

# TEAMPLAYERS

## ADHD & Team Development

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Being a member of a team can have numerous social, physical and personal benefits for children. There is, however, a dark side of organized team participation when a child feels left out, is teased, bullied or bullies others during the activities. Children with ADHD or other behavioral disorders may easily fall into one of these areas due to having trouble with social interactions or struggles in understanding team dynamics. They may act impulsively, not adequately respect other's boundaries, struggle to wait their turn or display poor sportsmanship.

Most team-based activities are competitive in nature and teammate interactions can quickly change from teasing to hazing, harassment and bullying. Research has indicated that there is a high likelihood on many sports teams that one or more of the lesser skilled players could be bullied or teased by a more skilled teammate. As a parent, if you notice that your child is struggling with being a positive teammate, there are several strategies you can utilize, including informing your child what they should do, instead of what they may have done wrong. Some of the following tips are ways to do this:

- Discuss components of sportsmanship such as turn taking, celebrating others' successes, the benefits of sports, etc.
- Teach your child to: Stop, Think, Do Stop (look and listen)
- Think (consider solutions and possible consequences)
- Do (choose the best option)
- Role play difficult situations that your child has experienced, or may face, during athletics. Try having your child perform different roles to help them understand other's perspectives. If they are young, using stuffed animals or puppets can help to act out the behaviors. After the role-plays, talk about how each of the participants would have felt and what your child anticipates would happen. For example, ask and discuss:
- How did you feel when this happened?
- How do you think the other

person felt when you did that?

- How do you think they would react?
- Repeat your role plays so your child can "practice" their positive behaviors. Just like they practice their athletic skills, they also need repetition regarding their social skills as you "coach" them to improve their abilities in this area.
- Prior to a child's practice, identify a particular behavior that they can work on (for example, passing the ball to teammates) and then discuss strategies to make that happen.
- Be positive! Praise your child's positive behavior during an activity. Even if they are displaying some inappropriate behaviors, if you consistently praise what they are doing right it may increase these actions while decreasing other negative ones.
- After a game or practice, talk about situations that went well or should be improved.
- Ask what they did well and how it led to a positive outcome.
- If they encountered a difficult situation, problem solve ways they could have handled it differently. It will be important, however, to not focus only on negative situations as this can impact their self esteem.
- If you have an elementary-aged child, schedule play dates with other children to monitor, coach, and process your child's behavior with them. Give your child regular feedback regarding positive and negative behaviors.
- Your child looks up to you as a role model. Therefore, as a parent, it is imperative that you model tenets of sportsmanship and teamwork for them!
- If your child continues to have difficulties, having them participate in a therapeutic social skills group can provide a safe setting to learn and practice prosocial language and interpersonal strategies.

Research has shown that participating in unified, non-competitive activities outside of a player's sport can improve cohesiveness of members of a team. By engaging team members in non-competitive activities, it may help build personal interactions and relationships. Additionally, working with your child to develop assertive communication

strategies to advocate for themselves and discuss their concerns with teammates or their coach may be beneficial. If this is too overwhelming for them, it may be necessary for you to advocate on their behalf and address the concern(s) with the appropriate adult, such as the coach or another child's parent. You will be looking for support to help reinforce what you are trying to change. If your concern is with the coach, addressing him/her directly will be step one and most important.

Despite your best efforts, your child may express a desire to quit the activity they are participating in. If they are not enjoying the sport, having them finish the season can help them learn about commitment and follow through. Not liking a sport, becoming bored, not being "good enough" or "the best," or not wanting to work hard should NOT be reasons to quit an activity or sport that your child has made a commitment to. If what they are participating in is not right for them, then complete the season and begin the search to find something more suitable. If, however, your child's health is of concern, remaining on the team is contributing to significant emotional damage, or their grades are being directly impacted, ceasing the activity may be the best option.

Sports can provide a number of positive benefits, such as enhanced self-esteem, establishing a healthy lifestyle and learning valuable social skills. If your child is struggling to be a positive member of a team, there are numerous interventions you can do to help improve these abilities. This can be a valuable life lesson that has numerous short and long-term benefits for your child. So, while you are teaching them to be a productive member of their soccer team, they will be learning valuable skills to possibly use in a school study group, board room or as future parents.

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