

WINNING (SPORTS AND SELF-ESTEEM)

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WINNING AND SELF-ESTEEM

Is winning in sports more important than your child's self-esteem?

Sports have been an integral part of the school program and important in most people's lives for many centuries. Being active and having good health are synonymous. Teamwork, the rewards of self-discipline, how to rise above failure and doing your best are some of the important qualities a person can learn through sports.

While school sports programs have declined in popularity, the interest in sports as a nation is at an all-time high. We have moved from Monday night football as the weekly sporting event to having sports on television 24 hours a day. Millions of dollars a week are spent on sporting bets. Billions of dollars a year go to the salaries of sport's heroes. Clearly, America is obsessed with sports and in particular, with winning at sports.

The effect on our children is tremendous; some children have no time with one or both parents who are locked to the television set on a daily basis. More important from my perspective as a child advocate, is the huge increase in parental concern towards their child being on a winning team. Winning has become more important than how you play the game -- or that you can play a game to do your best and have fun.

As a parent, you teach most by what you model. A child who does not know how the world works, emulates any and all adults, especially in the definition of how to use personal power.

Ask yourself these questions about the modeling you are doing around sports:

1. How do you act when a player on your favorite team makes a mistake? (Could your child assume you feel the same way when he/she makes a mistake in sports?)
2. How do you act when your favorite sports team loses a game?
3. How do you act when your child's sports team loses a game?
4. How do you respond when you are playing catch with your child and you make a mistake? How about when your child makes a mistake?
5. How do you respond when your child isn't interested in a sport?

Children need to feel valued at all times. When a parent confuses value with being angry or disappointed, the child's self-esteem is damaged. A child needs to feel capable; able to do something well. Many children carry scars into adulthood because they couldn't be the sports hero their parent wanted them to be. It is essential that we, as parents, remember

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that the score of today's game will soon be forgotten -- the way we treat our child lasts a life time.

A Guide for Parents and Coaches/Sports

A family that enjoys sports, keeps winning in perspective and is always focused on enhancing individual self-esteem, build bridges between each other that will last forever. Here are some guidelines for parents and coaches in regard to sports:

1. Let children have their own feelings, especially about losing.
2. It's OK to feel disappointed or angry. Keep the importance of winning in proper perspective.
3. Learn to appropriately vent your anger. Yelling at a child in front of his/her peers is very demoralizing and harmful.
4. Teach a child how to do learn from a mistake without any guilt or remorse attached.
5. Don't yell at children; they can't hear you when you are screaming at them.
6. Along with sportsmanship, what you are really teaching is compassion, kindness and respect.
7. Sports are to be enjoyed.
8. Winning isn't everything.
9. 50 years from now, no one will remember what the score of today's game was -- but a child may carry the scar of unthinking parents or coaches with him or her the rest of that child's life.
10. Teach children to be winners in life over being a winner of today's game.
11. Children who love sports will participate in them their entire lives. Good health and being active go hand-in-hand.
12. You are the architect of a human being's life!

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WINNING IN SPORTS (an email conversation)

Sandy: I will say at the outset that I think the whole "win" consciousness we are passing down to our children is very harmful and should be stopped. My son, Scott, is six foot five; he walked off the basketball team in his junior year of high school because "life is too short for this type of abuse." The coaches picked on him for the next two years. Kids teased him. I complained and was written off as an over-protective mother. Scott's father thought he was a wimp. I thought he showed amazing courage. It was very difficult to watch him suffer through those two years.

Parent: My son is just having fun. He is competitive to a point, but he's just a little boy having a good time. The other children seem to be extremely competitive

Sandy: It is how some children get recognition and attention from their parents. Winning becomes nurturing, food.

Parent: (and their parents demonstrate "subtle" competition)

Sandy: I know this one well. If we were to video tape parent's behavior at a soccer match, basketball or other sporting even in which children are playing, we would shake our heads in disbelief.

Parent: As I said, they all are quite equal in ability, but a couple of times my boy got nervous and made some mistakes (we're talking an 8 yr. old here. They're entitled to some mistakes!). The other boys snickered and his team mates got mad. The moms didn't say anything. Now when it's time to team up to play they are saying things like, "Why do I always have to play with him?" and trying to grab each other like my son is the leftover. My boy is a great kid and he has been such a good sport, but he said to me, "I'm lousy at this game!"

Sandy: This is the damage--not believing in himself.

Parent: It breaks my heart. My gut feeling is to pull him out.

Sandy: Maybe it is best to let him choose. A conversation with a lot of truth in it will help, "I can see what is happening in this sport. The boys picking on you makes you more nervous so you make more mistakes. They think winning really matters, I do not. It is fun to win, but not essential. It will be hard to have fun in this group. I want you to know that if you want to change groups or stop going to this sport, I will back you in that idea. The boys will call you a wimp if you leave. That's their problem unless you want to make it yours. Don't count the vote of people you don't respect. It doesn't look like going this sport will be fun any more. Think about it and we can talk later."

Parent: But you do encounter people like this in life. Should I try to help him work through it? I'm not sure if I should "rescue" him or teach him to handle it. His coach says things like "No tears on my court."

Sandy: God forbid we would turn our athletes into compassionate caring males and females who play for a victory, but don't let their lives be changed by the outcome of a game!

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This is gladiator stuff that is hard for some people to fathom. Freaking out over the outcome of a game is silly to some people. I think it is very harmful to a child's sense of self to be treated the way some coaches treat young people. Is winning more important than having fun -- or a great game where skill is valued and the fact that each player did his/her best is good enough?

Parent: I know it sounds terrible, but most of the time he's having fun and likes his coach.

Sandy: Sounds great to me. It is such an important lesson to still like someone and choose not to be with them. It takes a lot of courage to do this. Kids cave in when someone puts them down (so do adults). The trick is to realize that the vote of someone you don't respect does not count. It doesn't matter. There are 6 billion people in the world--find another group, another friend who values you the way you are.