

Family Tapestries Strengthening Family Bonds



Fact Sheet

Helping Your Child be a Good Sport

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Have you ever been to a sporting event and noticed how some parents act? Some parents scream and holler at the umpire or referee because they disagree with the call. Other parents slap their programs against their hand or their seat. Some yell at their children to do this or that.

On the other hand, there are parents in attendance who model good sportsmanship. They watch the game with interest. They cheer and enjoy the game. They tell their children how proud they are of their achievements. Their children know that no matter how they perform on the playing field, they are loved unconditionally.

What is Sportsmanship?

Sportsmanship is defined in the Webster New World Dictionary as “characteristics of or behavior befitting a person who can take loss or defeat without complaint or victory without gloating and who treats his opponents with fairness, generosity, courtesy, etc.”

Let’s explore how parents can apply this concept of sportsmanship with their children as they participate in sporting events. Parents should:

- **Model good sportsmanship.** Children emulate their parents. Therefore, during sporting events, parents should model appropriate behavior.
- **Praise children for the positive aspects of their performance.** Parents should never make fun of or yell at a child for something he or she has done when participating in a sporting event. Also, parents should not boo or use inappropriate language when the other team makes a good play. More

importantly, parents should applaud the efforts of all players—no matter who wins.

- **Respect authority.** When talking to their child’s coach, parents should be respectful and noncritical. Parents should also support the decisions and calls the umpire or referee makes. If a parent disagrees with the call or something happens that is unfair, he or she should work through the official channels to make the necessary changes. Parents should not let temper and feelings of the moment allow them to become irate and do something they will regret later.
- **Encourage competition that is fair.** Competition makes individuals want to do the very best that they can so that they can achieve their goals. Parents should not encourage, support or condone dishonesty or cheating for the sake of winning an event at all costs. Instead, children should be encouraged to play hard and aggressively with the goal of winning. A team should win because they worked hard and performed well. If the child does well in competition, celebrate success in a respectful way.

Helping Children Learn

Children learn many lessons by participating in athletic programs. They develop new skills and learn how to be a part of a team. They learn about winning and losing and how it feels to experience each. More importantly, children learn about sportsmanship, what fair means and how others should be treated. Here are some tips for parents to help their children as they learn these new skills:

- **Accept your child’s abilities.** It may be tempting for parents to evaluate their child’s skills and abilities with another child the same age. It is important to remember that each child develops at different rates. Each child should be judged individually on his or her own work. Parents should set reasonable goals that are within the child’s ability to achieve. Parents should encourage and help their children evaluate their performance in terms of their own progress and accomplishments.
- **Support your child.** Sometimes children need motivation or encouragement. It is important for a parent to provide this type of support. However, be careful not to demand too much.
- **Be selective.** Parents should help their children select an athletic event that incorporates good sportsmanship. Also, select a team with a coach who values sportsmanship. The coach has a tremendous influence on the children and sets the standards for the entire team.
- **Role models are important.** Help children choose role models in their activity that exemplify important traits and values. Take the time to talk about these role models and the things they do that exemplify good sportsmanship.
- **Correct inappropriate behavior.** If children do something that is not appropriate in regards to sportsmanship, make sure to talk to them about the behavior. Explain why the behavior is inappro-

priate and what a better behavior would be. Be observant and watch the lessons the child is learning—encouraging those that are appropriate and correcting those that are not.

In summary, sportsmanship can be summed up in three words—courtesy, respect, and consideration. Participation in sporting events provides children with opportunities to learn and acquire these traits. Parents should model for and encourage their children to exemplify sportsmanship that fosters this learning.

References

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