

How to Budget When Your Kid Plays Competitive Sports

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Your child has it — that spark of talent, the drive, and most importantly, the love of the game — and they're heading to the "big time" of kids' sports, the rep leagues.

For parents, supporting the dream of a young, competitive athlete usually means gearing up to pay the sky-high fees that go along with it.

Sports Come with a Hefty Price Tag

A [recent Ipsos poll](#) pegged hockey as the most expensive extracurricular sport for kids in Canada, with an average annual spend of more than \$750 per child, followed by lacrosse and gymnastics. But with multiple practices a week, equipment costs, travel, extra coaching and more, the reality for kids playing at an elite level is often a bit pricier.

Madoc, Ontario based Theresa Dostaler runs the online community [Canadianhockeymoms.ca](#), and has three kids who have played in rep and AAA-level competitive hockey. She says registration and ice time fees vary depending on where in the country you are, but in her experience, they can run as high as \$3,000 per child, annually.

Meanwhile, Nicole Francis says she pays upwards of \$5,000 a year for her 10-year-old daughter's competitive gymnastics training in the Greater Toronto Area.

While there's no arguing that participating in sports at this level comes with a hefty price tag, with a little planning and knowledge, there are ways to work these fees into a family budget, and even cut down some of the costs as you go. Here's how:

1. Make It Part of Your Monthly Budget

Many costs associated with competitive sports — such as registration fees or training costs — are regular and expected, which helps give families a ballpark figure of what their sports-related expenses will be each month. They can then be worked into the household budget, along with other bills.

"It's a cost that's right up there with groceries. It's not negotiable, so we know it's there. It's part of the budget, it's a recurring expense that we plan for, and the monthly side of it is perhaps the easiest part, because it's predictable," says Francis.

2. Learn From Experience (or Ask the Veterans)

When her daughter moved from recreational to the competitive track in gymnastics, Francis admits she was met with a number of surprises when it came to the various expenses associated with training gear, competitions and extra coaches' fees.

As such, she suggests going in with your "eyes wide open" — ask around and find out as many details as possible when you're starting out.

"Fact-finding is really important up front so that you can really budget and understand what you're getting into from a time perspective, commitment perspective, as well as cost. Because it really isn't just the monthly fee, there are these other fees that factor in," Francis says.

"Having learned from my experience now, now I'll definitely be putting funds aside to be able to address that big lump sum for the competition fees, as well as for the gear," she adds.

3. Fundraise (and Involve the Kids)

For rep athletes and their families, fundraising can be a huge budget-saver, depending on how it's set up, says Dostaler. Initiatives that involve the young athletes — such as a bottle drive — can also serve as a teaching opportunity, she says.

"Be smart about the events that you're doing. Find fundraising that includes everyone or find ways to set up fundraising so you get out what you put into it."

4. Find Savings Where You Can

Whether it's buying a piece of equipment on sale, booking extra ice time at a cheaper off-hours rate or taking your own food on the road to save on restaurant costs, Dostaler says these decisions can add up to significant savings. For families who travel for tournaments, she says dividing and conquering — carpooling or sharing hotel rooms — can also make a big difference to the budget.

5. Don't Forget to Account for Surprises

In competitive sports, there are always additional costs, such as annual fees to be paid to provincial or national governing bodies, or even penalties charged when parents fail to volunteer at events.

Also, make sure to budget for the extra costs associated with winning.

"Two of my kids played in Silver Stick tournaments, which are regional tournaments. If you win those, then you go on to the international and you have to be there for three nights, so there's six additional nights in hotels," says Dostaler.

"So, if you're done early in a season, that cuts back on expenses — but you don't want to be."