

The Psychological Benefits of Sports

Help your child develop social and emotional skills.

By Karin A. Bilich

The Benefits

Sports can be a positive experience for your child's mind, as well as her body. Many aspects of psychological growth can result from sports participation, including self-esteem, social skills, discipline, and respect for others. Your help in guiding her through these life lessons is invaluable. Here are some tips on how to nurture this growth.

Self-esteem

- Give positive feedback and show pride in your child's accomplishments.
- Help him work on a specific skill at which he seems to be improving.
- Make sure he's in a sport and league where he's able to compete.

Discipline

- Preach the adage "practice makes perfect."
- Point out improvements in your child's performance.
- Encourage her to stick with a sport even when she's frustrated.

Respect for others

- Stress the importance of being gracious in victory.
- Set an example through interactions with the parents of the opposing team.
- Make it clear that disrespectful behavior is not acceptable -- even in the heat of competition.

Teamwork

- Commend your child for unselfish play, such as passing a ball.
- Congratulate him on the team's accomplishments as well as his own.
- Cheer for all the children, not just your own.

Coping with difficulty

- Assist your child in developing the skill for handling disappointment.
- Teach her how to redirect negative feelings into positive ones.

Communication

- Start conversations with your child about game events.
- Share both victory and defeat.

Continued: Potential Pitfalls >> next page

Potential Pitfalls

But be aware that some unhappiness can result from competition. Temporary insecurity, stress, or disappointment can lead to long-term negative feelings. Here are some potential pitfalls and how you can help avoid them:

Fear of inadequacy

- Give lots of positive feedback during practices and games.
- Let your child know that his personal best is all you ask for.
- Avoid comparing your child with other players.
- Let him try more than one sport until he finds one he's good at.

Feelings of failure

- Make sure the coach doesn't place unreasonable expectations on the team.
- Point out that all people make mistakes and can overcome them.
- Celebrate her participation regardless of the outcome.

Stress over lack of free time

- Set time aside for homework, family, and friends.
- Limit the number of teams she may join.
- Encourage her to have other interests.
- Allow her to take some time off.

You can help make your child's sports participation a positive experience by providing positive feedback and helpful advice. From self-esteem to a sense of responsibility, your child will grow by leaps and bounds.

The information on this Web site is designed for educational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for informed medical advice or care. You should not use this information to diagnose or treat any health problems or illnesses without consulting your pediatrician or family doctor. Please consult a doctor with any questions or concerns you might have regarding your or your child's condition.