

NSW Department of Sport and Recreation

Kids' Sport

A very real guide for

Grown Ups



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Times may change, but not your role

The verse below was written over 100 years ago, by a noble man, with noble ideas, about what success is all about.

The words are relevant to you and to your children.

The words are relevant to how you live your life each and every day.

The words are even more relevant to how those around you benefit from the things you do and say, each and every day.

The words are relevant to your children, your involvement in their activities and how you influence them. This includes when your children are playing sport with friends.

So if you really want to succeed in your children's sporting life:

To laugh often and much,
To win respect of intelligent people
And the affection of children,
To earn the appreciation of honest critics
And to endure the betrayal of false friends,
To appreciate beauty,
To find the best in others,
To leave the world a bit better,
Whether by a healthy child, a garden patch
Or a redeeming social condition,
To know even one life has breathed easier because you lived,
This is to have succeeded.

RALPH WALDO EMERSON (1803–1882)

Before you next visit your children's sporting arena, please stop for a moment and think about the issues presented to you in this booklet.

If you can't spare the time to read the words in this little book, you can't care enough about your children's sporting interests, or about what they want and need, or how you can succeed in making this little sporting corner of their life so much more enjoyable.

If you *do* care, then read on...



Some basics

What is winning all about?

Winning 'on the scoreboard' is only one of the many ways children win in sport.

Sport for children provides a solid base for later life.

Attitudes and skills involving physical well-being, the ability to inter relate and rely on others, to train for improvement and learning to accept both winning and losing times are all a part of our everyday adult life. These aspects are developed in children's sporting activities. If the children can win in these areas, then the scoreboard tends to look after itself.

Your responsibilities as an adult involved in children's sport relies on you knowing that there is more to this game than just scoring points.

Kids' sport needs adults to make it work. If you are a genuine, concerned adult, don't pass up the opportunity to get involved.

Apart from anything else, children and sport make for great entertainment.

What you teach them as children will stay with them as they grow up, so teach them well.

Training

You can take very positive steps to support training.

These steps will be encouraging to your children and their coach, and satisfying to you as a concerned parent:

- Don't interfere – but if you can, let the coach know you are available to help.
- Make sure your children are punctual and properly dressed for training.
- Grab any opportunity to go and watch the training session. It will help you to better understand the effort a good coach is putting into your children.
- Listen to your children when they talk about their training session. Get to know what they do at training.



- When they get home, ask, “Was it a good session? What did you do?” Let them understand that you place importance on their efforts at training. You will be actively encouraging the benefits of practical training (much the same principle as study for an exam or homework to support learning).
- If they are not happy – *tactfully* – find out why.
- If there is any problem with your child's attendance at training, let the coach know as early as possible.
- Encourage your children to take training seriously. Don't browbeat them, but do talk to them and let them understand the importance of practice.
- Don't let training become all consuming (e.g. a kid's footy team doesn't need training five days a week) – the children have other activities and responsibilities as well.

Training is very important for the success of every team and your support will go a long way towards making training profitable.

How is your child being treated?

If you have any concerns about how your child is being treated:

- Speak first to your children. Are they happy with what is happening?
- Do your children know something you don't know about why certain actions are being taken?
- If you need to, speak to the coach – quietly and privately. You may strike a nerve that sets things straight; maybe the coach will change his or her ideas; maybe you will change your ideas.
- Don't ever embarrass your children with loud, emotional, uneducated, defensive, incorrect comments, or loud, justified, educated, aggressive, well-founded questioning, within earshot of your children or their teammates.

Children can't maintain the respect of their peers if it looks as though they are being favoured as a result of your actions.



On game day

Please don't stop cheering for all the children!

The friendly banter and rivalry that goes with competitive sport can be great fun, but you need to know where to draw the line. Children love to hear encouraging words of support, but there is a big difference between support and abuse – and you should be smart enough to know the difference.

Children have egos too – build those egos, don't tear them apart. Let them learn from your example.

Acknowledge the good efforts of the children playing against your child – they're not to be blamed if they do something well.

Find out more about the game. Learn the rules and fewer happenings on the field will look wrong to you.

Love the kids – that's why you're there. Don't do anything that would give them doubts.



It's their game – not yours!

Before you consider why your children want to play sport, you'd better decide why you want your children to play sport.

Honest, caring parents want to see their children play well and have fun – that's great.

