

Introduction



“It’s all about the kids and their preparation.”

— *Coach Calhoun*



Is HALL OF FAME Men’s Basketball Coach Jim Calhoun talking about basketball?

Or, is he referring to the entire future of Connecticut’s children?

The answers are “Yes.” And “Yes.”

As a father and grandfather, Jim Calhoun knows a little about kids. You may be familiar with his excellent work in the battle to defeat autism, which has touched two of his own grandchildren.

As Connecticut's iconic Hall of Fame basketball coach, he also knows a little about setting goals, as well as the motivation, consistent commitment and just plain hard work it takes to achieve them.

The Connecticut Commission on Children is honored to team up with Coach Calhoun in a statewide public communications program to put our most important children's issues squarely at center court.

The Playbook for Prevention, the Winning Game Plan for Kids and Connecticut, is at the heart of this effort. For each of nine key issues, The Playbook spells out the ultimate goal or "Moment of Victory," describes the challenge or "Game Situation" along with our "Team Stats That Don't Cut It" and "Team Stats That Cut It." The Playbook then provides the "Full Court Press" Game Plan for Connecticut's team of families, educators, business leaders and policymakers to meet the challenge **today**, so that Connecticut's

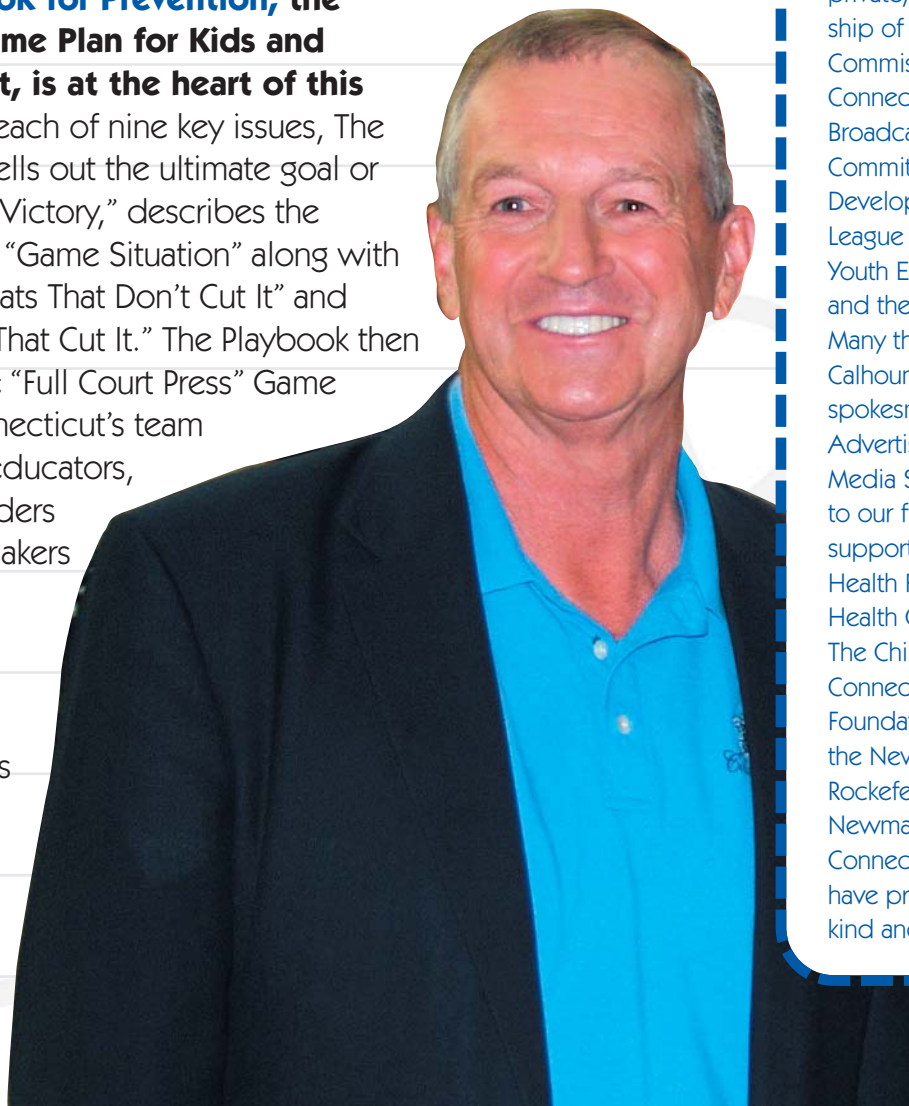
children grow into healthy, productive adults **tomorrow.**

Achieving that outcome, of course, is the ultimate Moment of Victory for all of us in Connecticut.

But remember – a playbook is a tool for action.

Connecticut's kids are out there right now, growing up by the minute. Addressing these issues is not only important, it's **urgent.** Just picture Coach Calhoun clapping his hands and encouraging us with, **"Let's show some hustle out there!"**

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Winners are made, not born.

It's all about the way the brain develops. A lot of people think smart kids are just born smart. But recent research proves that children who receive consistently sensitive, responsive care from parents and other caregivers in the first few months and years wind up functioning better intellectually and emotionally for the rest of their lives.

Why? Because the brain of an infant and toddler is very busy "wiring" itself. Brain nerve cells are formed and connected by pathways sculpted each time a child is exposed to a human interaction or something in the environment. Experience literally helps shape the brain's connections and synapses. Brain cells that are not used are lost. The early brain uses it or loses it.

What's an example? If a parent or other caring adult consistently spends time talking to a baby, and later reading aloud at the toddler stage, the brain synapses related to language skills are stimulated and grow stronger, paving the way for later learning. On the flip side, without that frequent spoken interaction, the connections for language development are "pruned" by the brain as unimportant extra baggage.

Although genetically fully capable of developing normal language skills, the child falls behind other children – a deficit that is very difficult to make up just a few years later, when the brain wiring is much harder to change.

That's why we say, whether it's athletics or childhood development, winners aren't born. They're made. And they're made very early, during the first years and even first months of life. And if some kids' brains aren't getting all the positive signals needed to develop in a normal, healthy way, it's up to the community to step in and help provide that all-important ounce of prevention. Not only for the health and happiness of our kids. But because the pound of cure later on is too little, too late. The brain science teaches us that each and every child can be a winner.

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The *Playbook*
can be downloaded at
www.kidsforct.org. For print
copies, call (860) 240-0290.

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