

Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship involves a striving for success, while maintaining a commitment to being fair, honest, and respectful [and] to following the rules -- all of which is synonymous with being ethical or moral. (*See references 5 and 8 below.*) In fact, young athletes (10-18 years) identified five dimensions to sportsmanship:

- A full commitment to sport participation.
- Respect for the rules and officials.
- Concern for social conventions (such as being a good loser).
- Respect for opponents.
- Avoidance of the winning-at-all-costs mentality. (*12*)

Children learn moral behavior from engaging with others, watching the behaviors of others, and/or being taught ethical behavior. Sportsmanship attitudes and behaviors are learned in a like manner. Therefore, being involved in sport alone is not sufficient to ensure that participants will learn sportsmanlike attitudes and behaviors. Rather it is the "social interactions that are fostered by the sport experience" that will determine the benefit of sport to athletes. (*8*) [Achieving that benefit] requires that designated leaders within the sport take action to teach ethical and moral behavior in sport.

How sport is structured by the community, administrators, and coaches can determine whether or not children learn sportsmanlike behaviors. The emphasis within the sport program becomes the [means] by which the child learns what is appropriate and/or acceptable behavior. Research has shown that the philosophy of a program, the goals for the team, and the teaching and modeling behaviors of adults can influence sportsmanlike behaviors.

Participation in sport does not necessarily lead to sportsmanlike behavior (in this case, lower aggression and improved social skills) unless sportsmanship (in the form of reflection and meditation) is emphasized within the program.

An overemphasis on winning in a sport may also cloud perceptions of moral behavior.

Athletes who focus on self-mastery and personal improvement (ie., task-oriented) are more likely to perceive the purpose of sport as teaching values such as working hard, cooperating with others, and becoming good citizens.

Teaching and modeling appropriate behaviors can...enhance sportsmanlike behaviors.

Striving for Excellence. John Wooden in his many successful years of coaching always emphasized striving for excellence. As long as athletes are putting forth the effort and attempting to achieve new heights, success can be realized. That process did not mean that winning would always occur, or that winning was placed at the top of the list; rather, it laid the [foundation] for future success for both the team and the individual. "Everyone can be a success because success relates to the effort put into realizing one's personal potential." (*9*) Children should focus on skill mastery, feeling better about themselves (ie., improving their perceived ability), and enjoying their sport experience. [C]oaches should remind [them]selves that striving for excellence will lead to many future successes and, more importantly, will provide a positive experience for young athletes.

Teaching Moral Principles. Teaching athletes moral principles will also help build sportsmanlike behaviors. Coaches are encouraged to look for teachable moments when moral dilemmas arise on the floor or in practice in order to guide young athletes.

What Is Good Sportsmanship?

Good sportsmanship is doing your best and having good behavior. It means working hard, learning, and following the rules of the game. It also means treating your teammates, your opponents, your coaches, and the officials with courtesy. When you congratulate opponents who beat you, you're practicing good sportsmanship. When you win and thank the other team for a good game, you're also being a good sport.

But it doesn't just have to do with sports. The great thing about developing good sportsmanship is that it helps you in other parts of your life, too. Sportsmanship applies to other games (no pouting if you lose at checkers!), contests (don't storm off just because you lost the spelling bee or school election), and more.

When you learn how to work well with other people on a playing field, you'll also find it easier to work well with your classmates in school, participants in other types of after-school or weekend activities, and even your brother or sister!

Putting Yourself in Someone Else's Place

Some people say that good sportsmanship is like the golden rule of sports - you treat other people like you want to be treated. Think back to games that you've lost. Did the other team hold a long and loud victory dance or make fun of the way your team played? That probably made you feel even worse than losing did.

Now think about a better way that you could handle winning. There's nothing wrong with cheering and yelling, of course, as long as the celebration doesn't go on too long. But don't forget that your opponents tried just as hard as you did. When you thank them, try to find something nice to say about a particular play that they made. It may make them feel better - and you'll probably feel pretty good about it, too.

It takes maturity to put yourself in somebody else's place or to realize that no matter how good you or your team, somebody else can come along tomorrow and beat you. Remembering that will help you stay humble even if you're in first place right now.

