PARENT GUIDE

Evidence-Based Strategies for Parenting the College Student-Athlete









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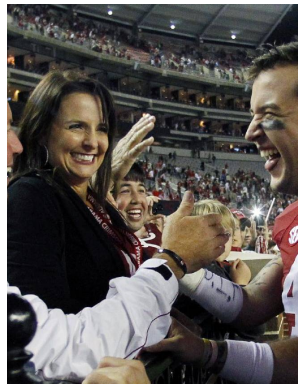
Forward



The transition from high school to college is a salient ecological shift in emerging adults' lives that has important implications for shaping student's success and well-being. This process is even more complex for student-athletes, who perceive a tremendous amount of pressure to succeed athletically and academically. For instance, researchers have found that many college student-athletes experience academic difficulties due to a lack of time and energy associated with their sport involvement. Student-athletes are also at a greater risk than non-athletes to experience drug and alcohol abuse and social anxiety. Moreover, student-athletes are more likely to engage in other risky behaviors and experience higher levels of depression than their non-athlete peers.

Because parents continue to play an important supportive role for athletes during emerging adulthood, it is surprising that researchers have yet to fully explore the impact of parent involvement on student-athlete development during the college transition. The maintenance of connections to parents during emerging adulthood, however, poses challenges for renegotiating the type and level of parent involvement during this developmental stage. Seminal theories of college student development placed parents at the periphery of socialization influences; however, in line with cultural and demographic shifts that emphasize active parenting throughout the transition to adulthood, recent theories of college student development have increasingly accounted for the role of parents in student development. Despite this theoretical redefinition of the parental role, empirical work has yet to operationalize key parent involvement factors or identify links between parent involvement and student outcomes, especially among NCAA student-athletes.





As parents have become core components of student development, colleges and universities have sought to cater to the increasing presence of parents in students' lives. The University of Minnesota's biannual survey of parent programs reveals a drastic increase in the percentage of institutions providing parent services. Despite this, researchers have failed to fully operationalize parent involvement during college. This has led to incompatibility between parent program implementation and empirical research. In sport, a number of programmatic interventions have been utilized with NCAA student-athletes; however, these programs have focused on education and intervention at the athlete level and have yet to account for the role of parents in student-athlete development. This is an important gap to address, as parent involvement has been linked to both student-athlete distress and success. Given the lack of an operational definition of parent involvement, especially among student-athletes, as well as the mixed findings regarding the impact of parent involvement on student-athlete outcomes, research is warranted to clearly identify key parent involvement factors that are associated with positive student-athlete development.

To fill this gap, the present research was designed to provide a systematic, evidence-based guide for parents of NCAA student-athletes that can help parents understand how to be involved in a positive and developmentally appropriate way to best enhance their student-athlete's academic success, athletic satisfaction, well-being, and individuation. As a first step in achieving this aim, we conducted online surveys with NCAA Division I student-athletes to investigate how specific aspects of parent involvement are related to student-athletes' development and well-being. This *Parent Guide* is the product of that effort and is a preliminary tool for parents of NCAA student-athletes to help them identify and use involvement strategies that can promote positive development in their student-athlete.



About the Authors



Dr. Travis E. Dorsch is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Family, Consumer, and Human Development and Director of the Families in Sport Lab at Utah State University. A former NCAA All-American football player at Purdue University, Dr. Dorsch's research is focused on parent-child relationships in sport and the developmental impact of sport participation on children and families. His findings have been used by sport administrators, coaches, and parents to construct more developmentally appropriate sport contexts and to evaluate the role of parent involvement in organized sport.



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Dr. Aryn M. Dotterer is an Assistant Professor of Human Development and Family Studies and Youth Development and Agricultural Education at Purdue University. Her multidisciplinary research line is grounded in developmental and ecological perspectives on human development and targets family relationships in under-represented populations.

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Our Research Goals

This goal of our research was to provide initial evidence for key parent involvement factors that are associated with NCAA student-athlete development. We defined **parent involvement** and **student-athlete development** as multidimensional variables comprised of four and seven aspects, respectively (see Figure 1).

Our main hypothesis was that parent involvement would be linked to student-athlete development in the context of intercollegiate athletics. We based this hypothesis upon published reports from the family, developmental, and sport literatures, as well as results of our own preliminary studies.
This past indicates that a higher level of parent academic engagement is related to students maintaining more confidence and persistence in their academic pursuits. Higher levels of parental support, contact, and academic engagement were also linked to to higher levels of risky behaviors and lower levels of individuation, such as emotional independence from parents.

