

How to Raise Upstanders (*Instead of Bystanders*)

As young athletes navigate through adolescence, they may run into situations that challenge their moral compass. Whether your athlete is faced with an ethical dilemma in school, in sport, or in the community, doing the right thing is important – no matter who is watching.

In a study about young children and the bystander effect, results showed that although children are typically extremely helpful to others in need, they are more inclined to assist others only when the responsibility is clearly attributed to them. Children were less likely to help when there were other potential helpers around because there was a diffusion of responsibility.

Here are five strategies to help your athletes become upstanders instead of bystanders in those complex times when their sense of responsibility and decision-making skills are tested.

Reinforce positive behaviors

Kids can learn about caring, fairness, and how to lead an ethical life from the people around them, so it's up to adults to lead by example when it comes to intervening in a situation where someone needs help.

“One of the simplest ways to help kids learn new behaviors is to reinforce them as they happen,” explains Michelle Borba, PhD, an internationally recognized character education expert, educational psychologist, and award-winning author of 22 parenting books.

“Purposely catch your child acting morally and acknowledge their good behavior by describing what they did right and why you appreciate it.”

Teach them to become active bystanders

According to the Safety Net Coalition at Loyola University in Chicago, an active bystander is someone who not only witnesses a situation, but takes action to keep a situation from escalating or to disrupt a problematic situation.

When kids decide to speak up on another person's behalf, it takes courage. Sitting in silence when you recognize someone is being hurt can also be devastating and fill your child with guilt after the incident.

Teach your athlete how to become action-oriented and assertive when it comes to situations that are unjust in their eyes. For example, if your athlete sees a teammate taunting an athlete on an opposing team, encourage them to be an upstander and leader by taking action to stop the bullying, whether it's by helping the target walk away, telling an adult, or another method.

Expand your child's circle of concern

Another way to raise upstanders is to expand their circle of concern. By teaching your young athlete to show care and concern to a wider network of people, you're teaching them that their decisions have an impact on others in their community.

Harvard Graduate School of Education's Making Care Common Project encourages parents to “cultivate children's concern for others because it's fundamentally the *right* thing to do, and also because when children can empathize with and take responsibility for others, they're likely to be happier and more successful.”

So, the next time your child is debating whether they should invite one of their teammates or classmates to their birthday party, for example, ask them to put themselves in the other person's shoes and how they would feel if they didn't get an invite to a party that everyone else was invited to.

Practice kindness and empathy

Empathy creates compassion for other people's perspectives.

In her book, *Unselfie: Why Empathetic Kids Succeed in Our All-About-Me World*, Borba shares, "Empathy can be instilled, and it is composed of teachable habits that can be developed, practiced, and lived. Empathy is what lays the foundation for helping children live one essential truth: We are all humans who share the same fears and concerns and deserve to be treated with dignity."

When your athlete is regularly exposed to kindness and empathy, they grow both socially and emotionally. So, whether your athlete is having a tough time with a teammate's attitude or they're struggling with the coach's decision to bench them for a game, acknowledge what they're feeling and continue to encourage them to look at the situation from another perspective.

Create a positive, caring family motto

Borba also recommends that parents develop a family mantra. "Ask your child, 'What do I stand for in this house? What really makes the difference in this house? What do you think is important to me in this house?'"

Borba adds that "You'll begin to hear the kinds of values that your child thinks are important. Then, you can come up with some fun, memorable motto."

As your athlete lives out your new motto, they will begin to internalize that positivity, which will soon be reflected in school, on the field, and in situations when it matters most.

Most parents hope to raise kids who play by the rules, are brave enough to stand up for what is right, and who make sure that everyone is treated fairly, equally, and honestly. These strategies will encourage your athlete to help others as they foster their sense of personal responsibility.



About TrueSport

TrueSport®, a movement powered by the experience and values of the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency, champions the positive values and life lessons learned through youth sport. TrueSport inspires athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators to change the culture of youth sport through active engagement and thoughtful curriculum based on cornerstone lessons of sportsmanship, character-building, and clean and healthy performance, while also creating leaders across communities through sport.

For more expert-driven articles and materials, visit TrueSport's comprehensive LEARN resource.

This content was reproduced in partnership with TrueSport. Any content copied or reproduced without TrueSport and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency's express written permission would be in violation of our copyright, and subject to legal recourse. To learn more or request permission to reproduce content, click [here](#).

You can link back to the TrueSport article beginning November 1st at:
<https://learn.truesport.org/raise-upstanders-not-bystanders>