



Developing Sportsmanship

**A Resource
For Preparing Youth And Their Families
For Participation in Competitive Programs and Events**

Developing Sportsmanship

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Introduction

The development of sportsmanship is an important part of youth development. To become contributing, competent, caring, capable adults, youth must develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and aspirations of sportsmanship. Youth must become fair and generous competitors, good losers and graceful winners.

At one time, sportsmanship was taught and reinforced within families to such an extent that it was unnecessary to teach it elsewhere. Incidents of poor sportsmanship in youth programs were rare and usually resulted in parental and community censure of offenders, with no negative impact on the program or on the large majority of participants who demonstrated good sportsmanship.

Times have changed. Media reports about incidents of poor sportsmanship by youth and their families have become common. Youth program professionals and volunteers are seeing a troubling decline in sportsmanship by participants and spectators at competitive events and in other settings. This decline in sportsmanship has damaged the once-sterling reputations of many respected youth programs, and caused some opportunities to be scaled back or cancelled. If left unchecked, poor sportsmanship can have major long-term negative impacts on youth programs and the opportunities we provide for young people.

Of course, the decline in sportsmanship extends beyond youth programs. But this is little comfort in an era when champions in tennis and ice skating are assaulted by rivals' fans and associates, a Little League season is cancelled due to parents' bad sportsmanship, titles are forfeited when cheating is discovered, professional games are called off when "fans" pelt the field, and "woofing" and "dissing" are considered acceptable behavior by many spectators.

An increasing number of youth and families are coming to our programs without: 1) knowledge about sportsmanship, 2) attitudes that sportsmanship is important, 3) skill or experience in sportsmanship, or 4) the desire to show sportsmanship. Therefore, volunteers and professionals must do our part to enable youth and their families to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations of sportsmanship.

Like many things in youth programs, sportsmanship is "learned by doing". "Learning by doing" is different from "sinking or swimming". We do not teach children to swim by tossing them in a deep lake to figure out by themselves how to get to shore. Instead, we:

1. demonstrate simple swimming strokes for them,
2. explain the basic techniques,
3. hold them up and help them in learning through practice in the shallow end of a clear pool, and
4. continue coaching them as they practice and master the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and aspirations needed for survival and enjoyment in the deepest and most murky water.

Sportsmanship is taught the same way. Adults and teen leaders must: 1) demonstrate sportsmanship ourselves, 2) explain what is expected, 3) provide orientation and practice in sportsmanship-like behaviors as youth prepare for and participate in programs, and 4) continue coaching, encouraging, correcting, and teaching for youth and their families to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations of sportsmanship needed for long-term success, happiness, satisfaction.

Many programs and events provide opportunities for youth and their families to learn and develop sportsmanship. However, most incidents of un-sportsmanship-like behavior are associated with competitive activities. Therefore, this resource is provided for volunteers and teen leaders to use providing the information, orientation and practice in sportsmanship youth and their families need as they prepare for competitive programs and experiences.

Developing Sportsmanship

What is Sportsmanship?

What is sportsmanship? *Webster's Third International Dictionary* defines sportsmanship and the elements of sportsmanship this way:

sportsmanship:	conduct becoming to an individual involving fair and honest competition, courteous relations and graceful acceptance of results
becoming conduct:	a mode or standard of personal behavior, especially as based on moral principles; behavior in a particular situation
fairness:	the quality or state of being honest and just; free from injustice, prejudice or favoritism; conforming to codes or rules of a competitive activity
honesty:	fairness and straightforwardness of conduct; integrity; adherence to the facts; freedom from deception; truthfulness; sincerity; of unquestionable authenticity; genuine; real; reputable
competition:	seeking to gain what another is seeking to gain at the same time, usually under fair or equitable rules of circumstances; a common struggle for the same object; a contest or trial between contestants
courtesy/courteous:	well-mannered conduct showing respect and consideration of others
relations:	dealings; connections; affairs; state of affairs existing between those having dealings or relationships
grace/graceful:	disposition to kindness, favor, or compassion; the display of kindly treatment; acting with the intention of pleasing; thoughtfulness
acceptance:	the act of accepting; to take without protest; to endure or tolerate with patience; to regard as proper, suitable, or normal; acknowledge as appropriate, permissible or inevitable; agree to consequences, effects, or conclusions; decisions or resolutions; that which is achieved, obtained, or brought about through a process or competition.

