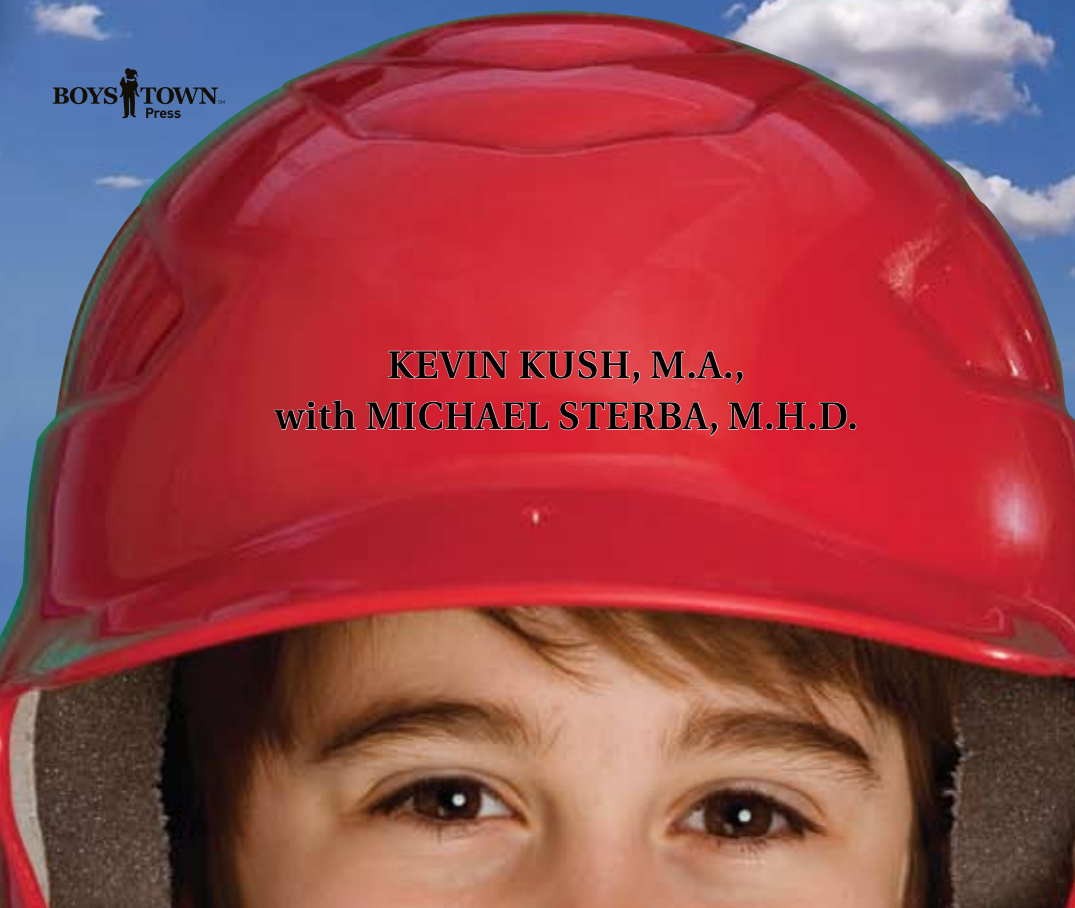


# COMPETING *with* CHARACTER<sup>SM</sup>

*Let's Put Sportsmanship  
and Fun Back in Youth Sports*

BOYS TOWN<sup>SM</sup>  
Press

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# 3

CHAPTER



## READY...SET...TEACH!

Kids aren't born knowing how to tie their shoes or feed themselves. As toddlers, they don't know how to make a bed, do the dishes, or use the toilet. Even when they start school, some children aren't yet able to print their ABC's or count to twenty without using their fingers and toes.

Children have to *learn* the skills they're going to need to use as they grow up. Skills are not magically absorbed as kids get older, and learning is not a one-time thing where you teach a skill once and a child is good to go. As

adults, we have to teach these skills over and over, making sure that a child is both old enough and developmentally ready to learn them. And teaching involves more than just telling a child what to do – it also means demonstrating, modeling, and practicing the skills until he or she knows how, when, where, and why to use them.

