

Through a Child's Eyes...



A Parents' Guide to Improving Youth Sports



Advice for Parents to:

- Keep your child active in sports
- Improve your child's sports experience
- Build your child's confidence
- Promote sportsmanship and fun



Citizenship Through Sports Alliance

Know Your Role

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The first step to helping your child is knowing where you fit in the process and acting appropriately. Bruce Brown, a special presenter for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA), puts it this way: You can play. You can coach. You can officiate. You can be a fan. But you need to pick just one and respect the others. Know your role.

Used with permission from Bruce Brown and the NAIA

What does “knowing your role” look like?

If you’re a FAN (which most parents are):

- Be a positive and encouraging supporter.
- Cheer for good plays on both teams.
- You’re not the coach, so don’t shout out instructions.
- You’re not the official, so don’t offer opinions on the officiating or on a particular call.
- It’s your job to help your child keep it all in perspective. That means keeping everything in perspective for yourself, too.

Know Your Role

CHOOSE ONE. RESPECT THE OTHERS.



ATHLETE



COACH



OFFICIAL



FAN

Keep it Fun

Have a Child-Centered Philosophy

One way to keep your child engaged in youth sports is by keeping it fun and focused on their needs. Child development experts call this having a “child-centered philosophy,” and it’s something that you can do to help your child get the most out of youth sports.

To emphasize a child-centered experience, you can:

- Look for a league that puts the goals of children – fun, friends, fitness, participation and skill development – first.
- Keep in mind that children of different ages have different needs. Look for programs that are developmentally appropriate for your child.
- Look for coaches who emphasize fun and participation over winning.
- Talk to your child about what he or she wants to achieve in sports (not what *you* want your child to achieve).

The NAIA’s Bruce Brown encourages parents to ask themselves some questions about why they want their children to participate and what they hope to gain. Then ask the children, “Why are you playing?” and “What are your goals?”

Brown notes that parents who discover they have different goals from their children should change their own expectations and adopt their child’s goals. He calls this exercise,

“Drop Yours and Adopt Theirs.”

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So what do most children list as their goals in playing sports? Experts report that children play sports to have fun, develop their skills and make new friends.

Source: Seefeldt, Ewing & Walk, 1992

To keep sports fun for your child:

- Emphasize skill development, not winning.
- Maintain realistic expectations.
- Stay positive. Avoid criticizing your child’s play.
- Keep in mind that if sports become work, they’re no longer fun.



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Need one more reason to keep it fun? Young people report a variety of reasons for dropping out of sports, but one reason that stands out is this: “It just wasn’t fun anymore.”

Source: Hedstrom & Gould, 2004

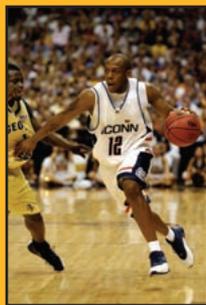
Know Your Goal

A well-rounded adult?

These numbers from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) show just how few high school players will go on to college or the pros:

- Less than one in 35 high school senior boy basketball players will go on to play NCAA college basketball.
- Less than one in 75 NCAA men's basketball players will be drafted by an NBA team.
- Only 1 in 100 NCAA women's basketball players will be drafted by a WNBA team.
- Only 1 in 50 NCAA senior football players will be drafted by an NFL team.
- Only 1 in 200 high school senior baseball players will eventually be drafted by an MLB team.
- Only 1 in 250 high school senior boy ice hockey players will eventually be drafted by an NHL team.

Source: NCAA



NCAA

Keep your goals and expectations realistic.

Just because your child is good at sports now doesn't mean he will excel (or even participate) later in life. Is your goal to develop a well-rounded adult? Or, are you hoping to have college paid for through sports?

If you believe your goal is helping your child earn a college athletics scholarship or play in the pros, you may want to dip your toe in the cold pool of reality with these numbers:

- First, the most simple math: There are nearly 7 million boys and girls who play high school sports. There are only 126,000 NCAA student-athletes who receive either a partial or a full athletics scholarship. That means about 1 in 56 high school athletes will have the opportunity to translate their athletics success into financial assistance.
- *According to the NCAA's most recent data, only 126,000 out of the estimated 350,000 NCAA student-athletes received either full or partial athletics scholarships.*
- *In all but the most high-profile sports, scholarships are divided up and spread among many different student-athletes.*

Source: NCAA

If paying for college is your goal, you might want to focus on your child's biology scores instead of her backhand. If you compare total funds available for academic scholarships vs. athletics scholarships, you'll find that much more money is available for academics.

