

Learning Guide #4

For Watching the 2010 Winter Olympic Games/Sports Events with Children

Defining Success (Winning and Losing)

Watching the Olympic Games or a sports event can be a valuable learning experience for young people. Just in time for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) has developed a series of learning guides for adults and children to use while watching sports on television or in person, both on the snow and ice, to promote healthy dialogue regarding sport. This guide suggests certain observations and presents several questions to discuss together. The learning guide concludes with a brief summary of important facts regarding the topic.

Observation and discussion questions: Defining Success (Winning and Losing)

While you watch the 2010 Winter Olympic Games or another sports event:

- Find an athlete who you think defines success through achieving their personal best (regardless of whether this results in winning a medal).
- Find an athlete who you think defines success through only winning a medal.
- Find an athlete who you think defines success by defeating his or her opponent.
- If you can do this (the first three bullets listed above), what is the main difference you observed between these athletes?
- Imagine you are an Olympic athlete. What do you think would be more important to accomplish: winning a Gold, Silver or Bronze Medal or performing your best and surpassing a prior performance?
- How would you feel if you participated in the Olympic Games but did not win a medal?
- Right now, do you define success as winning or by doing your best?
- Should you compare yourself to others or just to your own past performance?
- Do you concentrate on improving your game to become better, or, do you just want to beat someone?
- What if you beat someone, but they didn't play very well? Would you feel as good about winning?

Lesson Conclusion

Sport participation involves developing one's physical skills to challenge one's self 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.

AASP encourages adults to do their part to create a supportive youth sport environment so children will develop a lifelong interest in physical activity and sports. By teaching fundamental sporting principles, you can help children develop winning attitudes, both in sports and throughout life.

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The Association for Applied Sport Psychology (AASP) promotes the ethical practice, science and advocacy of sport and exercise psychology. Founded in 1986, AASP is an international, multidisciplinary, professional organization that offers certification to qualified professionals who practice sport and exercise psychology. With more than 1,200 members in 28 countries, AASP is a worldwide leader, sharing research and resources with the public via its Web site, www.appliedsportpsych.org.

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