Many times, we assume kids know how to behave correctly and understand how to make choices that are best for themselves and others. However, girls and boys need direction and guidance in almost every area of their lives. It might be something as simple as showing them how to clean their bedroom or something more complicated like how to accept defeat graciously. Whatever the circumstances, learning involves behaviors, skills, and teaching.

Coaches, parents, and other adults who spend time with kids do lots of great teaching every day. At Boys Town, we've spent more than ninety years developing the best ways to help kids learn, grow, and, succeed. Decades of research show that our skill-based, teaching approach is a highly effective and successful method, whether you're working with kids as a parent or as a youth sports coach.

In this chapter, we'll define what behaviors and skills are and discuss why they are important to your teaching with kids. Also, we'll introduce three methods you can use to teach behaviors and skills to youngsters. Finally, we'll talk about giving "reasons" and their importance to children in learning and using skills.

*Competing with Character's* skill-based, teaching approach helps everyone – coaches, athletes, and parents – set and achieve positive goals in the sports arena and in other settings like home and school. Teaching behaviors

and skills to kids, and having coaches and parents adapt and model new ones for how they participate, is the foundation for creating an atmosphere of good character, sportsmanship, and success. Learning skills and knowing how to use them helps kids and adults solve problems, resolve conflicts, and respond to situations with behaviors that are positive and constructive, rather than negative and destructive.

## **What You Don't Know *Can* Hurt You**

Often, youngsters (and some adults) don't use the right behaviors or interact with others in a positive way simply because they don't know what they're supposed to do in certain situations. For example, when young kids lose a close, exciting game for the first time, they're likely to be upset or angry and prone to react in inappropriate ways. They might throw their equipment around, refuse to congratulate or shake hands with the other team, or blame the officials. Instead, we can prepare them to handle adversity by teaching them the right ways to behave toward their teammates, coaches, and opponents in such a situation. It's up to adults to teach kids the behaviors and skills they need to function and find success.

We define a behavior as anything a person does or says that can be directly or indirectly observed (seen, heard, felt, touched, or smelled) and measured. Skills are sets of behaviors that usually are done in a particular order to achieve a goal or accomplish a task. For example, the skill of "Following Instructions" includes these individual behaviors: look at the person, say "Okay," do what you've been asked to do right away, and check back when the task is completed. When kids learn and use this skill, they're

more likely to be successful in many different settings (sports, school, home, etc.) and situations. It's also a skill that helps adults create organized, smooth-running learning environments where kids do what's asked of them.

Coaches teach athletic behaviors and skills all the time. Most involve physical skills, like how to shoot a basketball, where you explain, demonstrate, and practice a series of physical behaviors kids need to master to be successful. For example, when teaching a player how to shoot a basketball, you might go over hand and finger position, how to use the legs, elbow position, and follow through. To make your teaching most effective, you would have the player practice each component (or behavior) until it's mastered. Then you would work on helping the youngster put all the components together to perform the skill of shooting a basketball.

Teaching character and sportsmanship skills follows the same pattern – introduce each of the behaviors that make up the skill, put all the behaviors together, and have youngsters practice them until they've mastered the skill.

### **Skills Help Kids Succeed**

Teaching, learning, and using character and sportsmanship skills have many benefits for coaches, parents, and kids. The relatively short time you spend on this kind of teaching during practices and games will ultimately pay off in a better learning environment and will give you more time to coach and teach. When girls and boys are able to use the skills we recommend, a coach's job becomes easier because players are listening, following instructions, using positive behaviors and skills, and making decisions that allow the team to work together and move forward.

Here's an example: Let's say you're coaching a baseball team or basketball team of eight-year-olds. If you can help them learn how to pay attention to you and the other coaches and follow instructions, you can eliminate many of the problems you might run into during practices and games. When kids know how to do these two things consistently, you won't have to repeat yourself a dozen times or always check to make sure the players are doing what you ask.

