

Positive Interactions in Youth Sport

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Why Talk About Youth Sport?

Of the estimated 60 million boys and girls who participate in youth sport, roughly one-third drop out of sport each year, and up to 70% drop out by adolescence. Youth athletes report “having fun” as the number-one reason for participating in youth sport (Visek, Mannix, DiPietro, Achrati, McDonnell, & Harris, 2015). Treating youth athletes like professionals by overemphasizing winning is a quick way to reduce their enjoyment in sport and increase competition anxiety and drop-out (O’Rourke, Smith, Smoll, & Cumming, 2011). A positive sport environment shaped by coaches and parents can increase the likelihood that young athletes realize the full benefits of youth sport.

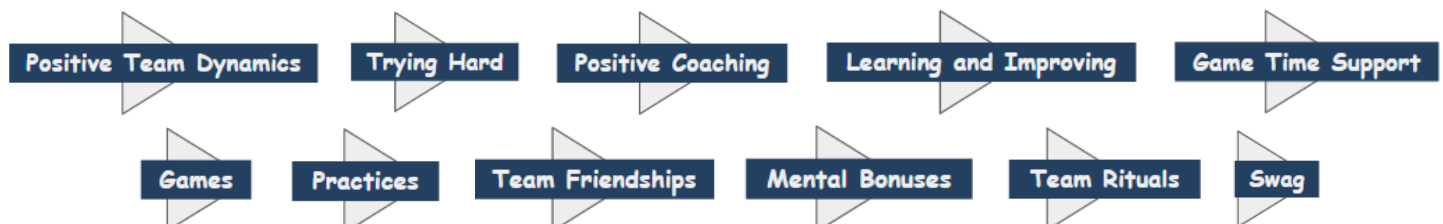
How Can We Facilitate Positive Interactions in Youth Sport?

Positive interactions within the “Athletic Triangle” (athlete, coach, and parent), can make youth sport a positive social and learning experience for youth athletes (Smith, Smoll, & Smith, 1989). The diagram on the right highlights the Top 3 *fundamental* tenants of the Youth Sport Ethos of fostering fun (Visek, 2015). Continue reading to learn how you, as a coach/parent, can be a positive member of your youth’s Athletic Triangle and promote the Youth Sport Ethos.



What is a Fun Environment?

Visek and colleagues (2015) discovered the following **11 fun-dimensions** of sport participation that make youth sport fun:



What Can I Do as A Coach?

Make Sport Youth-Centered:

- Activity based FUN, engage all participants.
- Focus on the process, build on skills, and learn from experiences.
 - ex. Model the **Good-Better-How** technique: ask what was **Good**, what could have been **Better**, and **How** the youth athlete can make adjustments.
- Encourage/reinforce effort vs. focusing on outcomes.
- Empower youth to name and work toward individual and team goals.
- Build quality and supportive relationships.

Hold a Coach-Parent Pre-Season Meeting That Covers:

- Coach introductions, including philosophy and experience in the sport.
- An explanation/demonstration of the fundamentals of the sport.
- Objectives of youth sport participation.
- Information of the program expectations, such as communication style and pipeline, scheduling, equipment and apparel needed, and team rules.
- How parents/guardians can support the efforts of their child and the development of the team as a whole.
- Questions and answers.

What Can I Do as a Parent/Guardian?

Post practice/games, these are the most important words:

"I love to watch you play."

- **Model a healthy, active lifestyle.** Play and activity extend beyond organized sport - join in the fun together!
- **Support your child's efforts and participation** in sport, with consideration of age and maturity level, keeping the following in mind: fun, learning, sportsmanship, creating friendships, and adopting a healthy, active lifestyle.
- **Support your child's maturation** by asking, "what do you want?" and/or "what do you find enjoyable?" - allow your child to learn how to self-advocate.
- **Think of the parent-coach dyad as a partnership** working to support a positive and engaging environment for your child and the team:
 - Proactively create a positive connection early by asking the coach what the expectations are of parents and players and how you can support the team culture and goals.

Where Can I Learn More?

<http://changingthegameproject.com/> <http://devzone.positivecoach.org/> <http://youthreport.projectplay.us/welcome/>
<http://www.y-e-sports.com/index.html> <https://www.nays.org/> <http://youthsportsoftheamericas.org/>

O'Rourke, D. J., Smith, R. E., Smoll, F. L., & Cumming, S. P. (2011). Trait anxiety in young athletes as a function of parental pressure and motivational climate: Is parental pressure always harmful? *Journal of Applied Sport Psychology*, 23(4), 398-412.

Petitpas, A. J., Cornelius, A. E., van Raalte, J. L., & Jones, T. (2005). A framework for planning youth sport programs that foster psychosocial development. *Sport Psychologist*, 19(1).

Smith, R. E., Smoll, F. L., Smith, N. J., & National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (1989). Parents' complete guide to youth sports. Costa Mesa, CA: HDL Pub. Co.

Visek A.J., Mannix H.M., DiPietro L., Achrati S.M., McDonnell K., & Harris B.S. (2015). The fun integration theory: Toward sustaining children and adolescents sport participation. *Journal of Physical Activity and Health*, 12(3), 424-433.

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