Showing You're a Good Sport

Here are some ways that you can show others what good sportsmanship is all about:

- Be polite to everyone you're playing with and against.
- Don't show off just to impress. (Play your hardest. If you're good, everyone will notice.)
- Tell your opponents "Good game!" whether you've won or you've lost. Cheer for them when they make a good play.
- Learn the rules of the game. Show up for practices and for games on time - even if you're the star of the team. Your teammates and coaches will appreciate it - and look to you for leadership.
- Listen to your coaches and follow their directions about playing.
- Don't argue with an official if you don't agree with his or her call. If you don't understand why you got a penalty, ask your coach or the official to explain it to you at a later time.
- Say only good things about your opponents. No trash talking.
- Don't make up excuses when you lose (for example, your foot hurt or you have a toothache when you don't). Everybody gets good breaks and bad breaks; it's all part of playing the game.
- Remember, even if you're better than others on your team, everybody should get a chance to play. That means you'll have to sit out sometimes. Do it gracefully.
- Play fair. Cheaters really don't win in the long run.
- Have fun. Don't forget that's what playing a sport is really all about!

Famous Good Sports

Sarah Hughes, 2002 Olympic gold medalist, was the first person ever to move from a fourth place to a first place finish in Olympic figure skating. She did it by skating her hardest and not thinking about a medal. And

she also lived up to one of her favorite quotes: "It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice," when she had the Olympic silver and bronze medalists join her on the winner's podium.

The bronze medalist at the Games, **Michelle Kwan**, is a symbol of good sportsmanship as well. After finishing with a silver medal at the 1998 Winter Games to 16-year-old Tara Lipinski, she found herself once again standing beside a younger skater as she, the favorite to win, looked on. Despite falling during her free skate, Michelle rallied, finished gracefully, and thanked the crowd.

Tiger Woods started golfing when he was a young boy. Even though he's one of the most successful golfers in the history of the sport, he remains modest about his talent and admits that his wins sometimes come from lucky breaks. He's said that winning isn't "life or death. It's more important to the media than to me."

When baseball great **Cal Ripken, Jr.**, retired, his farewell speech told a lot about the kind of person he is. "Hopefully, I will be able to share what I have learned. And I would be happy if that sharing would lead to something as simple as a smile on the face of others," said the Iron Man. "If I am remembered, I hope it's because, by living my dream, I was able to make a difference."

What Is Good Sportsmanship?

If your child has ever participated in a [sport](#), you've undoubtedly met people like Emily's dad. These parents get so wrapped up in winning and losing or in how well their own child performs that they lose sight of what's really important. They forget that one of the most important goals of kids' sports is helping children develop a sense of good sportsmanship.

Kids practice good sportsmanship when they treat their teammates, opponents, coaches, and officials with respect. They learn the basics of sportsmanship from the adults in their lives, especially their parents and their coaches. Kids who see adults behaving in a sportsmanlike way gradually come to understand that the real winners in sports and in life itself are those who know how to persevere and to behave with dignity - whether they win or lose a game.

Parents can help their kids understand that good sportsmanship includes both small gestures and heroic efforts. It starts with something as simple as shaking hands with opponents before a game. It includes acknowledging good plays made by others and accepting even bad calls gracefully. Displaying good sportsmanship isn't always easy: it can be tough to congratulate the opposing team after losing a close or important game. But the kids who learn how to do it will benefit in many ways.

A child who [bullies](#) or taunts others on the playing field isn't likely to change her behavior when she's in the classroom or in social situations. In the same way, a child who practices good sportsmanship is likely to carry the respect and appreciation of other people into every other aspect of her life.

Good Sports Are Winners

Ask a first or second-grader who won a game, and she may answer, "I think it was a tie." It's likely the question isn't of any real interest to her. She wants to tell you about the hit she got or the catch she almost made. But as they move into older and more competitive leagues, kids become more focused on winning. They forget to have fun. Without constant reminders and good examples, they may also forget what behavior is appropriate before, during, and after a sporting event.

If a child has a coach who cares only about being in first place and says that anything goes as long as they win, she picks up the message that it's OK to be ruthless on the field. If parents are constantly pressuring them to play better, or second-guessing every move they've made, children get the message that they're only as good as their last good play - and they'll try any method of achieving one.

Adults who emphasize good sportsmanship, however, see winning as just one of several goals they'd like their kids to achieve. They help young athletes take pride in their accomplishments and in their improving skills, so that the kids see themselves as winners, even if the scoreboard doesn't show the numbers going in their favor.