Teaching skills that focus on the basics and contribute to character building creates an atmosphere where there are fewer conflicts, more cooperation, better communication, and a greater sense of pride in a team's and organization's reputation for sportsmanship. Visible, frequent signs of good sportsmanship reflect this positive attitude. And who wouldn't want to be a part of that?

It's also important for adults to use and demonstrate good character skills in a youth sports setting. Kids learn most of what they say and do from watching the adults around them. When coaches and parents use sportsmanship skills, they model positive behavior for youngsters and show them that sportsmanship and character are important qualities for the team and organization. Modeling positive character behaviors and skills is the best way for you to be part of the solution!

In the next three chapters, we're going to review a number of skills for coaches and parents that help promote and model good sportsmanship, better communication, and respect for everyone involved – teammates, officials, opponents, and fans. We'll also present a number of skills that coaches can teach their players and parents can reinforce at home. These skills not only help girls and boys learn sportsmanship and character on the

field or court, but also help them find success at home, in school, and in many other social situations. Before we move on, though, let's go over the methods you can use to teach these skills.

## **Teaching**

How you teach skills to young people is often as important as what you're teaching. Coaches and parents must have effective methods and a planned approach for helping kids learn new skills, improve on existing ones, and get better at choosing the right skills to use in specific situations. This is true whether you're instructing kids on how to serve a volleyball or how to get along with their teammates.

The teaching methods covered in this section come from the Boys Town Teaching Model. They're proven techniques designed to make skill teaching successful. These three approaches – teaching proactively, using praise, and correcting misbehavior – work together to help you prevent problem behavior, reinforce good behavior, and correct inappropriate behavior.

## **Prepare and Practice**

Proactive Teaching is a way for coaches and parents to introduce new skills and help kids practice them before kids need to use them. This teaching method mirrors how coaches prepare their players for an upcoming game. Good coaches spend a lot of time setting up their team and players for success by teaching fundamental skills and developing a plan to use them in a game, practicing them over and over until they've been mastered, and then quickly reviewing the game plan just before the team hits the field or court.

You can use this proactive approach with any skill, including those that promote character and sportsmanship. For example, before a game you might remind players to not trash-talk or make rude gestures, to play within the rules, and to ignore any unsportsmanlike behavior from their opponents. Or, before you begin practice you might spend a few minutes telling your players that when a coach is talking, they should stop what they are doing, look at the coach, and make an effort to concentrate on what he or she is saying.

To set kids up for success in many different situations, it is important that you spend small amounts of time beforehand teaching new skills and reviewing behaviors and skills you've already taught. Just like a winning game plan, proper preparation and good execution are the keys to successfully teaching character skills!

### **Praise Works Wonders!**

Everyone likes praise. It's a motivator that lets a person know he or she did something well and that someone noticed. A pat on the back or a word of congratulations makes us feel good, both about what we've done and who we are. This is especially true for children and teens. They love it when adults who are important in their lives notice they've used or tried to use a positive behavior.

Our motto at Boys Town is "Catch 'em being good!" For many adults, this kind of approach doesn't come naturally and is sometimes difficult to adopt. Why? Because many people simply expect kids to use the correct behavior or skill, do the right thing, and make good choices. They believe youngsters should be doing these things anyway, so why praise them? However, many girls and boys struggle to use the correct behavior or skill at the right time, do the right thing, and make sound decisions.

Another reason praise is sometimes underused is that it's easy to focus on "bad" behavior or mistakes. Misbehavior is more obvious and "in your face." So we tend to notice and react to the bad behaviors and either ignore or forget to let youngsters know when they've done well.

Good coaches and parents rely heavily on giving praise, positive reinforcement, and positive consequences. At Boys Town, we focus on what our girls and boys do right and use lots of praise with them. We certainly correct youth for inappropriate behavior, but we also look for many more opportunities to praise and reinforce youngsters for using positive behavior. With some kids, we might use a very high rate of praise; it all depends on the youth and his or her individual needs (we'll discuss this more later in the book).

