

NOTES FROM UPSTREAM

Putting Youth First in Youth Sports

In many communities, spring is marked by the beginning of recreational youth sports. Ideally, well organized youth sports programs provide a safe, wholesome environment for families. Positive outcomes of this experience for children include having fun; forming friendships; developing confidence, self-esteem and trust; practicing healthy habits; and accomplishing personal goals.

Unfortunately, not all children have a positive experience in youth sports programs. Certain behaviors and philosophies may turn children off of sports or even cause them lasting harm. Parents who want their children to have a positive experience in youth sports should consider the following points before participating:

Program Philosophy

Healthy philosophies foster emotionally healthy children. They are based on sound objectives and nurture the concept that the well-being of a child is more important than his performance or winning.

A healthy philosophy should not make a child feel as if his worth depends on wins or losses. This pattern may be established when the first thing an adult asks a child is "Did you win?", or "What was the score?". A healthy philosophy emphasizes whether or not the child met the objective of playing. Did he—have fun, do his best, improve or learn something from the experience?

Abuse in Youth Sports

Emotional Abuse—Emotional abuse occurs when an individual treats a child in a negative manner which impairs the child's concept of self. This may include a parent/guardian/caregiver, coach, teacher, brother, sister or a friend. Emotional abuse is, perhaps, the most difficult abuse to identify and the most common form of maltreatment in youth sports. Examples include:

- Forcing a child to participate in sports
- Criticizing or ridiculing a child for his performance
- Yelling at a child for not playing well or for losing
- Hitting or punishing a child for not playing well/losing
- Not speaking to a child after he plays poorly or loses

Statements such as "You are such a loser" are not only nega-

tive, they may become beliefs of the child that can carry forth into adulthood.

Physical Abuse—Occurs when a person in a position of power, authority or trust such as a parent or coach purposefully injures or threatens to injure a child. It takes many forms, including:

- Slapping/Shaking/Hitting
- Grabbing/Shoving
- Kicking
- Pulling hair, ears, etc.
- Throwing equipment
- Hazing
- Punishing "poor" play by withholding fluids or with the use of excessive exercise (extra laps/refusing breaks)

Positive approaches to coaching are also the most effective:

- Use appropriate discipline
- Replace put-downs with instructions
- Motivate with praise, not name-calling

Parental Conduct

Parental conduct contributes to a child's sports experience in several ways. Parents should strive for a balance where they are supportive of their child's participation, but remain objective. They:

- Attend games and practices as appropriate
- Encourage the child to understand and follow the rules
- Highlight fun and enjoyment
- Emphasize effort and improvement over winning
- Talk directly with the coach if they have a concern; do not try to override or compete with the coach

Parents as Spectators—Good spectators add to the sports experience rather than distract from it. To consider:

- Some children enjoy cheering or hearing their name called when it is their turn. Other children find it easier to focus if their parents are attentive without being loud or obvious. Know your child's preference.

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PROGRAM NEWS

Funding for Newborn Home Visiting Programs Renewed

The State Child Abuse & Neglect Prevention Board has renewed nine grants. The grants, which are funded by the Arkansas Children's Trust Fund, will provide continuing support to the following home visiting programs:

ACCESS, Inc.—ACCESS offers the THRIVE program to pregnant and parenting teens in Jefferson County. The goal of the program is to educate and empower teen mothers, giving them the means to provide a safe, healthy, nurturing environment for their children. This program has been shown to increase the capacity of families to care for their children, thereby resulting in zero reported cases of maltreatment among participants.

A Woman's Place Pregnancy Resource Center—A Woman's Place serves first-time parents, teen parents and pregnant teens in Cabot, AR. Participants are served at one of three levels, depending upon a needs assessment. Services range from weekly home visits to reduce risk factors to center-based support to maintain a healthy family.

Batesville School District Parents as Teachers (PAT) - PAT provides guidance and support to families with young children through regular personal visits and group meetings, as well as with screening and referrals to additional services. The PAT model focuses on parent-child interaction, development-centered parenting, and family well-being.

Family Network—Family Network offers personalized parenting education and support for families in Washington County. Parent educators work intensively with families to improve pregnancy outcomes, promote children's health and development, and empower parents to make effective life choices.

Fort Smith Public Schools Parents as Teachers (PAT) - The PAT program provides parents with the information, training, support and encouragement they need to feel not only competent in helping their children develop, but to realize the crucial role they play as their child's first and most important teacher.

Ozark Mountain Health Network—As part of their services in Van Buren and Searcy counties, the OMHN operates the Young Moms/Healthy Families program. The program utilizes home visits and group sessions to teen parents how to become self-sufficient and able to provide a healthy and nurturing environment for their children.

Paces, Inc.—Paces serves young women aged 11-19 in Craighead County. They offer case management services and peer-led support groups. They strive to find a balance between individualized support for the mother while encouraging her to develop her own support network, personal resilience and independence.

Project FOCUS—FOCUS serves teens parents in Madison County. They place an emphasis on including family members in group meetings and home visitations as much as possible. This ensures that entire households are supportive and "on the same page" in regard to providing safe and healthy environments for children.

Support for Pregnant and Parenting Teens and Women—This program combines home visiting with peer group sessions and the services of collaborating organizations to create a supportive environment in which young mothers can give their children a healthy start in life. It serves families in Lincoln, Chicot and Desha counties.

Youth Sports, continued...

