



Sport Families: How to Celebrate Wins, When One Kid Isn't Winning

A young athlete's teammates, siblings, coaches, and teachers can leave a lasting impression, but parents have the greatest impact on how a child feels about his or her performance in sport, says Joel Fish, PhD, sports psychologist and author of *101 Ways to Be a Terrific Sports Parent*.

When you have two or more children in sports, it can be a challenge to give each one the same level of positive attention — especially when one seems to be winning all the time, while the other is struggling. Fish shares advice on how to find the right [balance](#) between celebrating success and prioritizing progress rather than just winning.

Praise Effort Not Results

It's natural to be excited about a win, and there's nothing wrong with [celebrating](#) it, says Fish. "But focus more on your core values versus results: make sure you're praising other successes, like developing new skills or putting in a strong effort. You have a great opportunity to teach children multiple goals — there are other ways to define success that aren't results-driven."

This applies to both your winning child and the one who's struggling in sport — it's a great way to give both children equal amounts of praise and attention.

Check Your Reaction

Understanding how important your reaction is, and becoming aware of it, can go a long way towards promoting [good behaviors](#) on your part.

"You have an immediate emotional reaction when a child wins, or when one loses," Fish says. "That's the main issue — and if you can pay attention to how you're feeling and reacting, what your reaction is to success or failure, then you're better able to manage those feelings and give a more value-driven response."

Make Sure Everyone Gets What They Need

It can be a challenge to manage a budding career for a highly talented young athlete while making sure that his or her siblings are still thriving as well. Some sports, like

figure skating, involve immense amounts of travel and even potential relocation, and Fish notes that it's important to take your other children into account in those times.

That may mean a larger family discussion about moving to a different city, or, on a smaller scale, simply making sure that your other children also have activities that they're passionate about, even if they aren't getting the same kind of results.

Consider Shifting Focus

"If your child who is struggling or not having success in sport still enjoys being on the team and having fun, that's great," says Fish. "But remember, that child can also consider [exploring other sports](#) if he or she isn't having fun. Parents get stuck trying to channel kids into one certain sport but there's a huge range of activities for kids to get involved in. I've seen kids go from team sports to something like cycling and really flourish, so you may want to try other sports and keep in mind that what one of your children likes, the other may not."

Be Mindful of the Winning Child

You may think that the biggest challenge is making sure that the athletes who aren't winning don't suffer from a lack of [self-esteem](#) because of their talented sibling, but the child who's winning deals with [immense pressures](#) as well.

Even though your focus should be on effort, [give praise](#) when either your athletes achieve something great – like a win. A win is still a win, and your athlete should be recognized for the hard work they contributed to achieve that.

"There's a lot more prestige connected to [winning](#) now, compared to 30 years ago when the mentality was more centered around the motto, 'it's not about if you win or lose, it's how you play the game,'" says Fish. Today, the landscape has shifted for how parents view youth sports. Winning has meaning to it. So, when one sibling wins, and another doesn't, that's a challenge for parents in a way that it never was before.

Excitement around a win and disappointment around a loss for your kids are both completely normal feelings, says Fish. Just remember that as a parent, it's your job to also make sure that your child doesn't feel as though your love and approval is conditional on their results in sport.



About TrueSport

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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, by creating leaders across communities through sport.

You can link back to the TrueSport article beginning August 1st at:
<https://learn.truesport.org/celebrate-wins-one-kid-winning/>