The best coaches - and parents - encourage their kids to play fair, to have fun, and to concentrate on helping the team while polishing their own skills.

Help Your Child to Be a Good Sport

Remember the saying, "Actions speak louder than words"? That's especially true when it comes to teaching your kids the basics of good sportsmanship. Your behavior during practices and games will influence them more than any pep talk or lecture you give them.

Here are some suggestions on how to build sportsmanship in your child:

- Unless you're coaching your child's team, you need to remember that you're the parent, not the coach. Shout words of encouragement, not directions, from the sidelines (there is a difference!).
- If you are your kid's coach, don't expect too much out of your own child. Don't be harder on him than on anyone else on the team, but don't play favorites either.
- Keep your comments positive. Don't badmouth coaches, players, or game officials. If you have a serious concern about the way that games or practices are being conducted, or if you're upset about other parents' behavior, discuss it privately with your child's coach or with a league official.
- Applaud good plays no matter who makes them.
- Set a good example with your courteous behavior towards the parents of kids on the other team. Congratulate them when their kids win.
- Remember that it's your child, not you, who is playing. Don't push your kid into a sport because it's what you enjoyed. As your child gets older, let her choose the sport she wants to play, and let her decide the level of commitment she wants to make to it.
- Keep your perspective. It's just a game. Even if your child's team loses every game of the season it's unlikely to ruin her life, or her chances of success.
- Look for examples of good sportsmanship in professional athletes and point them out to your kids. Talk about the bad examples, too, and why they upset you.
- Finally, don't forget to have fun. Even if your child isn't the star, enjoy the game while you're thinking of all the benefits she's gaining - new skills, new friends, and attitudes that can help her all through life.

Good sportsmanship is about playing by the rules, discipline, respect, and self-control. A good sport has fun because they enjoy playing the game more than the final outcome. **Top Ten Tips to teach your kids about good sportsmanship**

1. Show respect to yourself by treating others the way you want to be treated.
2. Respect not only your teammates, but also your opponents.
3. Respect your coaches and the officials of the game.
4. Respect the rules of the game.
5. Always play fair.
6. Accept the judgment calls of the coaches and the officials without argument.
7. Offer encouragement to teammates, especially when they make mistakes.
8. Forgive yourself when you make a mistake and get right back into the game.

9. Lose without pouting.

10. Win without gloating.

Teaching Youngsters How to be Good Sports

"Sports do not build character. They reveal it."

- Heywood Hale Broun

We're living in an age where the preservation of traditional values can no longer be taken for granted. It seems we need to have reminders (books, movies, newspaper articles, etc.) to maintain our awareness of the importance of preserving the basic human values, which are essential to the survival of a community.

It's no different in the world of sports. The traditional value of sportsmanship is being challenged from all sides: professional, college, high school, and even in youth sports. There are some who say sportsmanship is becoming a lost art and that unless we remind ourselves of the essentials of sportsmanship it will gradually fade as other values have done in our society.

In the midst of all this, it seems doubly important that we recommit ourselves to guiding our youth, reminding them what sportsmanship is all about, rewarding them for showing good sportsmanship and showing, by our example, that sportsmanship is still alive and valued in youth sports today.

There have been too many instances of parents getting involved and losing control at their children's game -- too much unnecessary violence. Heated arguments, yelling matches, physical beatings, and yes...even death have occurred. Parents must stop giving their children the message that this type of behavior is acceptable.

- **Parents need to listen:** Children have feelings and parents need to listen to their concerns about playing sports.
- **Give direction and support:** As a parent, it is your job to be there for your children before the game, and give cheers for the opposing team during the game.
- **Praise their children:** After the game, parents need to tell their children how good they've played and behaved, no matter whether they won or lost the game.
- **Good sportsmanship:** is something children will carry with them throughout life, not only during recreation and sports, but in the working world as well.
- **Parents should not allow improper behavior,** and should make sure their children's coach does the same.
- **Watch for signs of negative behavior:** Both parents and coaches need to watch for signs of negative behavior, and immediately put a stop to it.
- **Don't assume your children enjoy sports:** Parents should never forget to *ask*, "Did my child enjoy playing the game?". After all, if a child isn't enjoying playing sports, parents need to find out why. No child should be forced to play sports.