Objectives: What We Want To Accomplish

The ultimate objective is for all youth to become fair and generous competitors, good losers, and graceful winners. By using the information and materials provided in this resource, volunteers, teen leaders, and professionals will be more effective in helping youth and their families develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and aspirations of sportsmanship they need to achieve this objective.

Why Help Youth and Their Families Develop Sportsmanship?

Why should adult and teen leaders be concerned with developing sportsmanship? Three reasons are:

1. *Youth programs are easier to conduct and are more positive experiences for everyone involved if good sportsmanship is demonstrated.* This is obvious.
2. *The development of sportsmanship is an important part of youth development.* Youth and adults who develop and show good sportsmanship get along better, and are much more successful on a long-term basis in becoming self-directing, productive, contributing, competent, caring, capable adults, than are those whose behavior is un-sportsmanship-like.
3. *Sportsmanship is one of the key elements of civilized society.* Those who think of the "big picture" know the reasons for developing sportsmanship extend beyond an individual, a community, or a program. When societies allow sportsmanship to decline, their civilizations also decline.

Four Steps In Developing Sportsmanship

Sportsmanship is conduct becoming to an individual involving fair and honest competition, courteous relations and graceful acceptance of results. The four steps in developing sportsmanship are: 1) demonstrate sportsmanship ourselves, 2) explain what is expected, 3) provide orientation and practice in sportsmanship-like behaviors as youth prepare for and participate in programs, and 4) continue coaching, encouraging, correcting, and teaching for youth and their families to develop sportsmanship. Here are tips for effectiveness in each of the four steps:

Step 1. Demonstrate Sportsmanship

It is important for volunteers, coaches, teen leaders, and professionals to demonstrate sportsmanship. Youth and their families learn from the example we provide. We should always meet and exceed the expectations outlined in the hand-outs "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*", "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" and "*Sportsmanship For Spectators*". Here are some examples of additional ways to demonstrate sportsmanship:

1. Find out what the policies, rules, and procedures are for the programs in which your youth will be participating. Accept and support them, even if you do not agree with all of them. Behave as you hope your youth and their families will behave.
2. If you and the youth with whom you work disagree with something, be polite in expressing your concern. Suggest alternatives to "make the best better" to the appropriate policy makers and officials. Express appreciation if changes you suggest are made.
3. Do not be a "sore loser" when things do not go your way. Gracefully accept the situation and work positively with your youth to do their best under existing policies, rules, and procedures.

Step 2. Explain What Is Expected

It is important to explain the policies, rules, and procedures to youth and their families, and make sure everyone follows them. Review what will happen and what to expect at each of the events in which they plan to participate. Additional ideas for explaining sportsmanship expectations include:

1. Have a special orientation meeting with all your youth and their families, and do some of the suggested activities listed in the next section. If such a meeting is not possible, distribute and review with your youth the "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*" hand-out, and send the brochure "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" home with them for their families to read.
2. Work with youth so that they can perform as well as possible. Make suggestions for how they can improve before they compete. One idea is to have a "mock event" for your group. Make sure youth know their strengths and areas in which improvement is needed. It is much easier for kids (and parents!) to hear a judge or event official say that they need to study something or practice a technique more when they are already aware of such problems.
3. When youth or their families want to do something that is outside the policies, rules, procedures and sportsmanship guidelines, let them know what the consequences will be and stop them. If they persist, do your part to make sure the consequences come to pass.

