

**From TVO Parents article.**

## **Being a Good Sportsperson**

Part of good sportsmanship or what is now known as being a good sportsperson means, behaving in positive ways. From winning and losing with good manners to respecting teammates, opponents and officials, children can learn positive social behaviours and valuable life skills while participating in sport.

### **Process versus Results: What is being a good sportsperson?**

First and foremost, sportspersonship focuses on the process of the sport as opposed to the results or outcome of the game.

- When you talk about goals or winning, you talk about results or outcome.
- When you talk about effort, how well a child behaved, followed rules and played a position, you talk about process.

Part of this process of playing is learning to respect others. “Being a good sportsperson is the ability to respect other people including opponents and people with differences,” says Gretchen Kerr, an associate professor in the department of Physical Education at the University of Toronto.

When a child is a good sportsperson, they are demonstrating the character traits espoused by their team, club or school. “They are being respectful and honest; they have a commitment to their teammates and the team as a whole – not just their own interests,” says Steve Shantz, Athletic Coordinator for the York Region Athletic Association. “They are interested in winning, yes, but more importantly, in doing their best.”

Having fun is key. “Ultimately, the result is less important than the fact that everybody had a good time, learned something and would be happy to play each other again,” says Peter Donnelley, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Physical Education and Health at the University of Toronto.

What can parents and coaches do to promote good sportspersonship?

“Essentially, everything that happens (in sport) either reflects good sportsmanship or not,” says Shantz. “The role of parents and coaches is to be consistent at all times. It may be difficult not to put out only the best players to win, but what message might that send? It might be easier not to include children on the team that may develop more slowly than others, but that, too, sends a message to children. Adults need to walk the talk as well as enforce it.”

It’s also important to keep the big picture in mind. “The adults’ role is to ensure the sport program is designed and delivered to the kids’ developmental needs and their abilities and interests,” says Kerr.

“It’s really important that both parents and coaches keep in the forefront of their minds why children participate. The research is very clear on this,” says Kerr. “Kids participate in sports because they like learning new skills and being with their friends. There’s a whole list of things of which winning is not on the list. Winning only becomes important when the parents tell them that it’s important.”

Parents can reinforce the fun, and that no matter what the result of the game is, life goes on and it's not going to change the world. Here are some tips from Shantz, Kerr and Donnelley that parents can teach and demonstrate to their children:

- Respecting other players and the other teams.
- Being on time for practice and being there consistently.
- Taking on team roles that are needed regardless of position.
- No putting down anyone on their own or another team.
- Remembering both sides are necessary to play a game.
- Understanding that your opponent is not your enemy.
- Helping an opponent up after a good clean hit.
- Being positive about other children and avoid telling kids to “go after” a certain player.
- Telling the truth when the coach doesn’t see the child commit an infraction.
- Respecting officials is important, because there’s a lot of abuse of officials by parents, coaches and players.
- Doing their best each and every practice, each game, regardless if it can be won or not.
- Accepting winning and losing with good manners.

### **Life Skills Learned from Being a Good Sportsperson**

By being a good sportsperson, children can develop life skills.

“Sportsmanship is rooted in equity, justice and fairness with an emphasis on fairness,” says Donnelley. “If it’s taught properly, sportsmanship can give children an enormous sense of equity and social justice.”

Sportsmanship also teaches skills that are useful in school. As children learn how to lose and win gracefully, they also learn how to react to marks and test scores. Kerr asks: “How do you fail at a test in school in a very constructive way? How do you deal modestly with getting the top mark in class?”

“Students who participate positively in sports tend to do better in school and have less suspensions,” says Shantz. “The motivation, the positive attitudes and the skills learned become a part of how they interact with others. In sports, they learn to overcome challenges, not give up, keep trying – all necessary for academic success.”

Ultimately, the positive attitudes and positive social behaviours a child learns by being good sportsperson are transferable between the playing field, school, home and community.

### **Related TVO Parents Resources:**

- ["House League or Rep Team: What's right for your child?"](#)
- ["House League Sports: putting fun first for your child"](#)
- ["Competitive Sports: What are the Benefits"](#)
- Your Voice Episode: ["Should Kids Compete?"](#)
- Your Voice Episode: ["The Value of the Game"](#)