

Be a Good Teammate for Your Child!

Yes, whether you like it or not, *you* are a member of your son's baseball team too! You are your son's original teammate. You are the superfan who goes to every game and is invested in every pitch and every hit. You cheer for your child, you cry for your child, and you only want them to succeed. And while you may be sitting in the stands, you are still a part of your child's team because you are the most important coach and teammate that your child will EVER have in baseball, and in life. Your voice before, during, and after games matters so much more than you can imagine.

The WYBL recognizes that the success of our program not only depends on developing the fundamental baseball skills to win games, but our program depends on having a culture that is safe and fun for all players, where winning is not the end-all-be-all.

The WYBL is dedicated to helping everyone on the team (including the parents) build something INFINITELY MORE IMPORTANT THAN WINNING GAMES: character and confidence. The WYBL tasks every parent this year to take the Parent's Code of Conduct to heart and help be a shining example of what it means to be a Good Teammate for your child and your child's team.

Below are some tips to help you be a Good Teammate for your son's team. The WYBL can almost guarantee you that if you adopt some of these mantras, you will see improvement in your child's performance and enjoyment of the game and create an even stronger bond with your son!

Why We All Need to Be a Good Teammate

The WYBL stresses to every child that the physical skills of baseball are important and that we always compete to win. HOWEVER, it is even more important to work on sportsmanship and confidence. It all starts with the mantra that everyone can and should be a "Good Teammate". The WYBL teaches our players that mental strength is not merely a natural talent, but it is something that can and should be learned.

Being a Good Teammate means that you put your own emotions aside and think of others. When a teammate makes a mistake, we show empathy and pat them on the back and say: "next time" instead of yelling: "whatta' you doing?!?!"

We teach our players that when we make a mistake, we try to not act with negative energy that will affect our next play ("flush it down the toilet"). When someone makes a good play, we bring them up and say "Atta' boy!"

Study after study, and book after book has proven that players at any level who can wash away the negativity associated with failure in sports (and in life) will perform better in the long run and be a happier and more well-adjusted human being. Knowing that your teammates and friends have your back when the chips are down is one of the most powerful emotions in all of baseball and life. I mean who is Frodo without Sam? Who is Mork without Mindy? SpongeBob without Patrick?

So, as a parent, strive to be a Good Teammate for your child. Strive to not to live and die with every strike. Strive to not tie your own negative emotions to the score of the game. Try not to remind your son of the negative play or what they should be doing during a game. Instead, try to remove as many negative and "helpful" comments when watching your son's games or driving home.

Try it for a week or month and see what happens. It costs you nothing to transform your mental approach to watching your son's games, but it could mean everything to their performance and enjoyment of the great game of baseball.

Building Confidence, Not Stats

We are not only in the baseball-development business, but we are also in the confidence-building business. We aim to create mindsets in our children that foster growth. Our goal is to create a confident, but not cocky, mindset in our players so that their fear of failure does not hold them back. We want a mindset that failure is a part of the game and it's not whether you make a mistake, it's how you respond to it.

We strive to stress to our players that WINS AND PERSONAL RESULTS ARE NOT WHAT DEFINES YOU AS A PLAYER OR PERSON OR A TEAM. There are so many facets to the game that stats can be deceiving, especially when it comes to a player's self-worth. Try to help your player understand where they started the season with their skills and what they have improved on. Help them set mini goals that are tied to skills development, not stats.

Example: Ask your child what skill they want to get better at this season. Write it down. Look at it in a month and ask your son if they have improved at that skill. This is a micro-goal and you can more easily get a win here. Define success in his constant improvement of the micro-goal versus tying his success to stats that are not always under his control (i.e., a batting average can depend on the bounce of the ball and bad luck can lower your average 100 points).

Positivity is Infectious!

Allow a kid to be sullen after a mistake, but only for a moment. The WYBL teaches our players that the game and your teammates need you now and there is no time to waste! Your positivity could help someone else get a hit, throw a runner out, steal a base, etc.

As a parent, if your son is sullen after a loss or bad play, try these points with your son:

- Explain that their teammates probably feel badly too – so, go console a teammate and see how much better you will feel!
- There is no limit to what your positivity could do for your teammates!
- And as parents, we must exhibit the same good-teammate mentality by creating a mindset that losing and failure doesn't need to be re-lived in the car on the way home. It's tough to do but bite your tongue about what should've been. No one likes to be reminded over and over again about their mistakes, and your children are no different.

Your Kid's Mistakes are NOT Your Mistakes!

This is one of the hardest realities for us parents to grasp. As coaches and parents, we have a very hard job to do because almost every instinct or emotion we have while watching our children perform on the field or in life is stressful and tied directly to our own emotions and ego. It's hard to hold our tongue and not critique our children's performance in anything because we only want what is best for them and want them to be better at life than we ever were!

- We think that our child's failures are a direct reflection of us as parents and as human beings (i.e., "I'd never make that mistake").
- We fear that other parents will judge us because our child is not the best on the team.
- Your kid will make many mistakes and do stupid stuff despite the best knowledge and teachings we can give them (i.e., "don't touch that pan, it's hot." Three seconds later, your kid touches the pan).
- Ask yourself where your emotions come from. Are you re-living your own negative sports experience?
- We challenge every parent to assess their emotions and to realize that at some point we have no control over what happens on the field once the game starts.

Are you a Backseat Driver in the Stands?

"Keep your head down!" "Get your elbow up" "Go, go, go – get the ball!" "Don't swing at the high ones!"

We've all been there. It's hard not to shout "helpful" instructions to our kid during the heat of the game.

Take a step back for a moment. Think of a time where you were driving in downtown rush-hour traffic with cars all over the place, the kids fighting in the backseat, the radio turned up, and your spouse is telling you to “slow down”, “use your blinker”, “check your mirrors”.

