

All You Need to Know for Youth Sport Success

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Lets Get Started!

So, you might ask, what in the world has happened to youth sports over the years?! It seems like only yesterday when kids played multiple sports (and shorter seasons), never had to worry about things like youth sport burnout and performance supplements, and it was *unheard* of to even think that an adult might get a little crazy and act out aggressively at a game! With so many changes today, and with so much more money, media, and overall attention being paid to youth sports, it is **IMPERATIVE** that you do your homework and actively

create a safe, fun, and meaningful experience for your child.

Yes, this manual is simple, and most of the answers are probably common sense, but how many times have we overlooked the obvious in life, only to miss out on great opportunities because we thought things were more complex than they were? Similar to losing weight - we know that eating less food while exercising more works - but we sometimes forget this "common sense" knowledge.

This manual is designed to help you not overlook the

obvious, with the result being a wonderful lifelong learning experience for your child involved in youth sports!

Learn All About:

How you can create an awesome youth sport experience!

How you can identify and respond to the key concerns, concepts & ideas so that your child can succeed in sports!

How you can help your child use the sport experience for overall success in LIFE!



Sport Success = Life Success!

It's a fact: Kids who participate in sports are more likely to improve self-esteem and self-confidence, learn the importance of hard work, time management, and structure, and be far less at-risk for dropping out of school, using drugs and alcohol, or even getting involved with gangs! All these really awesome things can happen to your child, too, but it will take some work on your part to make it happen. This manual is designed to help you become proactive in the process, and actually create a winning sport experience for you and your child!

Why Kids Play Sports

The #1 reason why kids play sports, according to every research study ever conducted, is to **have fun!**

Coincidentally, "winning" has never been found to be the #1 reason kids play sports, and rarely even makes the top 5. Sure, every kid likes to win while playing, but if you ask them what they *really* value you will find that in addition to having a lot of fun,

they will also tell you making friendships, wearing a uniform, and seeing your proud face in the crowd are the *real* reasons they play sports.



How to Have FUN!

Clap excitedly for all great plays!

Take lots of pictures and enjoy them as a family!

Create a team webpage and upload pictures and video!

Create a player poster or team cards!

Take the FUN Test Before Each Game

Next time you go out to a game, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Am I happy and smiling?
2. Am I ready to enjoy watching the game - and cheer often?
3. Am I not the luckiest person in the world to be able to enjoy my child play sports?!

After 3 hearty and emphatic "yes" answers grab the car keys and go have fun!!!



Positively Reinforce EVERYTHING!



It's real simple: Kids lives are shaped by the people around them, and none more important than mom and dad. What this means, as it applies to sports, is the more ways you find to *catch your child doing well* (even just *trying real hard*), be sure verbally and

emotionally offer a "great job!" When you do this, the result will be wonderful – your child will love the attention and praise and work even harder to be successful! Additional benefits for your child include improved self esteem and confidence, greater athletic skill

acquisition and mastery, and stronger resiliency toward adversity – all pretty good qualities for mom and dad simply being nice!

Ways to Reinforce:

Scream out "Great Job!"

Fist bumps!

High Fives!

Standing ovations!

Whistle!

Tell your child "Go get 'em next time!"

Simply SMILE!

Things to "Catch" Your Child Doing

Things you should reinforce (meaning when your child does these things, say "great job!"):

- Positive attitude and enthusiasm
- Getting ready for practices and games on time
- Questions about what to do?
- Any success, even the little things that often go unnoticed
- Bouncing back from adversity of any kind (i.e. a strikeout or missed shot)
- Being a good team player – and good sport!



Transfer Athletic Skills to Life

Interestingly, almost every successful life skill can be learned through sports, yet many families overlook this, and as a result everything their child learns through sports tends to get “compartmentalized,” like his or her athletic equipment in a gym bag. As an adult, just think if you were conducting an interview one day and one of your applicants told you that she learned about the importance of goal setting, how to work successfully with teammates, the value of

hard work and motivation, and how to use failure as a learning experience for future success – and then she told you *she learned all these things from playing sports?! I bet you would take a good look at hiring this person – and you should!*



Sport Skills = LIFE SKILLS!!!