But on the other hand every parent needs to decide: Are your children playing sport for what they want to get out of their game, or for what you want to get out of their game?

Don't try and convince anybody else of your motives – be honest to yourself.

There is nothing wrong with parents loving their children and being proud of them.

Nor is there anything wrong with parents encouraging children to play a game to the best of their ability. Your children need to be encouraged.

Depending on their age and maturity, they need help and direction from parents in learning about the:

- effort needed to reach a goal
- value that is placed on those goals
- direction taken to reach those valued goals.

Your advice and encouragement is vitally important to your children. They learn from your example – so what example do you want to set?

If you are trying to motivate your children for what they want out of their game, you will:

- encourage them to enjoy their game
- encourage them to learn to develop their skills through training and practice
- encourage them to accept results and learn from their mistakes
- encourage them when they see you accepting results and setting high standards of behaviour for yourself
- be proud of them when they try their best
- encourage them when they try their best
- encourage them when they see that your pride in their good efforts is more important than winning or losing.



Don't push them into what you want.

If you are trying to motivate your children for what you want out of their game, you will:

- discourage your children by constant criticism of their performance
- discourage them by falsifying the value of their effort through bribes
- be their number one supporter when they win and their number one critic when they lose
- be the first to criticise the referee, the coach, the team and anybody else when they lose
- buy your children the best of everything, because you want them to look better than the rest of the team
- encourage your children to cheat. (Sorry – you might call it bending the rules. It doesn't matter what you call it, cheating is cheating)
- threaten your children either physically or emotionally to get a better result.

If you don't know what we mean then think about the parent, who after a loss, withdraws the usual after-match drink, pie, after game time to play with friends, or worse still – withdraws evidence of their love for their child.

(Sadly this does happen – you've probably seen it happen).

Parents, if you really want to motivate your children, then let them see your pleasure in witnessing their ability to compete.

Growing up, winning, losing and learning are tough enough without parents confusing the issues.

Let your children play their game – don't spoil their day.

Encourage them – don't push them.

If you can't do that – then stay away from their game.

Yep, stay away and let them enjoy their sport, without you being there to spoil their fun playing with their friends.



Game day

No matter what the score is in your child's game today – the sun will still come up tomorrow.

Cheer the good efforts of your child.

Applaud every good effort, by every other child, and you might just get other parents doing the same for your child.

Enjoy every bit of your child's sporting day. Because your child is not a child for long enough.

If the tension of your child's game is all too much to handle, buy a meat pie!

< The canteen can be a great tension release! >

If you can't let your child enjoy his/her day, without you getting in the way, STAY HOME! < But what a great time you'll be missing >

All children are different



The beauty of children is that they are all different.

Some can hit better, some can run faster or further, some can swim quicker and some can just play a sport better than the majority of other children.

Children are just not designed to be equal on the sporting field. Many are emotionally or physically immature compared to children of the same age.

But these children still front up asking to be allowed to play. Whether children are brilliant, or just average, the games they play will help them all to grow.

Don't pressure your child. Too many children turn off sport because of relentless adult pressure on them to perform. Be careful in the way you encourage your children – don't let them lose the love of a game.

If they have the talent to go further, the tougher competitive times ahead will be far more bearable if they can still love their game.

Don't push them into what you want, but encourage them to find their own level. Given enough breathing space, they usually end up close to where you were pushing anyway.

Avoid spoiling them. Spoilt children find it hard to appreciate what they have – expensive boots, a fancy tracksuit, bat, or racquet, don't help your child to play better.

Understand rewards. All children need to have their efforts recognised, particularly when they have tried their best. Let your children see that you are proud of their efforts - don't take them for granted. Let them also see that you can congratulate other children on their good efforts as well.

Pride. It's an emotion that needs to be fed, so after the game, a quiet pat on the shoulder or simple 'well played' will hit the right spot (along with shared meat pies and a drink) and your talented child will have been amply paid for his or her efforts.

Children need to be recognised, not glorified. Encourage your child to mix with teammates before and after the game – don't set your child apart from the rest.



Parents of mere mortals

Be proud of your children as long as they try to do their best.

Whatever you do, don't fall into the trap of criticising your own child's efforts because he or she is not as capable as another child, or criticising stronger children just because they can play a game better than your child. Either way, it isn't the child's fault.

All children play at different levels of skill. Just love them and be proud of their talents and the good use they make of them.