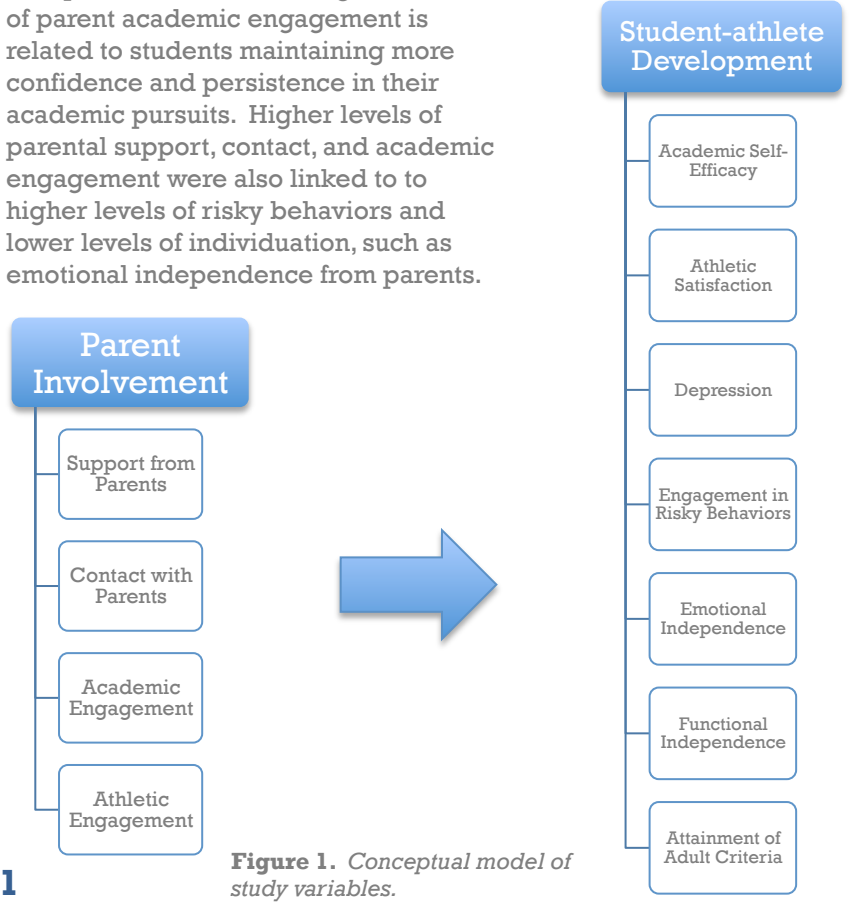


Figure 1. *Conceptual model of study variables.*

Our Research Approach

Athletic department officials at **Utah State University** and **Purdue University** provided E-mail contact information for all current student-athletes during the fall 2014 academic semester. Four weeks into the semester, student-athletes were sent an E-mail with a link to an 84-question, online survey. Student-athletes who chose to participate received identification numbers to preserve their confidentiality and anonymity for the duration of the study.

The survey link remained active for six weeks to allow student-athlete participants time to respond. Reminder E-mails (see Figure 2) were sent at the second and fourth weeks of data collection to encourage student-athletes to complete the survey. To bolster participation rates, researchers met in-person with all student-athletes to inform them about the study and to emphasize why their participation was important. Completing the online survey took student-athletes about15 minutes, and at the end of the data collection 10 student-athletes from each university who completed at least 75% of the online survey were randomly selected as $50 gift card winners. Online survey data was exported into statistical software for data management and analysis.



Figure 2. *Example of study logo used in recruitment and reminder email materials at Purdue University.*

Defining Parent Involvement

The 84 survey items asked participants to report on basic student and family demographic factors, as well as four aspects of parent involvement (see Figure 3) and seven aspects of student-athlete development (see Figure 4). All measures used to assess parent involvement and student-athlete development were established, reliable, and valid scales created by scholars across the family, sport, and developmental sciences.

