

Study Guide #4

Defining Success (Winning and Losing)

Parent & Child Study Guides to Watching a Sports Event

*Association for the Advancement
of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP)*

Watching a sports event can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Within the sporting arena we see both good and poor examples of such topics as: setting and working towards goals, focusing attention, managing emotions, handling disappointment, relating to others, dealing with nervousness, etc.

In order to maximize this learning opportunity, AAASP has developed a series of study guides for parents and children to use while watching a sports event, either in person or on television. Each guide is brief and focused around a limited topic. It suggests certain observations and presents several questions for the parent and child to discuss. The study guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

We hope that these guides will promote a healthy dialogue between parents and their children about various issues that athletes face during sporting events, as well as in preparation for competition. Your child doesn't necessarily need to be an athlete to benefit from these discussions, since children experience most of these issues in daily life, such as in school. We hope that this information is helpful to you in promoting healthy ideas about sport, exercise, and human performance in general.

Discussion questions: Defining Success (Winning and Losing)

While you watch a sports event:

1. Find an athlete who you think defines success through achieving their personal best (regardless of whether this results in winning or losing).
2. Find an athlete who you think defines success through only winning.
3. Find an athlete who you think defines success by defeating his or her opponent.
4. If you can do this (No. 1-3), what is the main difference you observed between these athletes?
5. Imagine you are an athlete. What do you think would be more important to accomplish: winning or performing your best and surpassing a prior performance?
6. How would you feel if you participated in a particular sport but did not win a championship?
7. Right now, do you define success as winning, or by doing your best?
8. Should you compare yourself to others or just to your own past performance?
9. Do you concentrate on improving your game to become better, or, do you just want to beat someone?
10. What if you beat someone, but they didn't play very well. Would you feel as good about winning?
11. What if you lost to someone and you performed your best, but they performed better than you that day. Can you still feel good, even if you are disappointed that you didn't win?

Lesson conclusion

Sport participation involves developing one's physical skills to challenge oneself as much as it involves competing against other athletes. The pressure to succeed comes from factors such as personal desire to do well, meeting coach or parent expectations, and from the importance of a particular competition. Initially, parents could teach young athletes the importance of trying one's best, being a good sport in victory as well as in defeat, and placing less emphasis on winning or being the best. Often, children and adults place too much emphasis on winning and losing, and only define success through the outcome of the game. Research on successful athletes suggests that they emphasize improvement and learning new skills and they do not just focus on the outcome.

Helping a youngster believe in his or her abilities, (over the final score or defeating an opponent) is more likely to contribute to a child's enjoyment of sport (or any other performance) and will foster healthy self-esteem. As a child develops trust in her or his capabilities, there is more of a willingness to develop and improve upon existing skills. This can lead to increasing a child's motivation, which in turn, inspires self-discipline, integrity, and perseverance. Once a youngster's skills improve, competition emerges as youth athletes find it gratifying to seek external recognition, praise, and other non-verbal rewards (i.e., hugs) for their athletic accomplishments.

AAASP encourages parents to do their part in creating a supportive youth sport environment so their child will develop a lifelong interest in physical activity and sports. By teaching fundamental sporting principles, you can help your child develop a winning attitude, not only in sports but also throughout his or her life.

About AAASP

Founded in 1986, the Association for the Advancement of Applied Sport Psychology (AAASP) promotes the ethical practice, science and advocacy of the psychology of sport, exercise and health. AAASP is the premier international, multidisciplinary sport and exercise psychology organization, and is the only professional organization in North America that offers certification to qualified professionals who practice sport, exercise, and health psychology. For more information on this and other topics, or to find a certified sport psychology consultant in your area, visit <http://www.aaasponline.org>.

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