

Responding to Your Child's Performance

Part of the process of maximizing your child's youth sport experience is learning how to respond to your child's performance. Even parents with the best of intentions can unknowingly create a stressful environment for their child by responding poorly to a child's performance. For example, a parent who misses a game and picks up the child may immediately ask, "**Did you win?**" Although said with the intention of showing interest in your child, this statement creates the perception that your love and attention are dependent upon your child's performance. Over time, this can create a stressful environment for your child. As a parent, it is important to make sure that your child knows that your love for him/her is unconditional. To do this, show interest in your child by asking questions like, "**Did you have fun?**" or "**How did you play?**" You can also ask, "**What was the best part of the game?**" Your child may tell you if the team won or lost through this interaction without you specifically asking. Younger children may not actually know if they won or lost because they have yet to develop the ability to keep score. With children of this age, the perception of a win or loss is often dependent on what the adults around them say or the adults' behavior.

Often the ride home can be considered the worst 20 minutes in the youth sport experience. During this time, families typically reflect on the day's practice or game. Unfortunately, this can be an intense and difficult experience for the child when issues of game play, decisions, sportsmanship and hustle are discussed. Below are some tips that can help you maximize your child's youth sport experience:

- Focus on the positives! Remember that having fun and being with friends are most important to kids.
- Accept your child's disappointments and triumphs. Keep things in perspective. In the grand scope of your child's sporting future, a single win or loss holds little meaning.
- Discuss sportsmanship issues at home rather than in the vehicle. If your child has performed in an unsportsmanlike manner, talk about it at home. The confined space within a vehicle increases the stress response in children because they are unable to flee. Additionally, discussions about sportsmanship can become heated and may distract you while driving.
- Remember that your child is not a miniature adult or a professional athlete.
- Youth sport is your child's experience. Avoid reliving your sporting past through your child.
- If you find yourself losing perspective, take a step back and ask yourself these questions:
 1. What is the purpose of youth sport?
 2. What will my conversations with my child be like when we reflect on his/her youth sport experience 15-25 years from now?
 3. What are my values? Does my behavior consistently reflect my values?

