

Sportsmanship Character Connection

“The crack of the bat, the splash of the water and the swoosh of the soccer ball; all sounds of exciting sports events. You may also hear the yelling of the coach, the jeers of the crowd and the name calling by athletes. The news of a sporting event turned violent or athletes doing whatever it takes to win are common. 4-H works hard to make sports fun. And, because “character does count,” it is important for all of us to constantly encourage sportsmanship instead of gamesmanship.

Gamesmanship means doing whatever it takes to win including encouraging athletes to bend, evade or break the rules to gain a competitive advantage. You may have heard, “It’s only cheating if you get caught,” indicating there is no ethical reason for following the rules. Sadly, there are many examples from professional sports that show gamesmanship – the infamous corked bat or winning the Soccer World Cup with an illegal move.

The good news is there are also wonderful examples of athletes who encourage sportsmanship – making the way one plays the game central. For example the Illinois high school quarterback who asked to have his name stricken from the record book when he discovered both coaches had agreed to let him successfully pass the football for the state record. Because he did not make the passes on his own merit, he did not want the recognition. Or Luz Long, the German athlete who shared his secret with Jesse Owens on how not to foul on the long jump line. Owens went on to win the Gold Medal and Long the Silver in the 1936 Olympics. Sportsmanship means giving 100% to the game with the commitment to integrity, fair play, respectfulness and grace.

It is the responsibility of everyone – staff, parents and children – to encourage sportsmanship and good character.

A Little Summer Reading

Summer is a great time for your child to read just for fun. Help your child pick books that emphasize character, and set goals for them to help them improve their reading skills. Increase the reading level, the number of books, the topics, etc. Help your child discover the wonderful worlds inside their local library.



Choices

Everyday we are faced with many decisions. Most are relatively easy, but there are others that are more critical and take more thought. While all choices reflect who we are, those critical decisions can really test our character. Hard choices aren't just reserved for adults. Our children also are faced with difficult decisions. It's our job to help them think about how to make decisions that reflect good character. We must help them understand that making the right decision is not necessarily the popular decision. Making the right decision can cost us in terms of friendship, prestige, pleasure or money. Making good choices is hard work and takes courage.

One way to think about the choices is to ask these five questions:

- Is there possible danger of physical harm to you or anyone else?
- Could you or someone else suffer serious emotional pain?
- Could the decision hurt your reputation?
- Could the decision impede achieving any important goal?
- Could you or someone else suffer significant monetary or property loss?

Example

A group of teens decides to remove a STOP sign from an intersection and then hide in the bushes to see what happens. It isn't long before they find out. A car proceeds through the intersection, hits another car and everyone is killed. The teens were arrested, tried and imprisoned. OK, although this is a true story it is a pretty drastic example. It is also easy to see that there is a "yes" response to each of the 5 questions. Wouldn't it have been much better had the teens thought about these questions before removing the STOP sign?

Help your child make good choices. Talk to them about decisions they make in their lives. Consider these examples:

- Not completing and turning in a homework assignment.
- Copying a paper directly from the Internet.
- Encouraging friends to not use playground equipment properly – jumping off equipment, etc.
- Encouraging your friends not to play with the new student because you decide you don't like them.

Good sportsmanship is important on and off the field. Help your youth remember to be good sports in the game of life.

