

“It’s just a game.” Learning Good Sportsmanship

With so much media attention given to athletes today, the public sees a lot of unacceptable behavior and bad sportsmanship in professional sports. When children observe such behavior from their heroes, they are inclined to imitate them. It’s important that parents and coaches change this negative trend. Children learn good sportsmanship from the adults in their lives, especially their parents. When parents, coaches, and sports officials treat each other with respect, children begin to understand that you don’t have to win a game to be a winner. A real winner learns to persevere and behave with dignity, win or lose.

Under the instruction of the team coach and help from parents, children learn that good sportsmanship comes from positive action, such as, shaking hands before a game, congratulating the opposing team on a good play or accepting bad calls gracefully. It’s not easy to shake the hands of the winning team but it is a good learning experience. The child who shows good sportsmanship in the playing field is likely to use this quality throughout his or her life. Parents can be good role models for their budding athletes by praising and encouraging all the athletes in their child’s team including the opposing team players. These opposing players could be part of your child’s team, next season. Children should be having fun and honing their skills when they play sports. They learn about team spirit and to work in conjunction with their team mates. Winning a game is always a great feeling but in contrast, losing should not be devastating. The question parents should ask their child at the end of a game is “Did you have fun?” As opposed to “Did you win?” By playing down the final score, you will show your child that it’s not about the end of the game but the process. Parents can teach their child good sportsmanship, by being a positive support. If your child’s team does not win a game, he or she will eventually learn to become adaptable and cope with losing. However, if your child does exhibit a negative attitude after a game loss, rather than embarrassing him or her in front of the team, take your child aside and voice your disapproval of this behavior.

Don’t put down a player, coach or referee at a sports event or whilst watching television, in front of your child. When watching the Olympics recently, what message did you give to you child? Were you only rooting for your country’s team? Allow your children to appreciate the many skills the athletes perform. Discuss the training and dedication that it takes to acquire such skills. Also, point out the wonderful camaraderie and friendly rivalry between all the countries. Include what an honor it is to be a part of the Olympics, regardless of the outcome. Parents can find “teachable moments” for their children whether they are watching the Olympics or their child’s school team. When an athlete’s behavior is honorable or discourteous, there is always a conversation to be had on sportsmanship. Moral responsibility is a part of parenthood, teaching your child good sportsmanship is a valuable life lesson.

At Woodcrest School, we encourage our children to get involved with team sports. Our wonderful Coach Max, prior to every game gathers the team together and says the following,

“We’re not here to win but we are here to play hard. It’s not all about winning; it’s about learning and having fun.”

*Shosh Byron
Executive Director
Woodcrest School*