



A publication provided by  
Boone County Step Ahead  
May, 2004

### **Making Youth Sports a Positive Experience**

Source: Penn State University CES

Sports can be a fun and engaging way for children and youth to learn some important lessons about life. Studies suggest that participation in sports can be very beneficial, fostering responsible social behaviors, greater academic success, and an appreciation of personal health and fitness. Participating on a team also can give children an important sense of belonging.

The atmosphere set by organizations, parents, and coaches is a major factor in determining whether or not children will have a positive experience in a sports program. A “win-at-all-cost” atmosphere can be harmful to a developing youth. Few children possess the talent to play competitive sports at the highest level – most will not grow up to be professional athletes. Therefore, the primary goals of youth sports are to foster the development of general physical competence and to promote physical activity, fun, life skills, sportsmanship, and good health.

Sports that foster personal competence help youth develop their abilities to do life planning, to be self-reliant, and to seek the resources of others when needed.

Sports are opportunities for children to learn; they provide a “practice field” for life. For youth, participating in sports may develop teamwork, leadership, self-confidence, self-discipline, and coping skills. Sports also teach youth about sportsmanlike behaviors and respect for authority.

Participation in sports also has the potential to be a negative experience for youth, depending on the atmosphere created by the coaches, parents and the organization’s philosophy. A lack of positive role models and pressures to perform do not create a positive atmosphere.

Parents can be great role models. Here are some recommendations:

- Encourage your child to try various physical activities.
- Encourage your child to play because her/she enjoys it, not because it may get them a scholarship.
- Focus more on skill mastery and cooperation and less on winning.
- Communicate with your child’s coaches.
- Focus on teaching life skills.
- Focus on supporting your child.

### **Setting Limits and Standing Firm**

Source: Ohio State University Extension

What’s the one thing that you can give to your child and you will never hear them say – “Oh, thanks. I really needed that!”? The answer is limits. So what are limits and why are they so important in parenting? Let’s explore.

Limits are specific behavioral expectations parents set for their children. Setting limits defines the boundaries for acceptable behavior. Parents show their love, concern, and willingness to parent children when they set and use reasonable limits. But there is something funny about limits – children will never say they want/need/like them. However, children need clear, reasonable limits just as much as they need food and shelter. Limits are at the foundation of parenting responsibility.

There are two behaviors we see from children reared without limits. Some children will withdraw, too frightened to test the boundaries by themselves. Other children will deliberately misbehave to see who is watching to step in and provide the limit.

It has been said that “if a little bit is good, then more of it is better.” That does not apply to setting and using limits. Having too many limits is stifling and prevents a child from learning on his/her own. There are four functions of limits. Limits protect people from physical harm, protect property, prevent psychological harm, and promote respect for others. Reviewing these functions will help parents decide if a new limit needs to be set and if an old limit is still a reasonable one. Let’s look closer at setting limits.

### ***“Limit Your Limits”***

Limits must reflect your deeply held values. This conviction is what you draw on every time the limit is broken/tested, and you must enforce.

### ***Set Reasonable Limits***

Reasonable means limits that allow children to succeed.

### ***Clear and Positive***

Limits tell children what to do and how well it should be done (the standard). Children who understand the limits are much more likely to assume responsibility for their actions.

### ***Consistent***

Inconsistently enforced limits are very confusing to children. Parents should discuss and agree on limits before they are presented to the children so there is a consistent response.

### ***Adapting***

Expecting children to treat one another’s possessions carefully is a reasonable limit at any age. Other limits should be changed as children grow older.

### ***Input***

Your children often have wonderful ideas and opinions about limits. By involving them in “limit discussions”, parents are more likely to gain their children’s cooperation in meeting the limit.

### ***Whys***

Explain the “why” behind the limit. Explanations make sense only if the limits are reasonable, clear, positive, enforceable, and very dear to values and convictions.

Children are going to “try” the limit, and parents must be willing to stand tough. In testing the limit, children are testing parental commitment to their word. Children want their parents to love them enough to stand up for their deepest beliefs consistently.