Once your children find a sport they want to be a part of, then:

- Get to know the coach and let the coach get to know you.
- Give your children room to establish themselves in their team. Try not to 'embarrass' them by being overly protective.
- Get to know your child's capabilities. Don't expect too much, but don't be surprised by their successes either.
- All good coaches love a child who tries, irrespective of natural talent. Encourage your children to keep trying no matter how good or bad they may be.
- Don't be hesitant about showing pride in your child's efforts. A weaker child's single good action could be the equal of another child's 100 good actions. Get things into the right perspective – if you know they are trying their best, then show your appreciation of that effort.
- Please don't ever compromise your child's self-esteem through thoughtless, loud, public protestations. You will probably be wrong anyway.
- Be fair in recognising their needs and desires to play.
- Be proud of their attempts to compete. Get to know what they are capable of and acknowledge their efforts, good and bad.
- When your children are playing sport, watch them grow in confidence when they talk about their game.

All children are different in ability, but the same in their basic desire to play a game. Show them you understand that sameness and don't let your actions get in the way of their game.



What do children want from sport?

Children want to play a game and you have the opportunity to help them play.

Please don't ever forget that 'the game' is what children want first.

Ask your children and you will discover that the scoreboard really is less important to them, than it is to many adults. We can prove that.

Ask your child what the score was from a game played just two weeks ago – it will be very rare if they remember or particularly care.

So if the score doesn't particularly worry them – why should you let it worry you?

Can you remember the local park and the kids you ran around with on weekends, after school and particularly during holidays? There was never any shortage of children to play a game.

The only adult who seemed to be about was the odd crank who invariably had a house that backed on to the park.

The barbed-wire fence-top and his growling, snapping, child eating dog simply added a sense of daring to the game, as you valiantly tried to retrieve the ball that inevitably found its way into that yard.

Children play a game.

Please don't ever forget how much fun a game can be. Don't ever forget how well you survived as a child, when your imagination and your friends gave you the opportunity to simply have some fun.

We need to keep it all in perspective. Less than 3% of children who play competitive sport will ever reach an elite level.

But 100% can have a chance to enjoy their sport, if we let them.



Winning and losing

There are more children playing sport, who just want to enjoy the fun of playing a game, than there are the desperados simply wanting to win. For the sake of all children playing sport, adults need to think more clearly about winning and losing and put it into perspective. So to help, here are a few simple things to consider:

- Human nature thrives on competition.
- Competitions must have winners and losers.
- Winning scoreboard results are great, but did your child win in any other ways?
- Prepare children to accept results – they can't always be scoreboard winners. Some teams may seem unbeatable, but they will lose one day.
- Winning is watching children laugh, learn and grow up. Have you helped them lose anywhere along the way?
- Regardless of the game result, encourage your kids to always keep trying.
- Who is your favourite sporting hero? Did he or she ever finish second?
- When your child's team loses a game, who suffers most – you or your child?
- Kids' sport can be either a war or a game. There are no winners in a war; there are no losers in a game. What price are you willing to pay to see your children win?
- Even the best players make mistakes. Mistakes can be your best friends if you learn from them.
- Winning at sport includes: scoreboard results; friendship; teamwork; skill development and plenty of good fun.

There is no disgrace in losing – there is disgrace in not being able to accept it.

Always be fair



Children always win when you let them enjoy themselves.

Disappointment really does build character.

Winning scores are always a possibility – not an impossibility, nor an inevitability.

Are you a parent living your own sporting life through your child? Who is winning?

Children need to learn the difference between good and bad losers. Show them!

If your children have tried their best, how can they be called losers?

Congratulate them on their good efforts.

Maybe the cynics are right when they say we can't change adult attitudes by simply writing about the merits of winning or losing.

We may be kidding ourselves in believing that there are plenty of mature, caring adults willing to show children the way to understanding what winning in sport is all about.

But we trust that there are more winners out there who understand the difference between winning and losing, than the losers out there who may never know the real difference.



Talk sport with your children

If you haven't done it yet – ask your children why they play sport.

You may well be surprised by the answers.

Children care less about trophies and scoreboard results than you would imagine. In general, children want to be with their friends and be a part of a team structure that lets them play in their own domain. They have ownership over their game, and control over their playing field.

They want adults there to watch – children love to have mum and dad watch them play.

