

Practice The Golden Rule In Youth Sports

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Chances are you and your kids have witnessed good sportsmanship: soccer players trading jerseys after the game, captains meeting at mid-field to shake hands, or players lining up for post-game high fives.

And when we think of "sportsmanship", we oftentimes think of these moments and the idea that we should respect our opponents, whether we win or lose. It's often the life lesson we hope our kids gain from playing youth sports.

But how do you teach your kids to respect opponents? One of the best ways might be the idea of "The Golden Rule": *treat others the way you want to be treated*. The Golden Rule is easy to remember but may be a bit harder to teach and follow. Try these helpful tips to start the conversation with your kids about The Golden Rule and respecting their opponents.

Develop a Top 10 List

Sit down with your youth athlete and create a Top 10 List of characteristics that are part of The Golden Rule in youth sports. Words could include things like "play by the rules", "be kind/nice", etc. Then make a poster and hang it on the fridge at home or post it up in the locker room or gym at school. The poster serves as an important reminder to practice these efforts every day.

Reward Desired Behavior

Kids respond positively to praise – and then continuously seek more of that praise. Your athletes are more likely to repeat behaviors that respect opponents when they are recognized and rewarded for those behaviors. Helmet stickers, a Golden T-Shirt Award (given weekly), or a Gold Cap Award are just a few of the ways that you can 'call out' players who demonstrate respect for an opponent during a game. Also, don't forget to use the words and principles of good sportsmanship when you praise kids for their behavior. For example:

"You showed a lot of *kindness* toward the player on the other team when he fell and hurt himself. That was very *thoughtful* of you."

Positive Teachable Moments

It happens. Your child refuses to shake an opponent's hand after a loss. Or she commits a dirty foul. Your goal is not to shame or lecture, but to really help your youth athlete learn and grow. Help guide them through the incident so that they can begin to use their own judgment skills to see the error of their ways. Start by asking why they behaved the way they did and acknowledge their feelings ("it *does* stink to lose!"). Then, talk about how their actions made their opponent feel and recognize when they understand this ("I'm glad you understand how they might feel.").

Also, plan a "do-over" when possible, giving your athlete the opportunity to apologize and practice what they learned. Don't forget to give praise when their do-over is done, highlighting that they practiced good sportsmanship.

Demonstrate Sportsmanship

We can't ask our kids to practice The Golden Rule if they don't see us doing it in the stands or when we're at home talking about the game. As a fan, show the same respect for opponents that you hope to see from your children: shake the hands of the parents of the opposing team after the game; congratulate players and parents alike with a "good game"; show empathy and compassion for opponents; and praise players and coaches playing by

the rules, especially when the rules are not in their favor (“That was really a classy move when Number 10 raised his hand to admit he had tipped the ball out.”)

Teaching good sportsmanship starts with helping youth athletes understand why and how to respect their opponents. You’ll be surprised how easy it is for kids to see the importance of The Golden Rule in sports, and how those lessons can translate into life outside the game.

The Liberty Mutual Insurance Play Positive™ program promotes good sportsmanship in youth sports so that our kids can have the fun and positive experience they deserve. We believe kids can learn valuable life lessons when coaches and parents come together to support doing the right thing on and off the field.

In an effort to benefit millions of youth athletes, parents and coaches, this article is among a series created exclusively for the Liberty Mutual Insurance Play Positive™ program.

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