In fact, some educators have estimated that there are 30 times more scholarship dollars available for college academic scholarships than there are athletics scholarships.

Source: John E. Roberts, Michigan High School Athletic Association

See the Big Picture

Not just the scoreboard

As the parent, your job revolves around the Big Picture – making sure your child takes away life experiences and life lessons from sports that will make him a stronger, more responsible and confident person in life. Don't let the Little Picture – winning a game or striking out at bat – cloud your vision or his.

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- Help your child learn to bounce back from disappointments in sports. It's good preparation for life.
- Remember to emphasize values like teamwork, discipline and responsibility. Winning comes and goes, but values remain.
- See sports as one of many enriching activities your child participates in – not the focus of his life.

The scoreboard only records the Little Picture. Focusing on the Big Picture requires you to look for the ELM Tree.

Jim Thompson, founder of Positive Coaching Alliance, encourages parents and athletes to focus on the **ELM Tree of Mastery**.



E – stands for Effort,

L – stands for Learning, and

M – stands for bouncing back from Mistakes.

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NCAA

Promote Fitness and Health to Your Child

If your child quits youth sports (which 70 percent of children do by age 13), he doesn't reap the benefits of participation anymore. Why is that a problem?

- Children participating in organized sports tend to achieve higher results in school, develop excellent interpersonal skills and lead healthier lives.

Source: Michigan State University's Institute for the Study of Youth Sports

- Almost 50 percent of youth in the United States don't take part in regular vigorous exercise.

Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 1999

- Childhood obesity is on the rise, with 13 percent of children age 6 to 11 classified as either overweight or obese.
- Obesity in childhood often leads to obesity in adulthood.
- Obesity can lead to diabetes, heart problems and a variety of ailments, including high blood pressure, some forms of cancer, depression and poor self-esteem.

Source: U.S. Surgeon General, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Thompson says mastery is all about learning and continuous improvement. **How can you focus on the ELM Tree of Mastery?**

- Encourage your child to put forth her very best **Effort**.
- Praise her based on effort, not results. (Winning the game is out of a child's control, but the effort put forward is in her control.)
- Promote **Learning** new skills and improving existing skills. (Again, it's an area that is within the athlete's control.)
- Remind your child to focus on improving her skills rather than on the results on the scoreboard.
- Help your child bounce back from **Mistakes**. It's impossible to learn new skills or complex plays without making mistakes. If your child is overly worried about making a mistake, she may quit trying.
- To encourage players to forget about mistakes, some teams will use signals to "brush off" or "flush" mistakes. If your child's team doesn't do that and your child is someone who worries a lot about making mistakes, help her come up with a signal of her own.

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What About Sports Specialization?

Sports specialization – playing one sport exclusively or year round – is a relatively new phenomenon. Years ago, young athletes played baseball in the spring, football in the fall and basketball in the winter.



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Now there are so many sports options available to youngsters – fall soccer, indoor winter soccer, spring soccer, summer soccer clinics, as just one example – that it is possible to pick only one sport and focus on it exclusively, a practice that some coaches encourage. That may lead to a child “burning out” on sports completely.

Rick Wolff, co-founder and chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting, points out that there are many studies showing burnout is a real problem for kids in their early teens, and he notes that burnout usually affects kids who have been playing one sport for a long time on a travel team.

Wolff also points out that many of today’s professional athletes didn’t specialize in just one sport until they were in high school. Wolff notes that premature specialization might also mean a child doesn’t ever try a sport that might end up being his favorite.

“Some coaches will pressure kids to play just one sport,” Wolff said. “As a parent, you should be wary of this. In addition to burnout worries, ask yourself, ‘How does your child know which sport will be his or her best one, unless they try a bunch of different sports?’ When they’re young, let them try a bunch of sports.”

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If your child is in middle school and has begun encountering coaches who want her to specialize, sit down with her and talk about it.

- *If she really does want to focus all of her energies on one sport, there’s no reason why she can’t do that.*
- *On the other hand, if she wants to keep playing a variety of sports, that’s fine too. Specialization does not guarantee success in sports.*

Used with permission from Rick Wolff and the Center for Sports Parenting

Fill 'er Up!