Remember the first time your child scaled the arm of the lounge and stood smiling as though Everest had just been conquered. A little while later, you were in the backyard witnessing the *World Record Empty Garbage Bin High Jump*. You applauded the gallant attempt, then found the bandaids to repair the champion's damaged body.

Nothing much changes as your child progresses into organised competitive sports. They still love to have your support. They don't need adults who stop applauding the good effort and start demanding more than they can deliver. They don't stay children for long enough and if you interfere with the enjoyment sport gives them, you rob them of something that can never be replaced.

Talk to your children about what they want through sport. Ask them what they want you to do – about how they want you to be involved. Find out their feelings about your sideline cheering. Ask them.

Some parents will be pleasantly surprised by the response that welcomes their actions. Other mums and dads will discover that what the children want from their game may in fact differ from what the parents are providing.

Out there playing their game are your children. You have watched them since they first tried to pick up a ball. But you're not standing at the kitchen window now. Playing becomes more real when they enter a formal competition.

Even though your child is now playing with a different group of kids, you really don't have to change the attitude you had when you watched their backyard games. You should still be proud of your children, and get a buzz out of watching them compete, and marvel at how your children continue to grow.

Talk with your children and discover how easily you can enjoy their game with them.

Enjoy their game.

The Parent Test

To gain entry into the world of your children's sport, this test must be completed every week, after every game. Pass rate of 100% required.

Fail the Parent Test and you lose!

- yes* I love my child
- yes* My child has respect for me through my actions at his/her game
- yes* I cheered, I clapped, I acknowledged my child's good effort and the efforts of teammates
- yes* I applauded the good efforts of the opposition
- yes* I only looked for reasons for results and not excuses
- yes* I acknowledged that not all umpire/referee decisions were necessarily correct – but I outwardly accepted the game rulings
- yes* I supported my child, but I didn't interfere with his/her game
- yes* I acknowledged and encouraged the importance of fair play
- yes* I might be disappointed, but I know my child will learn from any loss
- yes* I enjoyed the company of other parents
- yes* I acknowledge that children have different skill levels
- yes* I know what my child likes about sport
- yes* I always want my child to play the right way
- yes* I want my child to be happy
- yes* I acknowledge that good fun is more important than a good win
- yes* I have encouraged my child to play for the fun of the game



- yes** I found at least one reason to be happy at my child's game – and I smiled
- yes** My child respected opponents
- yes** I encouraged my child to be relaxed at the game
- yes** My child still has self-respect
- yes** I have acted in a way my child wants me to act
- yes** I acknowledge that it is not what I say, but what I do, that impacts on my child
- yes** I let my child compete today without pressure
- yes** I did not bribe or apply emotional pressure on my child
- yes** I gave my child the opportunity to learn from competition, without robbing him/her of the true understanding of winning and losing
- yes** I want my child to still enjoy sport when he/she is an adult
- yes** Should I slip in any way I will endeavour to fix my faults immediately, because I love my child

This is an important test because your children need you to pass it every time. It's up to all of us to create the right climate for their game.

If you've been able to answer yes to every question in the Parent Test you're welcome back next week.

If you're struggling with any part of the Parent Test, it's up to you to do some homework and get it right.

It's not hard – we can all do it.

Someone said ...

'The biggest asset any adult can give children is the right example and attitude. For growing up is how humans prepare for adult life and sport is a part of that growing up.' **Adult**

'I play sport because it is fun and you will be able to still move when you grow old!' **Kid**

'Children don't learn from what adults say, but from what adults do.' **Adult**

'All young children should love what they are doing and try to do it to the best of their ability, by listening and learning from adults around them and then putting it into action. We adults need to set the best example.' **Adult**

'It is more important to be a good person than it is to be a good anything else.' **Adult**

'The people who really care about kids developing through healthy sport must get involved, so as to outnumber the mugs who spoil the kids' game.' **Adult**

'Sport is having a good time with friends.' **Kid**

'Children are often put off sport by the imposed structures and attitudes of 'well meaning' adults associated with their sports.' **Adult**

'We don't have a scoreboard, but we do have the best meat pies.' **Kid**

'Many parents want to relive their own sporting life through their kids. In particular there is the parent who sees himself as a sporting nobody – he tries to make up for his shortcomings by pressuring his child.' **Adult**

'I don't play any more because mum used to yell too much. I got sick of it.' **Kid**

'The greatest enemies of kids' sport are the concerned adults. The ones who put their mouth into gear before they put their brain into action.' **Adult**

'My dad is great – he just watches.' **Kid**

'Kids' sport – it's more than a game, it's an education.'

