

# Helping Your Child Enjoy Sports

**Is your child resistant to sports? Is he or she uncomfortable with competition or afraid of performing poorly at the activity? Help your child enjoy sports fully by following these tips:**

## **DEVELOP A WINNING PERSPECTIVE**

Every decision parents make in guiding their children should be based first on what's best for the child and second on what may help the child win. Stated another way, this perspective places athletes first and winning second.

This is not to say winning is unimportant. Winning—or striving to win—is essential to enjoyable competition. Pursuing victory and achieving goals are important rewards of sports participation. But they can turn sour if, through losing, you or your child lose the proper perspective. An obsession with winning often produces a fear of failure, resulting in below average performances and upset children.

## **BUILD YOUR CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM**

Building self-esteem in your child is one of your most important parenting duties. It's not easy, and it's made even more difficult in sports by the prevailing attitude that "winning is everything." Athletes who find their self-worth through winning will go through tough times when they lose.

Building self-esteem in your child takes more than encouragement. You need to show your child unconditional approval and love. Don't praise dishonestly; children can see through that. If your child strikes out three times and makes an error in a softball game, don't tell her she played well. Just show the same amount of love and approval for her—not for her performance—that you showed before the game.

## **EMPHASIZE FUN, SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND STRIVING TO WIN**

The reason you should emphasize fun is quite simple: without it, your child may not want to keep playing. Kids don't have fun when they stand around in practice or sit on the bench during games, when they feel pressure to win and don't improve or learn new skills. Conversely, they do have fun when practices are well organized, they get to play in games, they develop new skills and the focus is on striving to win.

## **HELP YOUR CHILD SET PERFORMANCE GOALS**

Performance goals—which emphasize individual skill improvement—are much better than the outcome goal of winning for two reasons:

- 1.** Performance goals are in the athlete's control.
- 2.** Performance goals help the athlete improve.

Performance goals should be specific, and they should be challenging but not too difficult to achieve. For example, if your child plays soccer, you might help him set the goals of making short, crisp passes; of staying between the ball and the goal on defense; and of giving his best effort throughout the game.

You (and your child's coach) should help your young athlete set such goals. Help your child focus on performance goals before a game. This focus will help sports be an enjoyable learning experience for your son or daughter.

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## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The Nemours Foundation has more tips for helping your child enjoy sports and develop healthy attitudes at [www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/sportsmanship.html](http://www.kidshealth.org/parent/emotions/behavior/sportsmanship.html). The Citizenship through Sports Alliance has a brochure for parents that includes information about the benefits of sports participation and ways to help your child develop realistic expectations about sports, including the real odds of being able to play professionally, [sportsmanship.org/News/CTSA%20PGuide%20Final.pdf](http://sportsmanship.org/News/CTSA%20PGuide%20Final.pdf).