With positive reinforcement

It's Game Time – What to do BEFORE a game:

- Tell your child you are proud of her. *(Games can be stressful for kids. You can help relieve pressure on your child by letting her know that you love her, regardless of how well she performs in the game.)*

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- Tell your child to play hard and have fun. Remind her that her effort is what really counts.

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- Know what your child's goals are. Ask your child about her goals, and really listen to the answer. If her goals are different from yours, try to drop your goals and adopt hers.

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- Release your child to the game. Remember that it's her experience and not yours. *(Make sure it's a safe, caring environment and then let her go.)*

Used with permission from Bruce Brown and the NAIA

- Make a commitment to Honor the Game and be a good sport, no matter what the outcome, no matter what the officials do and no matter what anyone else does.

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Did you realize you can do something to help your child succeed in all kinds of things, including sports, while feeling good about it? Fill up his tank with positive reinforcement!

Jim Thompson, founder of the Positive Coaching Alliance, points out that children have Emotional Tanks that need to be filled with positive encouragement, praise that is both specific and truthful. When people are praised for doing something right or helpful, their E-Tanks fill up (and they are more likely to continue the behavior).

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How do you fill children's emotional tanks?

- Praise them for a behavior you'd like them to continue.
- Be both specific and truthful. *"I like the way you are hustling up and down the court."*
- Don't make a vague or general statement.
- Look carefully to find something genuine to praise. *(Even when things aren't going well, children are still doing something right.)*
- Children can see through false praise, so keep it truthful.

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Praise Sandwiches

Help serve up criticism



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Sometimes it's appropriate to encourage your child to practice a skill or develop a new technique. Perhaps you'd like to give your child a bit of constructive criticism without discouraging him. How can you do that?

Rick Wolff, noted author and chairman of the Center for Sports Parenting, suggests the "Praise Sandwich," approach. This means giving your child two slices of positive feedback, with one thin slice of constructive criticism in the middle.

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How do you build a Praise Sandwich?

- First start with a slice of praise, such as, "You've really developed a great ability to bring the ball up the court."
- Next, slip in the slice of constructive criticism, such as, "If you could develop the ability to dribble the ball with your left hand as well as your right hand, that would be really special."
- Then top it with another slice of praise. "And if you could dribble with both hands, as well as you're doing with other parts of your game, you'd be unstoppable."

Used with permission from Rick Wolff and the Center for Sports Parenting

It's Game Time – What to do DURING a game:

- Remember your role. Let the coaches coach, the officials officiate and the players play.

Used with permission from Bruce Brown and the NAIA

- Don't give advice to your child or to other players during the game.
- When it comes to the officiating – silence is golden, no matter what happens.
- Model the type of behavior you'd like your child to have. Be calm, confident and positive.
- Honor the Game: cheer for good plays and good efforts by both teams; never criticize a call by an official; and have fun!

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- Fill your child's Emotional Tank with positive, specific comments. (And fill those of his teammates if you can.)

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Honor the Game

Respect all roles

It's Game Time – What to do AFTER a game:

- Tell your child, “I love watching you play.”

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- Thank the officials for doing a difficult job, and thank the coaches for their efforts.

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- Give your child the space and time he needs to recover from the game. The ride home is not the time to initiate conversation about the game.

Used with permission from Bruce Brown and the NAIA

- Refrain from questioning the coach's actions. That can unintentionally undermine the coach's authority.

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- If you must discuss a behavior in the game that would not be acceptable at home (profanity, poor sportsmanship), do so carefully and discuss it as a parent to a child, not as a coach to an athlete. (After a particularly emotional game, your message will be better received after a cooling-off period.)

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One way to improve youth sports is to Honor the Game, a concept championed by Jim Thompson of the Positive Coaching Alliance to take sportsmanship to the next level. Honoring the Game means doing all you can to promote respect for everyone involved in youth sports.

How can you Honor the Game?