So heres what you should do so your child can use sports to excel in life:

1. Sit down as a family and talk about all the skills your child is learning in sports (there are no wrong answers here so don't be shy)
2. Allow your child to be a part of this discovery exercise (big smiles and high-fives are encouraged!)
3. Work together to brainstorm all the ways these athletic skills can be used – for example, if your child talks about how he stays calm in pressure situations in sports, another great place for this *same exact skill* is when he gets nervous giving a speech before the class

Athletic Transferable Skills include:

- Goal setting
- Communicating effectively with teammates
- Being a team leader
- Time management
- Being responsible with team rules
- Resolving conflicts and tough decisions
- Being a “self-starter”
- Spontaneous and systematic decision making
- Integrity
- Listening to the coach and other leaders
- Focusing under pressure
- Handling constructive feedback

Make Unique Family Decisions



Talk About:

To what extent will sports be a part of your family?

All the pros and cons of the various sport leagues, including costs, time commitments, and other potential missed opportunities?

What other people might be able to help you with your family sport decisions?

You wouldn't sign your kids up for accelerated learning classes at school if you felt the normal curriculum suited them fine (this is true for the vast majority of kids by the way), nor would you sign your child up for a marathon if simply running around the track once was plenty enough. Then why, I ask, do so many parents casually without thinking much sign their children up for

advanced sport leagues, elite athletic clubs, and high-intensity travel leagues when very good, less-intensive, and fun youth leagues exist?! My point is just because you believe "everyone is doing it" the reality is this simply isn't true, and what is most important are the answers you decide as a family that are unique to your values, wants and needs, and future goals.

What's Right for YOUR Family?

Here are a few key questions to talk about as a family:

- Do we know the realities of how few kids actually earn full-ride college scholarships and professional sport opportunities? As you might imagine, this number is incredibly small – and never something to bank on!
- Have we talked about the pros and cons of sport specialization (exclusively playing just one sport) versus sport specialization?
- Are we thinking about how much fun we will have as a family, as well as how much our kids will learn from the experience?
- If we try a more intense league, are we going to be open to the experience while at the same time gauging the experience objectively and willing to revisit the decision if we see our child becoming "burned out?"

Both recreational and travel leagues can provide great experiences for your kids, so examine both opportunities and make a decision best for your family. What you should never do, however, is simply follow what everyone else is doing - especially if it is against your families better interest.



Communicate as a Family



It goes without saying that as a parent you are expected to talk with your child – a lot – about all the things your child experiences in life. Since this is the obvious part to raising kids, here’s the not-so obvious-part: listening. In fact, even for adults the easier thing for most people to do is to talk rather than listen (yes, even shy people, when comfortable with others, enjoy talking). When it comes to sports it’s no different – and while your tips, insights, and suggestions are certainly needed – it’s what your *child* says and *how well you listen* that really matters.

When it comes to youth sports, for many people it’s those emotional decisions that prohibit them from making sound, logical decisions pertaining to their child’s best interests. In other words, while it can be exciting to think about your child one day playing in the Little League World Series on ESPN, the time, effort, and money needed to make that a possibility may not be in your best interest, nor might it be what your *child* would actually like to do! The key is to ask open-ended questions and listen closely to your child, and then work together to arrive at sound and healthy family decisions.

Quick Tips

Ask a lot of open-ended questions - like “Tell me about how you like playing on your team?”

Use positive, open, inviting body language and listen closely

Ask politely for clarification of things you don’t understand, and be open to your child’s comments

Work together to resolve conflicts, and always be open to compromise

Here’s How to Get Started!

Key questions to talk about with your child:

- How much fun are you having playing on this team/league?
- What ideas do you have when it comes to playing sports?
- What can we do differently (or better) as a family to help you have a great sport experience?
- What things would you like us (mom and dad) to do more of (i.e. sign up for a new league) or less of (i.e. continue to have to go to a specific sports camp every year)? (Be sure to emphasize honesty in your child’s answers, and assure him or her that there are no negative consequences for simply being honest).



Be Nice to the Coach

OK, lets be frank, when it comes to youth sports, your child's coach is *not*: A) a professional coach, B) paid, C) perfect, and D) out to get your kid. On the other hand, your child's coach is *likely*: A) a rookie coach doing it to help out, B) a volunteer, C) prone to make mistakes, and D) trying to be fair to all the kids on the team.