Or think about an over-bearing boss that second-guesses your every move at work and then lectures you for an hour on how you should not make mistakes on your TPS reports, only to have three other bosses lecture you on the same thing an hour later (ala the boss from *Office Space*).

Most of you should be cringing or feeling something creep up in the pit of your stomach by now because you’re reliving a moment in your own life that stressed you out.

Now ask yourself if those situations are any different than shouting at your kid from the bleachers during the heat of a game? There are very few people in our world that thrive or flourish in the scenarios described above and the added stress from the bleachers can actually decrease performance and their enjoyment of the game.

- Peak performance during a stressful event needs FOCUS, DETERMINATION, and CONFIDENCE. How can anyone concentrate on such things when the person they love most second-guesses their every move?
- Our job as parents and as a Good Teammate is not to get in the way of confidence. We mean well, but does it actually improve our child’s performance or love for the sport?
- Instructions can confuse your child on what or who to focus on during the game – is it you or the coach? Before you know it, they are looking into the stands at you after every play seeking your approval or disapproval and not focusing on the elements of the game.
- Let them fail. Let them be themselves!
- Is your child playing the game not to fail, instead of to succeed? Are they starting to play to please their parents, instead of for the love of the sport?
- Baseball is a mindset, be aware of what mindset you are creating.

“I love to watch you play”

So, how do we as parents turn off our natural teaching selves? We challenge ourselves. We change what we say, how we say it and when we say it. One great first step is to tell your child and yourself that you go to their games because you LOVE to watch them play. Say it out loud. Tell your kids this before every game. Take the pressure off your kids and take the pressure off yourself to be the “perfect” parent. Then sit back and enjoy the show!

“I love to watch you play. You are my favorite player and this is my favorite thing to do! Go out there and put on a show!”

Give Specific Praise

It goes without saying that everyone likes a good pat on the back. But after a while, some of our outward praise can be so vague and generic that it becomes less motivating and meaningless without context. Instead, try to give specific praise about a specific act that you would want to see repeated and which may give them more motivation to repeat the praised action again. Also, the kids will start to attribute their successes on the field to the controllable acts you praise (i.e., “nice job keeping your head down and on the ball”). Be sure to give praise not only for their performance (i.e., hitting a home run), but for giving a good effort even though the actual performance may have failed (i.e., hitting a hard ball that was caught or “good hustle” to first on an obvious out).

Umpires are Humans Too

We have all been there before. The umpire totally missed a call and we can’t help ourselves from standing up and saying: “Are you Blind?? He was out by a mile!!”.

Remember a few things:

- The umpire will not reverse a call because of you.
- No one reacts well to being screamed at – especially during a stressful event.
- If you get kicked out of a game, so will your head coach per the league rules.

- We already have an umpire shortage because of how umpires are treated – please don't contribute to the problem.
- Remember that our kids are watching, so don't give them excuses or let them blame anyone else for the way the game ends up.
- You are an adult at a kid's game – this is not the world series, and the Twins are not recruiting your son.
- The umpire is usually a kid themselves, and that is someone else's child up there. How would you want others treating your child?

Keep Criticism of Players and Coaches Private:

Why can't Albert throw a strike? Why is our coach playing that kid? We totally could have won if he didn't play. Why is Albert even on our team? My kid should've gotten more playing time...the coach totally plays favorites. The coach treats my kid differently than the rest of the team...Did you see the way he treated my kid? ... The comments that parents have said in front of their children goes on and on.

It's so easy to look at your kid's team like it's the major leagues or your fantasy football team. We may all have negative thoughts about what could've been and why we think our son's team lost a game. Remember, you are a part of your son's team too!

- Would you want any other player or parent talking about your child negatively in front of other children? Probably not! So, strive to be a Good Teammate and do not talk negatively about other players or coaches around your child.
- Chances are you are talking about your child's friend, but worse yet, you are teaching your child how to judge, create excuses and focus on negative actions that we cannot control. Isn't it more productive to focus on how we can get better?
- We can all help in flipping the narrative by steering our child's negative comments about a teammate's performance into a positive direction.
 - For instance: "Yes, Albert struck out, but didn't other people? How would you feel if Albert said that about all of your mistakes?"

Coaches are your Teammates Too!

Coaches are human beings as well who are constantly driving in rush hour traffic with 12 backseat driving parents to please. Coaches are tasked with setting schedules, ordering jerseys, chalking the fields, emailing and texting parents, entering scores, researching training techniques, managing their own son, their own household, their own jobs, stressing out about playing time, wins and losses, parent expectations, board expectations, and then trying to manage the emotions and actions of 12 rambunctious boys. Whew! It can be a lot. Coaching is more stressful than playing baseball, believe it or not!

So, it's always a good idea to be a Good Teammate to your coaches too. It's easy as parents to be Monday-morning quarterbacks, but just like the positivity we are trying to create with your sons on the field, we are also trying to create the same positivity with the parents and coaches.

- The 24-Hour Rule: If you feel your child is legitimately having issues on the team or with a specific coach, write it down in an email. Do not approach coaches during the heat of a game and scream at them about your opinions. Wait 24 hours. Reread your email. Set up a time for coffee. Put yourself in the coach's shoes. Are you offering any solutions, or do you just want to get something off your chest or second-guess the coach's decisions? Be civil. If the issue is large enough or cannot be addressed by the coaches, write to the WYBL Board for consideration.

Conclusion

Baseball is a game. Games should be fun and not a job – especially for parents. Our views, words and actions dictate how much our children will enjoy the great game of baseball, so let's all pitch in and do our best to set an example of what a Good Teammate is. Who knows, it might just work!?