.

Treat them just the same whether they win or lose, are selected or not selected.

- Even the best young players still need to use slower balls and smaller courts. Again, nothing changes. However, if your child has been selected, it is likely that he will be invited for more training, and more higher level competition.

## DO'S AND DON'TS WHEN YOUR CHILD IS PLAYING OR COMPETING IN MINI TENNIS

Do:

- watch and take an active interest in their development and progress, but you do not need to watch every lesson
- talk to them about their coaching and matches, but emphasise performance and effort rather than results. It is



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important that they understand that you are happy if they are trying hard

- be sure that the coach of your child is qualified and well trained
- communicate with the coach about the progress of your child (but not during lessons!). Find out how you can help your child to practise between sessions
- take advice from the coach. The coach is best qualified to decide when your child should move up to the next level, so try to take their advice.
- be there to support, encourage and listen when things are not going well
- remain impartial, however difficult that may be! Show respect for other children, parents and officials, and try not to favour your child too much.
- talk about other things after a match, but not immediately after the match. Talk about good things and things to be improved.
- talk to other parents – tennis can also be a social occasion!

Don't:

- talk too much about results, even if

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your child won. Effort and performance are more important at an early age.

- communicate with your child or the coach during coaching or competition but a smile is OK!
- walk away if they are losing
- show impatience, anger or displeasure when they play matches – they are trying their best!
- ever allow your child to cheat
- allow your child to make excuses for losing or criticise their opponents
- force or pressurise them to play if they do not want to. Children have rapidly changing views and tastes, and to pressure them might put them off tennis for a long time.

## SOME FAQs

### “Why use slower balls and smaller courts?”

Your child is small but growing. He doesn't yet have the physical size, strength and coordination to cover a big tennis court and play with a ball which travels fast and bounces very high! In order to allow children to develop a strong game

for the future, slower balls and smaller courts must be used by all children aged 10 and under

### **“What if my child doesn’t seem to be progressing?”**

We all compare our children to others, even if unintentionally. It is vital to understand that children develop in different ways and at different rates. It is more important to see your child enjoying what they do. You should expect the coach to teach simple technique, but also many other things to help them play the game. Tennis requires a high level of skill, and it can’t be learnt quickly.

### **“When should my child move from one level to another?”**

The natural instinct when there are different levels like red, orange and green, is to aim to get to the next level as quickly as possible. But it doesn’t work like that with tennis. Your child first has to master the game at red before moving to orange, and then master the game at orange before moving to green. All in all, the journey could take 6 years!

## **“Why isn’t my child playing ‘normal’ matches?”**

What seems normal to us isn’t necessarily normal or right for a young child. Children get tired and bored quickly, and long matches do not suit them. The ITF recommends shorter matches using competition formats where more than one match is guaranteed, even if your child doesn’t win. Such formats, such as round robin events, avoid long matches, losers being eliminated after one match and complicated traditional tennis scoring which young children don’t understand.



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