Praising and reinforcing young people when they do something right motivates them to repeat positive behaviors and skills and lets them know you see their good behavior as well as their bad behavior. For example, you might teach kids the skill of listening to adults. Then, when you're explaining something to youngsters and see them stop what they are doing, look at you, and concentrate on what you say, praise them! Give them a pat on the back and tell them exactly what they did right so they can do it again. Praise, reinforcement, and positive consequences help young people feel confident about themselves and their ability to succeed.

### **Right the Wrong**

No one does everything perfectly all the time, especially kids who are learning new behaviors and skills.

They will get frustrated and upset sometimes as they try to master what you're teaching. So you can expect some bumps along the way.

While it's important to praise youngsters for using appropriate behaviors and skills whenever possible and to prepare them for situations where they will have to use certain skills, there will be times when you have to correct a child's misbehavior. This is when teaching is the most important. You have to step up and teach them the right behaviors and skills. If you don't, they'll continue to misbehave and fail.

When you're the adult in charge, you control the setting and how it runs. You do not control the kids. Why? Because they have to make choices for themselves. However, you can influence those choices. One of the most important ways you do this is through teaching and giving consequences. Praise and reward good choices, but don't hesitate to correct poor ones. For example, if you expect your players to remain quiet while a coach is talking (and you've taught this skill), and you observe two players constantly giggling and whispering back and forth, call them on it. Address the inappropriate behavior, correct it by teaching them the right behavior, and (if needed) give them a negative consequence. When the players are quiet and paying attention to you, praise them and reinforce the positive behavior.

A word of caution about negative consequences: They are not supposed to be punishing or a way to "get back" at a child who misbehaves. Rather, they should be deterrents to future misbehavior and motivators for good behavior. Consistently using appropriate consequences helps change behavior. Also, make sure the negative con-

sequences you use are appropriate for the age and developmental level of the kids you're working with. For example, it's inappropriate to make a ten-year-old do a hundred pushups or run sprints the last thirty minutes of practice. It might be more appropriate and effective to have that child sit out for ten minutes on the bench or jog a lap around the field. Negative consequences can be difficult to choose if you don't know what motivates each child. Get to know your youngsters and what they either enjoy or dislike so you can choose positive and negative consequences that will change their behavior.

## **It's Okay to Explain Why**

Parents and coaches are notorious for using the reason, "*Because I said so. That's why!*", when a child questions their instructions or decisions. We've learned that it's much more effective to take a few extra minutes to explain to kids the purpose or reason behind what you're asking them to do. Giving reasons works well in any learning setting. When you take time to give reasons, kids appreciate it, learn, and are much more likely to do what you ask of them.

There are times when young people just can't connect what they are asked to do to the reason for doing it, especially when the benefit to them is not immediate or readily apparent. They often fail to realize that good things will happen in the long run if they do what they're asked to do. Giving kids reasons turns on the light bulb that helps them understand the long-term connection. Coaches can use reasons to explain why players do certain drills in practice, why coaches use certain strategies during games, or why youngsters should use character

and sportsmanship skills after a defeat. Parents can use reasons to explain why they're asking their child to accept advice or criticism or get along with others.

Whenever you have the opportunity, take time to explain and give reasons. This will help make your life much easier and your teaching and coaching more effective because you've provided kids with immediate "buy-ins." Reasons work, so use them!

## Summary

Teaching kids new behaviors and skills so they can learn and change for the better is a very rewarding experience. There are many behaviors and skills you can teach girls and boys in a youth sports setting – physical, social, and character. Situations and youngsters will vary and you'll likely face challenging and difficult times. That's why having the specific behaviors and skills that *Competing with Character* offers, along with proven methods to teach them, are so important to your success with kids. You will have the confidence and knowledge to handle almost anything thrown your way. Teaching new behaviors and skills also gives you the ability to head off problems before they happen and to create an environment where the fun and healthy aspects of youth sports participation are promoted. When this takes place, everyone wins!