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Step 3. Help Youth and Their Families During Competitive Programs

Competitive programs abound with "teachable moments" for developing sportsmanship. It is important for volunteers, coaches, teen leaders, professionals, and others to keep attuned to the participants and spectators, and provide assistance in exhibiting sportsmanship as needed. Here are some tips:

1. When possible, be present at the programs and events in which your youth are participating.
2. Encourage youth to enjoy themselves and learn as much as they can.
3. Visit with parents about how the event is organized, and what the judges and officials are looking for.
4. Encourage younger siblings to take part in similar opportunities when they are old enough.
5. Visit with youth after they participate and help them learn from their experience. Discuss what they did well, what they might have improved upon, and ideas to try in the future.
6. Congratulate and cheer for those who won or performed better than they expected, and encourage them to be gracious towards others and not "show off" or get conceited.
7. Console those who lost or who did not perform as well as they had hoped. Explain that learning to be a good loser is one of the most difficult and most important abilities we ever develop. Help them understand that in competitive situations there are almost always more "losers" than "winners" just as in real life only one person gets a job for which ten may interview. (This may not seem helpful at the time, but it gives youth something to think about later in accepting the disappointment.)
8. Discuss how they can improve their performance in the future.
9. Do not permit your youth or their families to exhibit poor sportsmanship. Stop any complaining, blaming, or excuse-giving as soon as it starts. Help them understand why things are as they are.
10. Review the expectations of sportsmanship as needed. Recognize and praise good sportsmanship.

Step 4. Work With Youth and Their Families Following Competitive Programs

Continue to work with participants and their families after events "to make the best better" for the future. Shortcomings and criticisms should be handled and dealt with in private. Successes and progress should be recognized publicly. Have a follow-up meeting or meetings to celebrate successes, talk about areas for improvement, and begin plans for the future.

Sportsmanship Development Activities To Do With Youth And Their Families

Activity 1 - Basic Sportsmanship Expectations

Time Required: 15 minutes

Audience: Youth / Families

Materials Needed:

- One "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*" hand-out per youth
- One "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" hand-out per family
- Extra paper & pencils for note-taking

What To Do:

1. Briefly introduce the topic, define what is meant by the term "sportsmanship", and discuss why it is important for the youth and their families. Highlight some of the relevant points from pages 2-4. Use examples from the experiences of the young people themselves or examples from your own experiences to explain why the topic is important.

Another idea for illustrating the importance of the topic is to share current news stories and articles about recent sportsmanship incidents. Do an internet search (or have participants do one) using the name of your program and "sportsmanship" as search words. Share the articles that you think would be of most interest to your participants. Discuss how many incidents of poor sportsmanship are reported, vs. the number of reports you find about good sportsmanship.

Talk about why good sportsmanship is important, and why poor sportsmanship is a problem.

2. Distribute the "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*" hand-outs.
3. Review the main points by having youth take turns reading each of the suggestions listed, and discussing each item. Make sure youth understand completely what is meant by each item. Ask for personal examples of how they can apply the tips as they participate in their events. Also ask for examples of how someone might act if she/he used un-sportsmanship-like behavior, to help youth understand the difference.
4. Distribute the "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" hand-out to be taken home to each family. Ask youth to give the brochure to their parents or other supporter who will be with them at upcoming competitive programs, and ask them to read it before the event.
5. Ask if there are any questions and provide appropriate responses.
6. Ask participants to each list two or three things they think are important to remember as they plan to show good sportsmanship in upcoming competitions.
7. Summarize by briefly reviewing how your youth are expected to behave before, during, and after the upcoming competitive programs and events.

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Activity 2 - Sportsmanship Expectations

Time Required: 30 - 60 minutes

Audience: Youth And Their Families

Materials Needed:

- "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*" hand-outs
- "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" hand-outs
- Extra paper & pencils for note-taking

What To Do:

1. Briefly introduce the topic, define what is meant by the term "sportsmanship", and discuss why sportsmanship is important for the youth of the group and their families. Highlight some of the relevant points from pages 1-3. Use examples from your own and the young people's experiences to explain why the topic is important.
2. Share current news stories and articles about recent sportsmanship incidents. Do an internet search (or have participants do one) using the name of your program and "sportsmanship" as search words. Share the articles that you think would be of most interest to participants, and discuss the incidents of poor sportsmanship which are reported, vs. the number of reports about good sportsmanship. Talk about why good sportsmanship is important, and why poor sportsmanship is a problem.
3. Ask youth to share an example or two of sportsmanship-like and un-sportsmanship-like behavior they have observed. For examples of un-sportsmanship-like behavior, ask them to tell what could have been done differently for the behavior to demonstrate better sportsmanship.
4. Distribute one "*Sportsmanship Expectations For Youth Participants*" hand-out to each participant. Review the main points of the brochure by having youth take turns reading each of the suggestions listed, and discussing each item.
5. Make sure everyone understands completely what is meant by each item. Have youth role-play for the group examples of good sportsmanship and poor sportsmanship for each item. Use the examples provided to set the stage for the role-plays, make up some of your own, or ask the youth to develop their own situations to illustrate the points.

