

I'm not robot!

What do you see when you watch your student, son, or daughter play a board game with their friends? Do you see someone who knows the rules of the games, follows the rules, and plays fair? Are they having fun as they play, or do you see them get a little hot under the collar if they are losing? If your child loses the game, would they say, "Good game" and congratulate their friend? Or would they throw the board game against the wall and storm off? We want our kids to be good at sports when playing games with their peers. Some kids have an innate ability to do this. Others not so much. In this post I will discuss some ways you can teach children how to be "good sports". Since play is the language of children, in my counseling sessions, I play SO many games with kids! I have found over the years that many of my students who need help with social skills often also need help with, and direct instruction on good sportsmanship skills! Often these are the kids who will brag when they're ahead, or whine when they lose. Since I use so many games in my work and kept seeing this pattern, I now begin all of my group counseling sessions with a focus on sportsmanship. It has been so impactful in my groups! What is Sportsmanship? The term "sportsmanship" comes from the playing fields of diamonds, grids, courts, and pools. But what does it mean exactly? Sportsmanship is defined as conduct (such as fairness, respect for one's opponent, and graciousness in winning or losing) becoming to one participating in a sport (Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, n.d.). Some people have a different definition or idea of what sportsmanship is. Still, for the intent of this post, we will consider Merriam's definition. It's beautiful to see athletes or competitors in various games not considered sports show respect and humility to one another. It does not matter who wins or loses; the person gave their best even if the odds were stacked against them. This is one type of sportsmanship. Another type of sportsmanship is when a competitor loses and blatantly shows their disgust through negative body language. This could be not shaking their opponents' hands or walking off the field or court by themselves. Some even decided to be physically violent towards the winner. We often see this type of person who is hurt by the sporting event's outcome become labeled a sore loser. The other type of sportsmanship is when a competitor wins and taunts their opponent. They may even make rude gestures to the opposing team's fans or not shake their competitor's hands. In the above scenarios, both the winner and loser in the contest are not at their best. This behavior leads to questioning the person's values and how they were coached or taught. It leaves fans and opposing players with uncomfortable thoughts about the person, due to their unexpected behavior. And then the behavior is not checked; it can quickly come up again and maybe even be worse than it was before. Our society is built on celebrating those who win. Unfortunately, our community is also made to ridicule those who lose. There is a distortion of viewpoint here. Winning is great but losing is a part of competition and games. If the person has "lost" a game, they have gained valuable knowledge of how to approach the next opportunity. Putting them a step closer to victory, if not success itself. How Being a Good Sport Can Teach Our Kids Positive Qualities and Life Skills Our children can learn through loss. It is painful (especially if the opponent who just won is a lousy winner). Still, strength, confidence, and wisdom can be gained from competition. Of course, this remarkable aspect of competition would not be realized if the "person who did not win" loses emotional control and makes some unexpected choices. Now, let's take a look at the qualities children learn through good sportsmanship. 1. Teamwork and Cooperation There is no "I" in team! Yes, this is an old saying, but it's true that many hands make light work. If children are on a team, they must learn to work together to achieve a collaborative goal. Everyone must understand each other's strengths and weaknesses. And following directions from a coach, parent or teacher is an essential process of learning how to compete and become better. 2. Grit It can get tricky when competing against a good opponent. Things can even feel impossible when facing a great opponent. When things start to go wrong, and often it will, how does your child respond to this? I use the word respond instead of reacting because you want to see thoughtful and active participation in the competition. Often, when someone reacts, it's done out of thoughtlessness, and they do something abrasive that is counter-productive. We want our children to have grit, tenacity, and resilience. To dig deep into themselves and put in an effort they did not know they had in them. A person who is a good sport can arrange for this effort easier than a poor sportsman, who will quit when things don't go their way. 3. Dealing with Winning and Losing Graciously It has become commonplace in our world of athletes, gamers, and people who conduct business to act without character. The winning football player runs to the middle of an opposing team's field and dances on their logo; the soccer player throws a water bottle at a referee for a foul call that may cost the team a game. A young boy or girl throws the game controller on the floor because she just got beat in a video game. The above examples give you a picture of poor winners and poor losers. The perspective of the winning athlete or competitor seems to be, "I'm a winner; I can do what I want!" The attitude of the losing athlete appears to be, "This stinks! I hate this, and it's everybody else's fault I lost." Teamwork and cooperation, dealing with winning and losing graciously and grit are all skills that can be built up in childhood but will benefit children throughout their whole lives, into adulthood too. Sports can build character, but this is not automatic (Lodl, 2005). As we all know, kids learn from their surroundings and what they are exposed to. Adults are teachers, coaches, and parents. So, it is up to the adults to help children model, teach, and show good sportsmanship. How Adults Can Help Kids Be Good Sports If you're looking for some good picture-books and videos to teach kids how to be a good sport, be sure to check out this blog post! To be fair, there are many "adults" who do not act like they know how to be a good sportsman or sportswoman. Imprinting good character qualities and traits in kids encourages them to engrain the traits of a high-quality person. Parents and coaches need to work together