While it is understandable to sometimes disagree with the

coach, it is never OK to physically or verbally assault the coach! Coaching is often a no-win proposition when it comes to things like cuts, playing time, and other subjective decisions, so try to see how difficult it is to coach in a way where somebody isn't going to be upset with a decision.

The *better* way to go in order for your child to prosper while playing youth sports? Try being nice to the coach,

unconditionally and all the time! This does not mean you should be fake and corny, but instead try to offer sincere praise and encouragement whenever possible. Remember, your child stands to gain much more from the youth sport experience when you work *with* the coach, and not against him or her.



Remember

The job of a coach can be tough!

Your child's coach is likely a volunteer, and quite possibly could be coaching for the very first time

You can be assured your child's coach wants to be fair to all kids, but when making decisions in life, it's nearly impossible to make everyone happy all the time

Give the Coach a Pat-on-the-Back!

Other nice things you can do with your child's coach:

- Let the coach know how much you appreciate all the time needed to coach
- Offer to help the team – possibly as an assistant coach, or maybe with fund raising
- Stand up for the coach if you feel he or she is experiencing unfair criticism
- When you have a thought or advice to give, do so in a nice, respectful way so that the coach knows you are not trying to take over the team
- Cheer and offer praise for all team success the coach has helped the team achieve!



Chill Out While Watching Kids Play Sports



Have you ever been to a youth sporting event and witnessed an act of aggression in the stands? This type of behavior can range from very severe (i.e. physical fighting) to less severe, yet still very serious and uncalled for (i.e. calling out obscenities toward kids, other adults in the stands, and coaches). Sadly, since the late 1990's we have witnessed a growing trend for

adult fans to act out in ridiculous, offensive, and sometimes dangerous ways – all over amateur youth sports!

Obviously you are going to become emotional watching your kids out there competing hard on the field, and it's certainly OK to cheer with praise and encouragement whenever possible.

What's never OK, however, is when adults act like jerks and make the experience bad for everyone simply because they couldn't keep it in check. Yes, that guideline might seem harsh and direct, but trust me, it's a lot less crude than some of the things kids have to endure when looking into the stands and seeing their parents make fools of themselves.

Keep it Cool Out There!

So to make things easy, here are a few golden rules:

- Always cheer, even for the other kids on the team who may not be your children
- Understand officials are going to blow calls (they're amateurs, too), so be tolerant of their mistakes
- Always promote respect and sportsmanship (you would ask your child to do the same thing, right?)

Never Do This

Act out in violent or physically aggressive ways

Yell and scream profanities

Intimidate

Embarrass

Humiliate

Show any kind of poor sportsmanship

Do things you would never want your child to do



Do Your Homework

If you haven't been involved with youth sports since you were a kid, you might be surprised at all the changes. Many kids today play sports year-round, specialize in one sport, compete in travel leagues against advanced competition, use performance supplements to gain an athletic edge, and regularly juggle their schedules to fit in school, activities, and other social interests and commitments. As a parent of

a young athlete, it is imperative that you stay involved in the process of youth sports, and get as much credible, objective information as you can so that your family can make safe and healthy decisions.

Many experts feel as though youth sports have become mini-professional athletics, and as a result, adults need to stay on top of the latest trends, problems, and issues that

seem to happen all the time. Rather than send your child out and merely react to things that are likely to occur, try the old adage of "an ounce of prevention being worth a pound of cure" and become proactive with information collecting.



Prepare for Things that You Might See

Travel leagues

Dietary and performance supplements

Sport sampling vs. sport specialization

Injury prevention, rehabilitation, and recovery

Media exposure

Youth sport burnout

Cuts, conflict, playing time problems, and all other potential athletic experiences

Sharpen Your Pencil!