Role Plays About Conduct

Role Play 1 - High Standards of Behavior

One youth acts as the person registering people for the event. Another youth demonstrates how you should act when you arrive at the event and approach the registration area. Be pleasant, ask questions politely, say please and thank you.

Role Play 2 - Poor Behavior

One youth acts as the person registering people for the event. Another youth demonstrates how you should NOT act when you arrive at the event and approach the registration area (fuss about how your parents made you late, complain that the line is too long, start a quarrel with your sister, argue about where you are supposed to set up your display, etc).

Role Plays About Fairness

Role Play 3 - Showing Sportsmanship Through Fairness

One youth acts as a news reporter. Another youth demonstrates how you should act in explaining to a new reporter what youth in your event did. Explain the contest requirements and the criteria being used in judging the event. Talk fairly about the other participants and what they did.

Role Play 4 - Poor Sportsmanship: Being Unfair

One youth acts as a news reporter. Another youth demonstrates how you should NOT act in explaining to a news reporter what youth in your event did. Brag about what the kids in your group did, but make fun of what kids from other groups did. Or complain that you didn't have as much time to prepare or practice as the other kids did (when in fact everyone had the same 24 hours per day, 7 days per week).

Role Plays About Honesty

Role Play 5 - Showing Sportsmanship Through Honesty

One youth acts as the judge or event official. Another youth demonstrates how you should act in explaining honestly to the judge/official what you did in preparing the things you are exhibiting.

Role Play 6 - Poor Sportsmanship: Being Dishonest

One youth acts as the judge. Another youth demonstrates an example of cheating or dishonesty in explaining to the judge what you did. For example, "borrow" someone else's project and try to pass it off as your own. Or show something that is obviously made from a kit or purchased, and tell the judge not only did you make it, but you even designed the pattern and made the material yourself! Or cheat in little ways, such as saying that you are 13 so you can compete in a junior class, when you are actually 14. Better yet, think of a way that someone might actually try to cheat in your event, and act it out for your group.

Role Plays About Competition

Role Play 7 - Showing Sportsmanship in Competition

Two youth role play competitors being good sports as they sit side-by-side in a competition. Have a nice conversation with each other. Explain what you did in preparing for the event, compliment one another for things that were done well, and make helpful suggestions for how you might improve.

Role Play 8 - Showing Poor Sportsmanship in Competition

Two youth role play competitors sitting side-by-side in a competition as it should NOT be done. Have a mean-spirited conversation with each other. Try to convince the other person to change something that would in actuality make their performance look worse to judges and officials.

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Role Plays About Courtesy

Role Play 9 - Showing Courtesy

One youth plays the part of the program organizer. Another youth plays the part of a participant who shows courtesy in asking if water could be brought in or if part of the group could be excused to get a drink since the weather is so hot.

Role Play 10 - Poor Sportsmanship: Being Rude

One youth plays the part of the program organizer. Another youth plays the part of a participant who is rude in asking to be excused. Tell the organizer your parents think she is an idiot for scheduling the program on such a hot day, say you and your buddies will just walk out if something is not done to cool the place down immediately, etc.

Role Play 11 - Showing Sportsmanship in Relating to Others

One youth plays a spectator who wants to talk with a participant about the event. Another youth plays a participant who shows sportsmanship in responding to the spectator's questions and excusing yourself when it's time to compete.

Role Play 12 - Being Un-Sportsmanship-Like in Relating to Others

One youth plays a spectator who wants to talk with a participant about the event. Another youth plays the part of a participant who LACKS sportsmanship in responding to the spectator's questions. Sarcastically tell the person if they read the local newspaper once in awhile they would know the answers to their dumb questions...tell him/her you're just too busy to bother with anybody who is not an official, etc.

