

Learning Guide #10

For Watching the Olympic Games/Major Sporting Events with Children

Dealing with Disappointment

Watching the Olympic Games or a sports event can be a valuable learning experience for young people. 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 to promote healthy dialogue. 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: Dealing with Disappointment

While you watch the Olympic Games or a sports event:

- Find an athlete who might be disappointed with how they performed in the Olympic Games.
- What did they say or do to let you know that they were disappointed?
- What did you like or not like about how they showed their disappointment?
- Have you ever been disappointed in your own performance? In sport? Music? School?
- What did that feel like to you, and how did you get over it?
- Often, athletes want to win every competition in which they participate. Is it realistic to expect to win every time? Would you have fun if you knew that you would “magically win” every time, even if you didn’t try?
- What if you lost to someone and you performed very well, but they performed better that day? Can you still feel good about how you played, even if you are disappointed?
- Do you feel like you have to perform PERFECTLY every time you compete? Is it possible to be perfect? Do you think you need to be perfect to be good at something?
- How might you feel if you do not perform perfectly?
- Do you get angry at yourself when you make a mistake? Why? What can you do instead of being mad?

Lesson Conclusion

Successful athletes realize that disappointment is part of sport. If they won every competition, they would eventually become bored with their sport and quit. The only way to win every competition would be to compete against others who were not as good as they are. Sometimes athletes perform well, but their opponent might seem to have an edge that day, and beat them. It is easy to be gracious when you win, but it is more difficult to accept defeat. Good sports will always tell their opponent “good game.”

Successful athletes pursue excellence, not perfection. While they want to win, they realize that they won’t always win. They learn to evaluate how well they played, win or lose. For example, watch an athlete who has a personal best at the Olympic Games, but may get a Bronze Medal. He may still be very excited, yet disappointed he did not get a Gold Medal. These athletes respect their sport, the other participants, and those around them. When they are disappointed, they do not allow that emotion to ruin their experience, or other participants’ sport experience. They learn to cope with adversity and loss, as well as with success. Successful athletes use disappointment to motivate them to practice so they do better in the future.

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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