

# THE PARENT LETTER



About Our Kids:  
A Letter for Parents by the  
NYU Child Study Center

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## **SPORTS: MORE THAN JUST FUN**

### **Do sports make a difference in the lives of kids?**

Sports are great fun, and they're also good for kids in many other ways. Kids who play sports build strong bodies, acquire skills, learn how to get along with others, how to handle winning and losing, how to solve problems and develop a sense of competence and solid self-esteem. In addition, it has been shown that kids who play sports have less anxiety and depression and are less likely to become involved in risky behaviors such as sex and drugs.

### **How to make your child's sports experience successful**

- Introduce your child to a sport appropriate for his or her interests. For the young child don't focus on rules, keeping score or competition. A beginning sport should get the child using her body and moving and equipment should be easy to handle. School age children enjoy games with rules, and they are concerned about how they are judged by others. Teamwork helps them master skills and learn about cooperation, taking turns, and respecting their peers. For adolescents sports provide further opportunities to use their abilities in communication, negotiation and leadership.
- Encourage your child to try a number of sports and not to think of playing competitively until middle school. Ideally the best sports program for kids, starting at about the age of 10, would be one individual sport and one team sport per academic year.
- Be sure the physical requirements of the sport are within the capabilities of your child. Early specialization and too much practice and play may result in injuries due to overuse of certain parts of the body.
- Remember, organized team sports are not for all children. Children have many other options; they can be encouraged to try sports such as bowling, golf, swimming, tennis, gymnastics, fencing, or martial arts.

### **How to find a good sports program**

Check out programs available in school, your city's parks and recreation department, religious organizations, civic clubs and children's clubs. For team sports, find out about the league, its leaders and coaches. If you can, volunteer your time. Become informed about the coach's style and sports philosophy, and then determine if it's a good match for your child. Having a positive relationship with a coach is very special, and coaches can instill a sense of pride and competence. Make sure that the coach gives a higher priority to enjoyment and to skill mastery than to winning above all else.

### **How to be an involved sports parent**

- Realize that every kid makes mistakes and don't compare your child to others.
- Provide positive support such as coaching and encouragement to practice.
- Encourage your child to be responsible, to respect teammates, coaches and opponents.
- Find something to praise; children will work harder to please than to avoid punishment. Guard against overpraise, however, since too much praise loses its meaning.
- Cooperate with coaches by making sure your child is present and on time at all games and practice sessions with the appropriate equipment.
- Be tolerant of losses and pleased with wins, and remember that coping with winning and losing is part of learning the lessons of life.

- Listen to your child and if his interest wanes, investigate the reasons and try to remedy them before allowing him to drop the activity.

### **Be aware of some common pitfalls**

- Kids can become overly involved and neglect other parts of their lives. For some kids, sports time commitments have become so demanding that time for unstructured play has been cut in half. To achieve a balance, encourage children to expand their interests and talents in other areas and to develop friendships in addition to sports friendships.
- Parents too can become overly involved. Some parents get so caught up in their children's sports that they get into arguments and become inappropriately aggressive when attending their kid's sports event. Some parents insist that their child stay in the game even when he is injured or does not feel well. Stress the importance of fair tactics no matter whether the team is winning or losing. Let your child know that parental love and approval do not depend on her performance.

Sports, whether individual or team, help children's social, emotional and physical development and are a source of satisfaction throughout life. The benefits of sports are far more numerous than the negatives, so it's up to parents, schools and others involved with children to make sports a successful and pleasurable experience.

**Written and developed by Marianne Engle, Ph.D. and the staff of the NYU Child Study Center.**

### **ABOUT THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER**

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the research, prevention and treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers evaluation and treatment for children and teenagers with anxiety, depression, learning or attention difficulties, neuropsychiatric problems, and trauma and stress related symptoms.

We offer a limited number of clinical studies at no cost for specific disorders and age groups. To see if your child would be appropriate for one of these studies, please call (212) 263-8916.

The NYU Child Study Center also offers workshops and lectures for parents, educators and mental health professionals on a variety of mental health and parenting topics. The Family Education Series consists of 13 informative workshops focused on child behavioral and attentional difficulties. To learn more or to request a speaker, please call (212) 263-8861.

For further information, guidelines and practical suggestions on child mental health and parenting issues, please visit the NYU Child Study Center's website, [AboutOurKids.org](http://AboutOurKids.org).

**AboutOurKids.org**  
THE NYU CHILD STUDY CENTER ONLINE

**Changing the Face of Child Mental Health**  
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