**A Sportsmanship Message to Parents**

* **Important things to remember both before and after a game your child is playing.**

Much of the joy of being a sport parent comes from watching your child during practices and games. Fortunately, the majority of parents behave appropriately at athletic events. But it takes only a few inconsiderate individuals to turn a pleasant atmosphere into a stressful one for all. Athletic administrators, coaches, sport officials, and the athletes themselves have a right to demand that spectators conform to acceptable standards of behavior.   
  
**Pre-Practice/Game Preparation**

* + Tell your child to have fun. Emphasize that sports and other activities in life are enjoyable in themselves whether you win or lose. In other words, having fun does not depend on winning!
  + Tell your child that success is related to commitment and effort! The goal is to do your best, rather than be the best. Emphasize that athletes are always winners if they commit themselves to doing their best and giving maximum effort.
  + Let your son or daughter know that the pride you feel is not affected by their level of performance, or by winning. Again, effort is what counts!

**During Practices/Games**  
Youth sports should be enjoyable for everyone, so remember to have fun. Moreover, in addition to some obvious don'ts (using profanity, drinking alcohol, etc.), you are encouraged to follow these rules of conduct:

* + Do remain in the spectator area during the event.
  + Don't interfere with the coach. You must be willing to give up the responsibility for your child to the coach for the duration of the practice or game.
  + Do express interest, encouragement, and support to your child. Be sure to cheer good effort as well as good performance. Communicate repeatedly that giving total effort is all you expect.
  + Don't shout instructions or criticisms to the children.
  + Do lend a hand when a coach or official asks for help.
  + Don't make abusive comments to athletes, parents, officials, or coaches of either team.

**What if an official makes a bad call or a parent violates a rule of conduct?**

* + You have the obligation to control your own behavior, and to remind others of their responsibilities, if necessary.
  + When parents behave badly (loud, rowdy, obnoxious actions), it is primarily the duty of program administrators and sport officials to step in. But you can also help to correct the situation with a reminder that these are just kids playing a game.
  + Caution! When parents misbehave, it could be emotionally charged and potentially dangerous. So, be very careful and diplomatic in how you approach unruly parents.

**Post-Practice/Game Follow-up**

* + Compliment the coaches and sport officials for doing a good job, and be sure to thank them for their contributions.
  + STOP focusing on whether your child won or lost.
  + LOOK for signs that indicate how your child is feeling (facial expressions, tears, body language).
  + LISTEN to what your child has to say before you provide input. Begin with a supportive greeting, and then ask open-ended questions:  
    What part of the practice/game did you enjoy the most/least?  
    What was the best/worst thing about your performance?  
    Were you satisfied with your effort?  
    If not, what do you intend to do about effort in the future?  
    What was the most important thing you learned from the practice/game?

**After a Win**

* + Let your child know that athletes should feel good about winning and enjoy it.
  + Tell your child to show consideration for opponents. Good sportsmanship includes being a respectful winner and giving opponents a pat on the back or a high five in a sincere manner.
  + Remind your child about the importance of continued effort and striving for improvement. If your child played well, here are some things to say: Way to go! You showed a lot of effort and improvement. Keep it up.  
    You must feel satisfied with your effort and performance. I'm proud of you.  
    You met the challenge really well. Is there anything in your game that needs more work and improvement?
  + If your child played badly, here are some things to say:  
    That was a good one to win. Is there any part of your game that needs work?  
    Let's enjoy that win. Keep focusing on your effort and learning, and you’ll do better next time.
  + Ask your child: Did you learn anything from this that you can apply in school and in other parts of your life?

**After a Loss**

* + Don't blame or get angry with your child. He or she feels bad enough already.
  + Avoid the temptation to deny or distort the disappointment your child is feeling. For example, it is not helpful to say, "It doesn't matter".
  + Point out something positive that was achieved during the game. Here are some things to say:  
    Great effort and improvement. Keep working hard, and winning will take care of itself.  
    That was a tough one to lose, but your defense showed improvement. Stick with it, and it. lt will pay off.  
    Really good effort. That's all anyone can ask. I'm proud of you. It never feels good to lose, but you showed terrific sportsmanship. Way to go!
  + If your child hasn't given maximum effort, communicate your unhappiness without putting down the youngster as a person. Focus on the future and emphasize athletes owe it to themselves and their team to give maximum effort.
  + Ask your child, "Did you learn anything from this that you can apply in school and in other parts of your life?

NOTE: This material was excerpted from Sports and Your Child (Frank L. Smoll & Ronald E. Smith, Warde Publishers, Inc., 2005).  
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