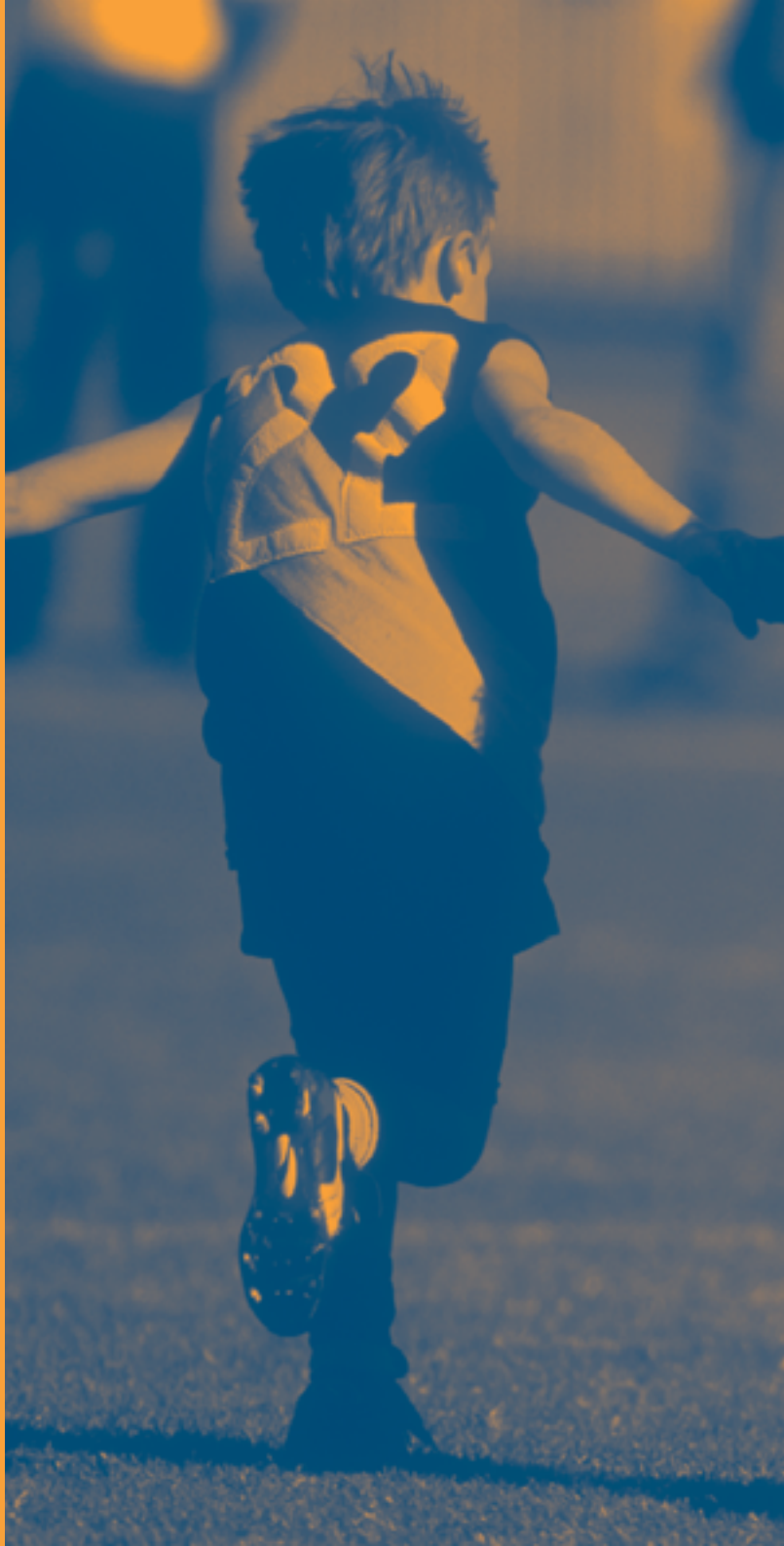


'Sport is about having a good time'

This little book is written on behalf of every child who wants to play sport, in the hope that more and more adults can accept that children's sport belongs to the children themselves.

We adults should be there to help and be a witness to the beauty of the child's game, but never get in the way.





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