

Putting YOUTH Back Into Sports

Community Guide

Everyone plays a role in making youth sports a positive community resource

- Youth can make sports more positive by showing good sportsmanship and focusing on mastering skills.
- Parents can help make sports a positive experience by supporting the youth and the coach. This includes being an appropriate spectator, letting the coach be the coach, and encouraging kids to have fun!
- Coaches can help by promoting positive coach/parent and coach/child relationships. Coaches need to be able to communicate effectively, understand conflict resolution and remember when it comes to sports, kids' number one priority is having fun!

Positive goals for an effective youth sports program

- Ensure that young players can experience success in learning the skills of the sport.
- Provide an environment that nurtures the youths' physical and emotional well-being.
- Provide an atmosphere in which young athletes can raise their self-worth.
- Maintain healthy attitudes that don't emphasize winning at all costs, but that emphasize personal improvement.
- Let the youth have FUN!

Spectators! – How you participate matters

Sports can foster a sense of community as sports are often the primary community activity. Everyone involved in a sports program has a responsibility to make practices and games an enjoyable experience. Here are some simple rules for positive "spectating."

- Applaud and cheer for everyone, not just your child or his or her team.
- Avoid insulting the other team members and the opposing team.
- Welcome and visit with the spectators from other communities.
- Be respectful to the coaches, officials and players.
- Keep in mind that having fun and learning, not necessarily winning, are the goals of youth sports.

Spectators! – Keep Cool

Everyone can get angry at times, but anger, rage and violence have become all too common in sports. It is important to understand the causes of spectator rage and how to overcome them. The causes of spectator rage can include:

- Not understanding the rules of the game.
- Not understanding the skills needed for the game.
- Not understanding the strategies used in the game.
- The type of sport.
- The number of critical-play events
- The dehumanization of the opposing team—enemies instead of kids.
- Lack of leadership or appropriate modeling.
- Whether your team is winning or not



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Avoid Spectator Rage

- For league officials...be sure to teach the rules and strategies of the game.
- For parents... portray good sportsmanship and drop the win-at-all-cost attitude.
- For youth...make it clear that having fun is important.

What is the moral climate of your sports organization?

Everyone responds differently to their environment. In the world of sports, the moral climate is determined by the competitive structure of the organization, the nature of the sport itself, the motivational orientation of the coaches and parents, the leadership style of the coaches, the moral dialogue that takes place within the team and the cumulative experiences of the players making up the team.

What can a community do to ensure that a positive moral climate exists? What can be done to ensure that the climate that does exist will build good character and positive sportsmanship? Consider the following questions about the sports program in your community:

- Does the sports climate promote self-control?
- Does it promote respect for the rules?
- Does it promote positive relationships?
- Does it promote skill development and self improvement?
- Does it promote good sportsmanship even if it means losing the game?

Drawing primarily from a book sponsored by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine, Perkins has identified 10 critical features in achieving a quality youth sports program. These features relate to youth sports in the following ways:

Physical and Psychological Safety

The sports program provides a safe haven both physically and emotionally.

Appropriate Structure

The sports program has clear rules, expectations and responsibilities of youth, parents, coaches, officials and the sports organizers. These rules are clearly visible at all sporting events. All stakeholders (youth, parents, coaches, officials and sport organizers) are involved in creating the rules, expectations and responsibilities. Generally those rules are embraced by stakeholders when they have direct input in their development.

Supportive Relationships

The sports program has adults involved in the program's activities and events. Through these activities and events, adults and youth are able to establish trusted connections. The adults are intentional about building positive relationships with the youth and less emphasis is placed on winning.

Opportunities to Belong

The sports program provides activities and events that foster friendships and provide youth with a sense of a positive group experience.

Positive Social Norms

The sports program's culture (e.g. habits and expectations) that governs behavior and daily interactions involved conventionally positive social norms and good sportsmanship.



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Support for Efficacy and Mattering

The sports program provides youth, both individually and in groups, the opportunity to be useful and to make a difference in their social worlds. This includes helping each other during a sporting event and engaging in community service activities that extend beyond the sporting event (e.g., cleaning up the ball park and helping little children play a game).

Opportunities for Skill Building

The sports program develops skills and competencies through its activities and team-building experiences. The sports program provides youth the opportunity build their skills, both sports-related skills and life skills (e.g., leadership skills, decision-making skills, cultural competence, communication skills, problem solving skills, civic responsibility, etc).

Active Learning³

The sports program provides learning opportunities that are interactive, reflective, and engage multiple learning styles. For example, sports programs are viewed as experiential learning opportunities and youth are encouraged to take positive risks. Whether they are successful or unsuccessful, these attempts are viewed as part of the learning process. Indeed, youth learn how to take risks and also learning how to fail courageously. Reflection and teachable moments in practice or during a game are common techniques employed.

Opportunities for Recognition⁴

Youth are sincerely acknowledged for their contributions to a sport and their team. These recognitions convey a positive view of youth that is beyond winning. Effort, improvement, and sportsmanship are recognized and praised.

Integration of Family, School, and Community Efforts

The sports program coordinates its efforts and communicates regularly with families and schools to ensure similar norms and expectations across settings. The sports program offers a variety of activities and events that involve parents (e.g., social events, parental workshops, and volunteer opportunities).

³According to the book by the National Research Council and the Institute of Medicine (Eccles & Gootman, 2002), this is a sub-feature of the Opportunities for Skill Building feature. However, given its direct relevance and importance to practice, it is included here as a major feature.

⁴According to an manuscript by Roth, J. L., & Brooks-Gunn, J. (In press). What is a youth development program? Identification of defining principals. In R. M. Lerner, F. Jacobs, & D. Wertlieb (Eds), Promoting Positive Child, Adolescent, and Family Development: A handbook of Program and Policy Innovations, Volume 2: Enhancing the Life Chances of Youth and Families: Public Service Systems and Public Policy Perspectives. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