Below are a few key issues that should be included in your homework:

1. Learn about all the leagues available to your child, including the different competition levels of each
2. Learn about what issues might be more applicable to you and your child – for example, if you are the parent of a female gymnast, she may be at a higher risk for a future eating disorder according to some reports.
3. Talk to your child's coach, Athletic Director, or other sport experts to get their advice as it relates to current and future issues and trends
4. Attend any seminars, lectures, or other educational opportunities so you can learn from experts about youth sport issues



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Make Sports Part of Youth Development

Since it is a fact that very few kids will ever develop into professional athletes, it is very important that you not “put all your eggs in one basket” and create a situation where all your child does is play sports year-round, and at the expense of other developmental growth opportunities. Obviously, sports can be a great *part* of growing up, but when other important things like school clubs, academic opportunities, band, and volunteer experiences are ignored, your child may one day face a situations where A) he or she is not prepared to transition through sport retirement, and B) may feel under-developed as a young adult because his or her life experiences have been limited to sports. Obviously, neither of these situations is good.

So what should parents do? The best advice is to work hard to develop a balanced life schedule for your child – similar to eating a balanced diet. Academics, athletics, and school activities should always be considered when allocating time blocks in your child’s schedule, and after that any other activities that will help your child develop as a well-rounded person are strongly recommended. Ironically, while some people may feel that this type of schedule is prohibitive when it comes to advancing athletic skills, most experts feel differently and believe that staying well-rounded helps self-esteem and self-confidence, improves motivation, helps with communication and conflict resolution skills, plus much more – *all things that help in sports, too!*



Great Things Kids Can Do

- Excel in school
- Play sports
- Join school clubs
- Play an instrument
- Learn about art
- Perform in a play
- Help the elderly and disabled
- Invent things
- Learn a trade
- Volunteer

Help Your Child with Balance

Here are some simple tips to help you get started:

1. Come up with 3-4 core interests you value for your child (i.e. academics, athletics, music, and art)
2. Examine how your child is currently allocating his or her time in these areas, and how happy you are with things today.
3. Draft up future goals to tweak his or her time commitments, if necessary.
4. Revisit this exercise often!



Use Sports for Success in Life!

Learning how to set and achieve goals, work together with teammates, bounce back from adversity, and make clutch decisions are just a few of the terrific athletic transferable skills your child can apply to life. Sadly, far too many kids today compartmentalize these skills into one area of life – sports – when the truth is they are invaluable across life settings.

Yes, I am repeating this point, but I am doing so intentionally because its that important! When you consider that athletic skills are paramount to life success, its a golden opportunity lost when families don't harness and use them in life.

Talk to your child early and often about the benefits of sport participation, and how it

can help boost self-confidence and self-esteem, two great personality features that can lead to success in all areas of life. Look for ways to transfer your child's confidence to the classroom, befriending new people, and taking calculated risks in life. The truth is sport skills are life skills, and mastering life skills is the key to life success!



What Sports Can Do for Your Child

Increase self-confidence and self-esteem

Improve motivation and perseverance

Help develop problem-solving skills

Provide opportunities to learn resiliency

Invite new friendships

Experience winning and losing

Sport Success = Life Success!

Final Tips:

1. Be an active, positive, caring parent throughout your child's youth sport career
2. Talk regularly about big decisions, potential problems, and safe training procedures
3. Learn about what the coach expects, and support the coach as much as possible
4. Help your child maintain a balanced lifestyle, and keep an eye out for any potential problems like youth sport burnout and performance anxiety
5. Identify and help your child transfer important sport skills to life, offer positive praise and reinforcement regularly, and most of all - HAVE FUN!!!



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About the Author



Dr. Stankovich is an advocate for positive growth and development for kids involved in youth and interscholastic sports, and has spent his professional career involved in a variety of endeavors working toward this goal - including counseling, teaching, writing, and political activism. Dr. Stankovich's books include *Sport Success 360*, *Mind of Steel*, *Positive Transitions for*

Student Athletes, and *The Parents Playbook*. His work has been featured in USA Today, ABC World News, and several scholarly journals. Dr. Stankovich has taught at a number of colleges as well, including Ohio State, Capital, Kenyon, and Wittenberg.

For more information about Dr. Stankovich, or to reach him directly, please visit www.drstankovich.com



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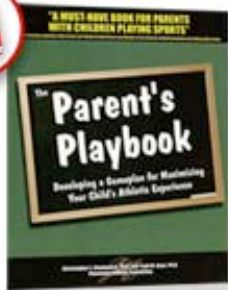
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