Parent Involvement		
Measure	**Example Item**	**Response Scale**
Support	"In the past few months, how often have your parents provided you with advice?"	*Not at All* (1) to *Daily* (7)
Contact	"In the past few months, how often have you and your parents communicated using texting?"	*Not at All* (1) to *Daily* (7)
Academic Engagement	"My parents and I discuss what I am learning in class."	*Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5)
Athletic Engagement	"My parents allow me to decide things for myself in my sport career."	*Not at All True* (1) to *Very True* (5)

Figure 3. *Example items and response scales for each parent involvement factor measured.*

Defining Student-Athlete Development

Student-Athlete Development		
Measure	**Example Item**	**Response Scale**
Academic Self-Efficacy	"I'm certain I can master the skills taught in my classes this year."	*Not at All True* (1) to *Very True* (5)
Athletic Satisfaction	"I know that I've done my best."	*Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (6)
Depression	"During the past week I felt lonely."	*Rarely or None of the Time* (0) to *Almost Every Day* (3)
Engagement in Risky Behaviors	"In the past month, how often were you sick to your stomach or threw up after drinking."	*Rarely or None of the Time* (0) to *Almost Every Day* (6)
Emotional Independence	"I sometimes call home just to hear my parents' voices."	*Not at All True of Me* (1) to *Very True of Me* (5)
Functional Independence	"I ask for my parents' advice when I am planning my vacation time."	*Not at All True of Me* (1) to *Very True of Me* (5)
Attainment of Adult Criteria	"Accepting responsibility for myself."	*Strongly Disagree* (1) to *Strongly Agree* (5)

Figure 4. *Example items and response scales for each aspect of student-athlete development measured.*

Examining Our Data

To answer our main research question, we employed a two-step statistical analysis:

1) In the **FIRST STEP** we examined how four key student-athlete and family demographic demographic variables (i.e., student-athlete university, sex, race, classification, and parent education level) were related to the seven aspects of student-athlete development.

2) In the **SECOND STEP**, we added all four aspects of parent involvement to the analysis as predictor variables. This was done in an effort to examine how parent involvement predicted each aspect of student-athlete development after controlling for individual and family demographics.

These analyses allowed us to examine the strength and direction of the association between parent involvement and student-athlete development in the context of intercollegiate athletics. In simple terms, our analyses helped us answer three interrelated questions:

Is **parent involvement** related to **student-athlete development**?

What **aspects of parent involvement** have a positive or negative relationship with student-athlete development?

How important is parent involvement in predicting student-athlete development after **controlling for individual and family demographic variables**?

About the Student-Athletes

A total of 514 student-athletes were recruited from the athletic departments at Utah State University (n = 204) and Purdue University (n = 310). Below we offer a breakdown of the basic **DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS** of these student-athletes as well as the educational level of their parents:

SEX

- 237 males
- 275 females

AGE

- Average age = 19.76
- Range = 18 – 25

CLASS

- 147 Freshmen
- 140 Sophomores
- 118 Juniors
- 109 Seniors

RACE/ETHNICITY

- 78% White or Caucasian
- 11% Black or African-American
- 4% Asian
- 4% More than one race
- 2% Other
- 1% Unknown

PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL

- Parents of the student-athlete participants represented a primarily educated group of individuals
- 410 mothers (80%) earned at least a bachelor's degree
- 342 fathers (67%) earned at least a bachelor's degree

About the Student-Athletes

Below is a flow chart of student-athlete **RECRUITMENT**, **PARTICIPATION**, and overall **RESPONSE RATE**. As Figure 5 depicts, the overall study response rate for was 67% across both universities.

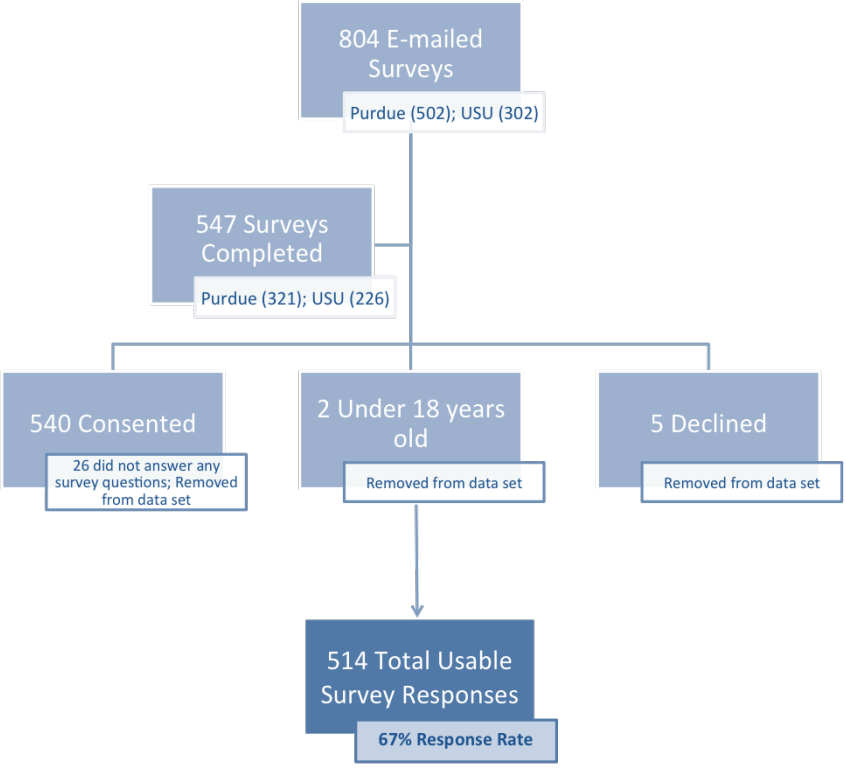


Figure 5. *Flow chart of participant recruitment, participation, and overall survey response rate.*