- *Set a good example for your child by modeling the behavior you'd like to see.*
- *Show respect for all people involved in the game, including the officials, coaches, players, opponents and opposing fans.*
- *If an official makes a bad call against your child's team, be quiet. (It may be difficult, but you can do it.)*
- *Avoid making negative comments about your child's coach, particularly in front of your child.*
- *Encourage other parents to Honor the Game. If someone is yelling at the officials, make it your job to remind them to Honor the Game.*
- *Support efforts by your child's coach or your child's league to promote sportsmanship and Honor the Game.*
- *If gentle reminders aren't enough for other parents on your child's team, ask a league official to deal with it. Your child has a right to a sports experience free of inappropriate adult behavior.*

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Our Experts

For additional resources on improving youth sports, see the Web sites and books produced by these youth sports experts who assist and advise the Citizenship Through Sports Alliance (CTSA):



Bruce Brown

National Association of
Intercollegiate Athletics – NAIA

www.proactivecoaching.info

www.naia.org



Bruce Brown is a special presenter and national speaker for the NAIA's "Champions of Character Program." The goal of Champions of Character is to create an environment in which every NAIA student-athlete, coach, official and spectator is committed to the true spirit of competition through respect, integrity, responsibility, servant leadership and sportsmanship.

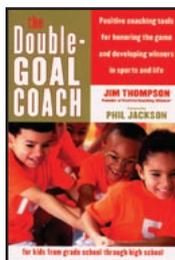
Brown regularly speaks to athletes, parent groups, coaches and businesses on the subject of character. He is the author of several books, as well. For more information about Brown, see the Web sites above.



Jim Thompson

Positive Coaching Alliance

www.positivecoach.org



Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) was established at Stanford University in 1998. PCA believes that winning is a goal in youth sports, but that there is a second, more important goal of using sports to teach life lessons through positive coaching.

PCA provides live, research-based training workshops and practical tools for coaches, parents and leaders who operate youth sports programs to help them Honor the Game. PCA

What to do AFTER a game:

- Know that immediately after the game is absolutely the worst time to critique your child.

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- Let your child tell you about the game. (Avoid giving your post-game analysis unless your child asks for it.)

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- If your child wants to discuss the game with you, ask open-ended questions like: "What was the most/least enjoyable part of the game for you?" "What did you learn from the game?"

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- Be sure your children understand that their self-worth (and your opinion of them) is not dependent on their performance in a game. Tell them you're proud of them (especially if the game did not go well).

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- Though Praise Sandwiches are the best way to offer constructive criticism to young athletes, those sandwiches should be delivered several hours after the game is over.

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KEEP YOUR CHILD INVOLVED IN SPORTS

A Self-Assessment Tool for Parents

*Parents are the key to improving youth sports for everyone.
Take this self-test to see if you're doing all you can to keep your child active in sports and receiving the benefits of sports participation.*

Do you know your role?

- I realize that there are only four roles in sport – player, coach, official or fan – and I pick one and stick with it.
- I understand that my child is the participant, not me, and my expectations are based on my child's needs, not mine.
- I avoid "coaching" from the stands, and I also avoid criticizing officials, coaches and opposing players.
- I seek to be a positive and encouraging fan, applauding good plays for both teams.
- If I coach my child's team, I seek to model appropriate behavior and sportsmanship.

Do you have it all in perspective?

- I understand that children play sports for fun, fitness, friends, participation and skill development.
- I examine my own reasons for being involved and make sure my child's reasons for playing come before mine.
- I focus on encouraging skill development and fun participation, not on winning.
- I realize that children's work is "play," and I try not to interfere with their experience.
- I am focused on my child's development as a whole person, not on his or her prospects for a sports scholarship or for a professional career playing sports.

For more information, see
www.sportsmanship.org

Do you model the kind of behavior you'd like to see in your child?

- I let the coaches coach and the officials officiate.
- I avoid criticizing officials, coaches or players – both during the game and after.
- I applaud good plays for both teams.
- I treat coaches, officials, players and other parents with respect.
- I provide only positive encouragement before, during and after the game. If I can't say anything nice, I don't say anything at all.

Do you encourage sports participation for the long term?

- I do all I can to make sports participation fun, particularly since experts advise that most children stop participating when sports are no longer fun for them.
- I am quiet after the game and avoid critiquing or analyzing my child's performance on the way home. I know my child wants to hear me say, "I love watching you play."
- I seek out leagues with trained coaches who focus on the positive aspects of sport, including sportsmanship, fun and skill development.
- I try to make five positive comments for every one critical comment to my child. Experts advise "filling the child's tank" with positive comments to aid in learning.
- I resist efforts to make my child specialize in any particular sport at a young age.



www.sportsmanship.org

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