Role Plays About Graceful Acceptance of Results

Role Play 13 - Behaving Gracefully as an Individual

One youth acts friendly, thoughtful, and kind in explaining what the judges said during their judging interview. Explain that they started off with easy questions that helped you feel at ease, and then moved on to tougher questions which made you think. Discuss how you didn't know the answers to some questions, and close with comments about what you learned and what you liked about the experience.

Role Play 14 - Behaving Disgracefully as an Individual

Another youth throws a tantrum in explaining what the judges said during the interview. Fuss that they started off with easy questions, and then blind-sided you with tough questions that nobody could possibly answer! Say your advisor or coach should have made sure that you knew what was going to be asked, and blame somebody else for the fact that you did not win.

Role Play 15 - Showing Sportsmanship in Accepting Results as a Family

One youth plays an announcer of winners. Another youth plays a responsible parent. Someone else plays a competitor who shows sportsmanship in accepting results.

When the winners are announced, the "parent" shows concern with a statement such as, "I hoped YOU would win this year...I wonder why they picked those other kids?" The "competitor" responds with comments that show acceptance such as, "They had a nice project", "They performed really well", "I talked with them...they studied hard and knew their stuff", or "I do not know, but the judge's questions were thorough...I bet they did better in their interviews than I did in mine", etc. The "parent" responds with appropriate comments such as, "Maybe so"... "Next time, would you like me to quiz you beforehand?", and "I'm proud of you for realizing that no one can always be the best."

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Role Play 16 - Showing Poor Sportsmanship in Accepting Results as a Family

One youth plays an announcer of winners. Another youth plays a parent who thinks his/her main job is to be an advocate for his/her child. Someone else plays a competitor who lacks sportsmanship in accepting results.

When the winners are announced, the "parent" shows concern with a statement to the "competitor" such as, "I hoped YOU would win this year...I wonder why they picked those other kids?" The "competitor" responds with unsportsmanship-like comments that downplay the results such as, "I do not know, but nobody could have studied harder than me...They probably cheated...I was gyped!", "It's not fair! After I didn't know the answers to those two questions, the judge didn't ask me anything else, and she spent ten minutes each talking to the kids who won!", and "If I had spent as much money as the winners, I could have won, too!" The "parent" gets riled and marches the participant up to the announcer to protest the results in a fit of anger.

3. After each role play is presented, ask the group to reflect on the important points that should be remembered from the presentations. Ask them questions to facilitate the reflection process such as:
 - What were the main points covered in this set of role plays?
 - How likely is it that someone might behave this way in a real competition? What parts were realistic, and what parts were unrealistic?
 - What should you do if someone behaved this way during one of your events?
 - How could the situation be handled better in real life?
 - Have you ever been tempted to act this way? What are your suggestions for keeping the situation under control and being a good sport?
 - What are some things that you will do to show good sportsmanship at upcoming events?
6. Distribute the "*Sportsmanship For Parents & Supporters*" hand-out. Ask for examples of how participants, their parents, and their supporters can apply the tips.
7. Ask youth to brainstorm a "wish list" for how they wish their parents would act at their events. Ask parents to compile a similar "wish list" for how they wish their children would act at the same events. Then compare the two lists in an open, friendly, honest discussion.
8. Ask if there are questions and provide appropriate responses.
9. Summarize by briefly reviewing the major points about how youth and their parents and supporters are expected to behave before, during, and after the upcoming competitive programs and events.

Measuring Success: An Evaluation Checklist

Directions: Complete the following checklist after youth participate in competitive programs to evaluate the degree of sportsmanship exhibited, and to determine where improvements are needed. Check "yes" or "no" as appropriate, and list problem areas and concerns to be addressed in the space provided.

YES NO

___ ___ Did parents demonstrate sportsmanship and require their children to demonstrate sportsmanship before, during, and following the event?

Did youth participants...

___ ___ demonstrate and maintain high standards of personal behavior and conduct which were becoming to them as individuals and as representatives of their families, groups, communities, and the program?

___ ___ behave honestly?

___ ___ act fairly?

___ ___ show sportsmanship during the competition itself?

___ ___ show courtesy and kindness?

___ ___ relate well to others?

___ ___ gracefully accept the results?

Comments, Problem Areas, and Concerns To Be Addressed In The Future:

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