Adults should also remember that although they are spectators, they are also objects of observation. They can model appropriate behavior in their interactions with other adults and participants from all teams. They should refrain from:

- Booing or taunting
- Using profane language or gestures
- Yelling at or arguing with officials, parents or players
- Becoming personally invested in the outcome of play

Very few children who play youth sports will turn out to be world-class athletes. That's fine, because that probably isn't why they joined. As adults, our role is to support them in fulfilling the reasons they did join.

We can select programs that have a positive philosophy about sports. We can emphasize the development of skills, friendship and character over winning. We can ensure that our children have an opportunity to reap the many benefits of participating in a youth sports program.

The Seven “C’s” of Resilience

We can't prevent life's ups and downs from happening, but we can learn to become more resilient by changing the way we think about challenges and adversity. We can also help our children develop resiliency of their own. The following guidelines will help you recognize and build upon you and your child's abilities and inner resources.

Competence

Competence describes the feeling of knowing that you can handle a situation effectively. It is developed by:

- Learning to focus on individual strengths
- Recognizing the competencies of siblings individually and avoiding comparisons
- Correcting mistakes in the context of specific incidents, rather than generalizing
- Empowering decision making
- Being careful that your desire to protect your child doesn't mistakenly send a message that you don't think he or she is competent to handle things

Confidence

A child's belief in his own abilities comes with competence. Build confidence by:

- Recognizing when he or she has done well
- Clearly expressing the qualities exhibited, such as fairness, integrity, persistence, kindness, etc.
- Praising honestly about specific achievements, rather than falsely praising or over praising
- Understanding a child's ability and capacity, so he or she can be challenged, but not pushed to take on more than he or she can realistically handle

Connection

Developing close ties to family and community creates a sense of security and stability. Help your child make healthy connections by:

- Providing physical safety and emotional security within your home
- Allowing the expression of all emotions so that kids will be comfortable reaching out in all situations
- Addressing conflict openly to resolve problems. Strive to moderate strong emotions in a positive way.

- Sharing your time, one on one with a child and as a family
- Fostering healthy relationships that reinforce positive messages

Character

Morals and values help children determine right from wrong and to demonstrate a caring attitude toward others. To strengthen your child's character, start by:

- Demonstrating how actions and behaviors affect others
- Helping your child recognize himself as a caring person
- Avoiding racist or hateful statements or stereotypes
- Demonstrating the importance of community
- Sharing your feelings about spirituality or philosophy

Contributions

Children need to feel that the world is a better place because they are in it. Understanding the importance of personal contribution can serve as a source of purpose and motivation. Teach your child how to contribute by:

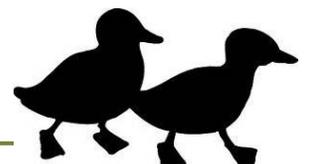
- Communicating to your child that many people in the world do not have what they need
- Stressing the importance of serving others by modeling generosity
- Creating opportunities for each child to contribute something meaningful in a specific way

Coping

Learning to cope effectively with stress will prepare your child to overcome life's challenges. Positive coping lessons include:

- Consistently modeling positive coping strategies of your own
- Guiding your child to develop positive and effective coping strategies
- Understanding that many risky or negative behaviors are attempts to act out against the stress

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RESOURCES

Child Safety

- Safe Kids USA has launched a nationwide information campaign on the dangers of hyperthermia (heat stroke).

Their web site includes a variety of tools you can use to help spread the message to never leave children alone in a vehicle. In addition to e-cards, links and widgets you can employ in your social media, they also have posters and flyers you can download and distribute.

www.safekids.org/safety-basics/safety-guide/kids-in-and-around-cars/never-leave-your-child-alone-tips.html

- For parents considering whether or not to leave their child home alone during the summer, the Child Welfare Information Gateway provides some helpful tips and resources to guide their decision.

<http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/homealone.cfm>



Seven C's, continued...

Control

Children who realize that they can control the outcomes of their decisions are more likely to realize that they have the ability to bounce back. Your child's understanding that he or she can make a difference further promotes competence and confidence. You can try to empower your child by:

- Helping your child to understand that life's events are not purely random and that most things that happen are the result of someone's choices or actions

Training Opportunities

• **Free Online Seminars**

Informational seminars on the *Talking About Touching*, *Second Step* and *Steps to Respect* programs offered by Committee for Children.

Check www.cfchildren.org for current dates and times.

• **Arkansas Head Start Association Institute**

July 20-22, 2011

Embassy Suites, Little Rock, AR

For more information call the Head Start office at 501-371-0740 or visit www.arheadstart.org

Notable Dates

Some fun and interesting dates to plan a parent group meeting or family activity around:

May 16—Wear Purple for Peace Day

June 6th—National Yo-Yo Day

June 9th—Donald Duck Day

June 26—National Chocolate Pudding Day

July 11—National Cheer Up the Lonely Day

July 21—National Tug-of-War Tournament Day

August 3—National Watermelon Day

August 6—Wiggle Your Toes Day

- Learning that discipline is about teaching, not punishing or controlling; using discipline to help your child understand that his actions produce certain consequences

The seven C's of resilience were identified by Kenneth Ginsburg, M.D., MS Ed, FAAP, pediatrician and author of *A Parent's Guide to Building Resilience in Children and Teens: Giving Your Child Roots and Wings*. Dr. Ginsburg emphasizes that you cannot guarantee your child's resilience, but you can show them that you believe in them and love them unconditionally as you both learn to negotiate the challenges your family faces.

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