Academic Self-Efficacy

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to academic-self efficacy (high school GPA was included in this analysis).

- Student-athlete **RACE** and **CLASS** were associated with academic self-efficacy. Non-White student-athletes reported lower levels of academic self-efficacy and increases in student-athlete class were related to higher levels of academic self-efficacy.

- **PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL** and **HIGH SCHOOL GPA** were also both positively associated with academic self-efficacy, such that increases in parent education level and high school GPA were associated with increases in student-athlete's academic self-efficacy.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athlete academic self-efficacy above and beyond the demographic control variables.

- In particular, **PARENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT** and **ATHLETIC ENGAGEMENT** were positive predictors of academic self-efficacy. Thus, increases in parents' academic and athletic engagement were related to increases in student-athletes' reports of academic self-efficacy.

- Parent academic engagement had the strongest association with academic self-efficacy.

Athletic Satisfaction

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to athletic satisfaction, but this relationship was not strong.

- **STUDENT-ATHLETE UNIVERSITY** was the only control variable that was associated with athletic satisfaction, such that student-athletes at Utah State reported a higher mean level of athletic satisfaction than student-athletes at Purdue.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athlete academic self-efficacy above and beyond the demographic control variables.

- In particular, **PARENT ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT** and **ATHLETIC ENGAGEMENT** were positive predictors of athletic satisfaction. Thus, increases in parents' academic and athletic engagement were related to increases in student-athletes' reports of athletic satisfaction.

- Parent athletic engagement had the strongest association with academic self-efficacy.



Depression

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to student-athletes' reports of depression.

- In particular, **STUDENT-ATHLETE UNIVERSITY**, **SEX**, **RACE**, and **CLASS** were associated with depression. Student-athletes at Utah State reported lower mean levels of depression, female student-athletes reported higher mean levels of depression, non-White student-athletes reported higher mean levels of depression, and increases in student-athlete class were related to lower levels of depression.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athletes' reports of depression above and beyond the demographic control variables.

- **PARENT ATHLETIC ENGAGEMENT** was the only parent involvement variable that was a predictor of depression. More specifically, increases in parents' athletic engagement were related to decreases in student-athletes' reports of depression.

- Parent athletic engagement had the strongest association with academic self-efficacy.

Engagement in Risky Behaviors

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to student-athletes' reports of depression.

- In particular, **STUDENT-ATHLETE UNIVERSITY**, **SEX**, **RACE**, and **CLASS** were associated with depression. Utah State, female, and White student-athletes reported lower mean levels of engaging in risky behaviors, and increases in student-athlete class were related to engaging in more risky behaviors.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables did **NOT** predict student-athletes' reports of depression above and beyond the demographic control variables.

- None of the four parent involvement variables were related to student-athletes reports of depression, indicating the background control variables were better predictors of risky behaviors than parent involvement.

Important Sub-Finding for Depression

- We also examined analyses predicting each domain of risky behaviors (i.e., sexual, drinking, and illegal drug use), and the risky drinking models provided some important results.
- While the addition of the four parent involvement variables did not predict risky drinking above and beyond the demographic factors, **parent contact** was related to risky drinking.
- Increases in parent-student contact frequency were related to **decreases** in students-athletes' reports of engaging in risky drinking behaviors.

Emotional Independence

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to student-athletes' reports of emotional independence, but this relationship was not strong.

- Student-athlete **SEX** was the only control variable that was associated with emotional independence, such that female student-athletes reported lower mean levels of emotional independence.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athletes' reports of emotional independence above and beyond the demographic control variables, and this relationship was very strong.

- **PARENT SUPPORT**, **CONTACT**, **ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT**, and **ATHLETIC ENGAGEMENT** were all predictors of emotional independence. More specifically, increases in all four aspects of parent involvement were related to decreases in student-athletes' reports of emotional independence from their parents.

- Parent support had the strongest association with emotional independence.

