

GROWING CHAMPIONS FOR LIFE

Positive Strategies for Helping Kids Win at Life and Sports

3 Leadership Habits That Cross from Sports to Life

By David Benzel



“Is your child a leader or a follower?”

Every parent wrestles with this question at some point.

For many children, it appears obvious from birth, that they are inclined to follow rather than lead.

However, if the **definition of leadership is having influence**, then **all kids** are presented with opportunities to lead others.

Sports participation, in particular, provides a natural place to develop and practice leadership habits. Additionally, it is important for young athletes to see the strong connection between what they learn in sport and what they can apply in school, work, and family.

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Check out these 3 leadership habits that are helpful in the competitive sports arena as well as other aspects of life.

1) Leaders Encourage

If you or your child has been the recipient of a well-placed encouraging remark, then you know how powerful it can be.

Encouragement at the right moment, can be the difference between success or failure and finishing or quitting.

Young athletes benefit greatly when parents, coaches, and teammates are encouraging at times like these:

- Mastering a new skill
- Facing a tough opponent
- Dealing with an injury
- Struggling with self-confidence

Teach your young athlete to recognize circumstances where they might have a positive influence by the simple act of encouragement. Talk to them about how the habits they develop in the team setting, can also be used in other places.

Perhaps it looks like:

- Encouraging a friend who is struggling in a school subject
- Positive comments made toward younger siblings
- Reassuring classmates that may be struggling with friendships
- Upbeat and supportive attitude at work

2) Leaders Educate

Another valuable aspect of leadership is education.

Just as we have countless opportunities to encourage, we also have many chances to educate.

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Athletes involved in youth sports are constantly being asked to learn:

- Game strategies
- Specific techniques
- New skills
- Improved outlooks

It is inevitable that at some point, your athlete will know things that younger athletes don't know. The ability to share and teach their less-experienced teammates is a valuable habit for them to practice.

Since learning is a lifelong journey, there will be many aspects of life where athletes can practice the habits of teaching and sharing information – outside of competition.

For example:

- Teach a sibling a trick to finishing a chore more efficiently
- Share a study habit with a classmate that is struggling
- Communicate with a friend the specifics of what a teacher is looking for
- Share what works for you when under pressure at exam time

3) Leaders Empower

Have you ever been under the leadership of someone who “does it all?” In other words, they aren't trying to lead a team but rather, *be the team*.

All good leaders learn the value of delegating. A leader doesn't send the message that they are the only one who can do things. Instead, they ask for help – which in turn, empowers others.

More than likely, your young athlete has experienced the great advantages that come from working as a team when they:

- Win a championship
- Work together toward a challenging goal
- Complete a hard set of practice drills, together
- Include everyone when cleaning up team equipment

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Help them to use that same team perspective, to empower the people around them – away from the field.

They might:

- Help to successfully organize a group school assignment
- Inspire younger siblings by applauding their strengths
- Start and help lead a volunteer project at church or in the community
- Ask friends for help when appropriate

Final Thoughts

Leadership is a two-way street.

Not only do we progress when under a positive leader, but we also grow stronger when we help lead those around us.

As parents, we can help to develop leadership qualities in our kids regardless of their tendencies when they come into the world.

Sports participation gives us the advantage to see leadership in action and practice it.

Have regular conversations about these 3 leadership habits so that your child not only perceives a chance to lead but also has the courage to act on it.