

**Streetsboro
Parks and Recreation**

Being a Good Parent on the Sidelines

(From University of Delaware)

A parent wouldn't dream of standing up at a concert or play and telling children how to perform better, so how come many parents do exactly that at a soccer or baseball game?

"Youth sports can be great experiences for kids when everyone, including parents, demonstrates good sportsmanship. But, unfortunately, youth sports can bring out the worst behavior in parents," Mark Manno, 4-H youth development educator, says.

Manno, the father of two college-aged sons and a grown daughter, coached his sons' baseball, T-ball and soccer teams throughout their childhoods. And over the years, Manno saw plenty of incidents that made him cringe: Parents yelling at their kids--and other kids--from the sidelines, criticizing coaches, talking back to referees and getting visibly angry about losing games.

"Participation in sports can teach children valuable lessons about teamwork, getting along with others, learning how to be a good loser—and a good winner," Manno says, "but most of all, it's about friendship and fun. The kids are just out there to have a good time; that's what they really care about."

The very youngest athletes Manno coached didn't care at all about winning or losing, which is how it should be, he says. He still gets a chuckle over a T-ball game that ended when half his team abandoned their positions to check out a pair of Canada geese that had landed nearby.

Even when kids get older and start becoming competitive, the score doesn't matter to them once the game is over, Manno says. "By the time kids leave the ball field, it doesn't matter to them whether they won or lost. They're more interested in finding out whether the team snack will be cookies or chips that day," Manno says. "It's not until kids are in middle school or high school that competition becomes important."

So, if kids aren't focused on winning or losing, how come mom and dad care so much about the score and their kid's performance?

"When kids fumble the ball or choke at the bat, parents feel bad or even embarrassed," Manno says. "They may be vicariously living out their old sports days through their children. They might believe that their child must excel at

everything to get ahead in life. Or, they could simply be overly caught up in the competition.”

Whatever the reason behind the parent’s actions, it’s sending the wrong message to kids. “You’re telling your kids that you value what they do, not who they are,” Manno says.

Compounding the problem, Manno says, is that many parents have unrealistic expectations about what their children can achieve athletically. “Kids develop at widely different rates. Some don’t have the motor skills or coordination to be able to do well on the playing field at a young age. A parent shouldn’t push a child into a situation he or she isn’t ready for yet.”

To be a good parent on the sidelines, Manno offers these suggestions:

- * Be calm and encouraging to your child. Praise your child for trying.
- * Don’t coach from the sidelines; leave the coaching instructions to the real team coach.
- * If you have a concern that you want to discuss with the coach, do so in private--before or after the game.
- * Realize that your bad behavior may embarrass your child. Do you really want to make your kid uncomfortable?
- * Don’t re-live your sports days through your kids.
- * Remember that referees are often young, new to their positions and paid little, if at all. They are doing the best they can and don’t have an easy job.
- * Show up at the game with a cup of coffee or bottled water. When you get the urge to shout, take a sip of your beverage instead.
- * Keep it fun. After the game, take your kid to the park or out for ice cream.

The very best thing about youth sports, Manno says, is that it gives parents and kids a chance to spend time together. Make the most of that time, and you’ll create happy memories your child will remember long after the score of the game is forgotten.

(From the University of Delaware)