in helping players with an atmosphere that can establish positive playing experiences (Solomon, Malik, p. 174, 2021). Helping the child to understand why they choose to play the sport or game is one way to start. Most children choose to play because it is fun for them. To experience being out there with the other kids and running around or taking part is extremely important, and kids should never lose sight of that. Practice playing some games and modeling good sportsmanship. If you fall behind in a game say something like "that's disappointing that I missed my turn, so I'll take a deep breath. I'm still having so much fun playing with you." Then point out when your child shows qualities of a good sportsmanship. Some quick games to try this with include: Blink Charades Tic-Tac-Toe Don't Break the Ice What are the Qualities and Characteristics of Being a Good Sport? Some qualities and characteristics of being a good sport that adults can model and teach to kids are to: • Include others, share, and let others have a turn to go first • Say kind words and encourage each other • Win graciously without bragging or showing off • Stay calm and use their skills to relax if they fall behind or lose • Have a cheerful outlook and try their best • Play pretty and follow the rules • Know that it's okay to make mistakes Having a cheerful outlook and trying their best is one of the more essential aspects of competition. If a person is in a negative state of mind, they will not have fun, give their all, and bring the joy of the game down for everyone. A child may ask, "Why should I try my best if I'm going to lose anyway?" This question may come up later in their lives, but some kids realize the importance of winning and its meaning. An adult can say, "if you try your best, you will be surprised by what you can accomplish. You don't know how much talent or mental ability you have, and you will not find out unless you give your all." Do not use a negative example such as, "You don't want to look foolish out there, do you? Then you need to give your all!" Saying something like this will leave the child afraid to even try. Sportsmanship, School, Career, and Family Sportsmanship skills expand beyond the playing fields of little league and tennis courts. In fact, youth league competitions are usually not the first place children learn good character. The lessons of good sportsmanship will often begin in the classroom with a game the teacher has introduced to the class. Knowing the rules and playing fair is essential in a class of 20 or more students where chaos could rain if individuals are not playing fairly. The same can be said when a person is a few years into their career. There are rules and regulations the person must abide by to effectively do their job well. Not following rules and not playing fair could lead to career or legal troubles for the adult. If a person has cheated most of their life, they may think that it's okay to continue to cheat as they get older. Family. There is no more critical construct than the family dynamic. A family is a small (sometimes large) team of people working together to better the household. Being able to trust your family members, supporting, picking them up when they are down, and teaching them rules is the ultimate team sport. And being a good sportsman or woman helps create a winning family atmosphere. Activities for Teaching Kids How to Be a Good Sport Are you looking for activities to teach cooperation, teamwork, grit, and good sportsmanship skills to kids? I've created these resources as part of my Social Skill Treasury! Sportsmanship Social Skills Treasury Set 1 Includes: ✓ Game Board with spinner, pawns, and dice ✓ 64 Scenario Cards with a Digital and Printable Version ✓ Good Sport and Poor Sport Sorting Mats ✓ "I Can" Learning Statements Poster ✓ Playing a Game Visual Poster ✓ Dice with Reflection Questions ✓ S.M.A.R.T. IEP and Treatment Plan Objectives for Easy Goal Writing! ✓ Data Collection Sheet ✓ Editable Letter to Families About the Topic ✓ Suggested Companion Resources ✓ Ideas to Extend and Practice the Concept ✓ Resources Come in Both Color and Black and White Learn more here to help kids address qualities like teamwork, cooperation, playing fair, coping with and handling disappointment, winning and losing graciously with this fun activity and board game set to work on positive sportsmanship skills! Sportsmanship Social Skills Treasury Set 2 Includes: ✓ 8 Page Social Story Booklet in Digital and Printable Formats ✓ 24 Game Cards for Discussion and Reflection ✓ Board Game with Spinners, Pawns, and Dice (Digital and Print) ✓ 43 Coloring Pages and Worksheets ✓ "I Can" Learning Statements Poster ✓ Playing a Game Visual Poster ✓ S.M.A.R.T. IEP and Treatment Plan Objectives for Easy Goal Writing! ✓ Data Collection Sheet ✓ Editable Letter to Families About the Topic ✓ Suggested Companion Resources ✓ Ideas to Extend and Practice the Concept ✓ Resources Come in Both Color and Black and White Learn more about Set 2 here. Sportsmanship Social Skills Treasury Set 3 Includes: ✓ Story with 12 Reflection Questions ✓ Writing Response ✓ Graphic Organizers ✓ Cut and Paste Worksheet ✓ Quotes for Discussion Prompts ✓ 6 Page Good Sport Flipbook ✓ Was I a Good Sport Today? Self-Reflection Worksheet ✓ "I Can" Learning Statements Poster ✓ S.M.A.R.T. IEP and Treatment Plan Objectives for Easy Goal Writing! ✓ Data Collection Sheet ✓ Editable Letter to Families About the Topic ✓ Suggested Companion Resources ✓ Ideas to Extend and Practice the Concept ✓ Resources Come in Both Color and Black and White Learn more about set 3, which is great for upper elementary-aged students here. Or you can get all of these resources at a discount in this bundle! Being a Good Sport Social Story Visual Poster When playing games with kids, are they getting upset if they lose or fall behind in a game, or bragging if they win? Are they grabbing other kid's pieces or messing up the game board? Are you looking for a visual poster to review expectations before playing a game? Scroll up to the top of this page and join my free resource library to grab this free visual sportsmanship poster! References Lodl, K. (2005). Developing a game plan for good sportsmanship. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2005(108), 127–134. Psychological skills and performance efficacy in hockey players: The mediating role of sportsmanship. (2021). *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 173–189. Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Dictionary by Merriam-Webster: America's most-trusted online dictionary. Merriam-Webster. Retrieved March 5, 2022, from

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