

## Our Sport Psychologists Can...

Teach athletes psychological skills and mental toughness to achieve performance excellence.

Provide counseling to help athletes, coaches and parents achieve optimal mental health, enjoyment in sport and better performances.

Work with teams to develop leadership, communication and cohesion.

Consult with coaches to help them build championship teams and be the best leader possible.

Work with parents to help them provide the best support possible for their children as they pursue sport and competition.

Help individuals become more involved in sport, exercise, and physical activity to develop their physical health and psychological well-being.

Make presentations to teams, coaches, sport organizations, and parents on psychological skills, such as imagery, confidence, emotional control, attention/focus, goal setting, and pre-performance routines.



## Our Qualifications

Our professional staff's credentials include:

Members of the 2004-2008 United States Olympic Committee Sport Psychology Registry

AAASP Certified Sport Psychologist Consultants

Licensed Psychologists

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# A Guide to Being a Positive Youth Sport Parent



CENTER FOR SPORT PSYCHOLOGY  
AND PERFORMANCE EXCELLENCE

at the University of North Texas

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



## KIDS & SPORT PARENTING

- 1. Educate yourself about the game**— develop a basic understanding of the rules, techniques, tactics, and general physical demands of your children's sport so you can appreciate what they are doing, enjoy the games more, and talk about their experiences.
- 2. Understand and model appropriate behaviors**— you are a role model for your children, so be a positive cheerleader and fan at the games. Model how you want them to behave, even if a referee is bad or the other team is playing unfairly.
- 3. Encourage your children to talk to their coaches**— learning to communicate with an authority figure is a skill that your children will need for the rest of their lives. Help them feel confident in asking their coach for assistance, support, and information.
- 4. Monitor your children's nutritional and sleeping habits**—ensure that your children have the greatest chance to be successful both on and off the playing field. Proper sleep and nutrition, and adequate hydration are essential for your kids to excel.
- 5. Limit your use of incentives**—instead of motivating your children through external rewards, such as giving them a dollar for every point they score, help them develop an internal motivation to participate and work hard and an internal perspective through which they can evaluate their performances.
- 6. Remember that the game belongs to the players**— be empathic and supportive of the experiences and emotions your children have in sport, but remember that it is their time to shine, grow, and even make mistakes.
- 7. Communicate positively and openly with coaches**— make sure your message is clear, appropriate for the situation, and respectful. Talk to the coach when you are in a positive mood, not at a time in when you're upset. Remember, coaching is a difficult job, and youth sport coaches generally are volunteers, parents like yourselves, who want to help kids develop and learn.

**8. Keep the sport experience in its proper perspective**— treat the game as an opportunity to have fun and learn, and your child will as well. Although competing and winning are important to even younger kids, it is essential that you help them learn that, ultimately, sports are a game and not an indication of their worth.

**9. Positively reinforce your children's behaviors**— be positive in all aspects of your children's sport experiences. Focus on all that they do well and not on the mistakes they make (their coaches will work with them to correct those).

**10. Support your children's entire team**— be positive not only toward your own children, but towards all the kids on the team. Encouraging everyone to play well and to have fun will not only make the team more cohesive, it will make your children's experiences more enjoyable.

## KIDS & COMPETITION

Kids do love to compete (and win!), but winning is not the most important thing for younger athletes.

To develop and set the stage for being a successful athlete, kids need to first learn the FUNDamentals of the sport. In youth sport, the focus should be on learning new skills, being physically active, and spending time with friends.

As kids get older and have played for several years, the focus can shift to learning how to compete (not necessarily win), how to work better as a team, and how to implement some basic strategies/plays. Pushing winning or competing on children when they aren't ready can contribute to their dropping out of sport.

***"Friendships born on the field of athletic strife are the real gold of competition. Awards become corroded, friends gather no dust."***

**Jesse Owens, Olympic Champion**

## KIDS & CHARACTER

Sport has the **POTENTIAL** to help kids develop in the following ways:

**Socially**- learn to communicate, resolve conflicts  
**Ethically**— learn about fair play, being a good sport  
**Emotionally**— manage emotions, develop empathy  
**Psychologically**— develop self-confidence, optimism

Whether this occurs depends on the environment that is created by coaches and parents. For young athletes (particularly ages 5-10) having FUN is the number one priority, and a sure way to keep them involved in sport and help them develop athletically and personally. Here are some ways you can create a fun environment:

- 1. Focus on learning new skills and improving existing ones** – kids want to learn new things. So talk with them about what their coaches are teaching them, provide encouragement as they try new things, and give them opportunities to practice at home.
- 2. Plan times for fun** – if possible, get to practices early and let the kids stay a little bit after ...those are often the times when kids just hang out and have fun with each other.
- 3. Set and work toward realistic goals** – help your children set age-appropriate goals for the season, with the focus on improving performances, learning new skills, and cooperating with teammates.
- 4. Share decision-making** – ask your children about what sports they want to play and give them opportunities to try different sports, particularly when they are young. Children do not need to specialize in one sport too early in their lives.
- 5. Be supportive and enthusiastic** – catch them doing things right at practices and competitions! If they make a mistake, let them know that it is OK and encourage them to keep trying.
- 6. Foster a love of physical activity** – model physical activity yourself and be positive about their involvement in sport...focus on how much FUN it is.