Functional Independence

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables was **NOT** related to student-athletes' reports of functional independence.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athletes' reports of functional independence above and beyond the demographic control variables, and this relationship was very strong.

- **PARENT SUPPORT** and **ACADEMIC ENGAGEMENT** were predictors of functional independence. More specifically, increases in both parent support and academic engagement were related to decreases in student-athletes' reports of functional independence.

- Parent support had the strongest association with emotional independence.



Attainment of Adult Criteria

Demographic Control Variables

- The overall set of demographic control variables were related to student-athletes' reports of attaining adult criteria.

- In particular, **STUDENT-ATHLETE UNIVERSITY** and **PARENT EDUCATION LEVEL** were associated with attainment of adult criteria. Student-athletes at Utah State reported higher mean levels of attainment of adult criteria, and increases in parent education level was related to more attainment of adult criteria.

Parent Involvement Variables

- The addition of the four parent involvement variables predicted student-athletes' reports of attaining adult criteria above and beyond the demographic control variables.

- **PARENT SUPPORT** and **ATHLETIC ENGAGEMENT** were both predictors of attainment of adult criteria. More specifically, increases in parent support predicted increases in attaining adult criteria while increases parent academic engagement was related to decreases in student-athletes' reports of attaining adult criteria.

- Parent athletic engagement had the strongest association with attainment of adult criteria.

Take Home Messages

Parent academic and athletic engagement positively predicted student-athlete academic self-efficacy and athletic satisfaction!
Parent athletic engagement negatively predicted student-athlete depression.
Support from parents, contact with parents, parent academic engagement, and parent athletic engagement were all strong negative predictors of student-athlete emotional independence.
Support from parents and parent academic engagement were strong negative predictors of student-athlete functional independence.
Support from parents was a negative predictor and athletic engagement a positive predictor of student-athletes' attainment of adult criteria.

Recommendations for Parents

Translating our research findings into practical and meaningful parenting behaviors that can be readily incorporated into parents' involvement strategies is the foremost purpose of this *Parent Guide*. Below, we outline real-world examples of recommended involvement strategies for parents of NCAA student-athletes.

We recommend parents read these strategies, and then reflect upon their own parent involvement behaviors to help them identify aspects of their parenting that they could enhance or diminish to best support their student-athlete's development.

We also caution parents to remember that student-athletes are active participants in their own development, and that during the developmental time period of emerging adulthood it is important for parents to be involved in their child's life in a way that respects their emerging independence. Thus, we encourage parents to remain watchful of their child's development without being intrusive so that they may be involved at level a reflects the current needs of their child.



Promoting Academic Self-Efficacy	• Moderate levels of academic and athletic engagement are recommended
Promoting Athletic Satisfaction	• Moderate levels of academic and athletic engagement are recommended
Decreasing Depression	• A moderate level of parent athletic engagement is recommended
Promoting Independence	• Gradually decreasing levels of parent involvement is recommended



Strategies for Parents

Examples of Appropriate Parent Involvement	
Support	**Contact**
Once every few weeks, tell your child that you are proud of them and that you love them no matter what.	Talk with your child via the phone or texting a few times a week, but remember that they are very busy balancing their athletic, academic, and social lives.
Ask your child how their days are going, and let him/her direct the content of the conversation.	Try to see your child in-person once every few months, especially if they are participating in sport-related events.
Academic Engagement	**Athletic Engagement**
Once every few weeks, ask your child what he/she is learning about in his/her classes and listen to his/her response.	Once every few weeks, ask your child how he/she feels about his/her sport performance and listen to his/her response.
Discuss that getting good grades is important, but focus your conversation on learning outcomes rather than GPA.	If your child brings up a sport-related problem, listen to his/her perspective and focus your conversation on strategies to effectively deal with the problem.

Conclusion

In line with our specific goal, our research provides **EVIDENCE FOR LINKS BETWEEN KEY PARENTING STRATEGIES AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETICS**. Importantly, answering this call for research has the potential to inform campus-level programming for parents of NCAA student-athletes. Our long-term goal is to offer a mechanism for campus-level programming for parents of NCAA student-athletes that promote enhanced student-athlete well-being and mental health.

Our ongoing research is transformative because it has the potential to inform policy addressing the role of parent involvement in the context of NCAA Division I athletics. From a policy standpoint, we have created this *Parent Guide* that can be used to assist with the implementation of evidence-based educational programming for parents of current and future NCAA student-athletes. This has the potential to enhance the strategies that can be implemented to improve the NCAA's efforts to enhance student-athlete well-being and mental health.

"It's not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves, that will make them successful human beings."

- Ann Landers

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Notes



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