



**How can parents
and coaches
help children to
handle defeat? ▶**

In every sport contest there are winners and losers. In fact, when winning is narrowly defined as placing first, second, or third, there are usually more losers than winners. Handling defeat is one of the important lessons that young children can learn through sport.

Adults who organize and supervise a sport program play an important role in creating positive lessons about winning and losing. For example, coaches who are continually 'bending' the rules in order to win are likely to teach children that cheating is acceptable. Children who work with coaches who play by the rules will learn a different view of morality.

Ken Shields, former national men's basketball coach, says that "the time to teach youngsters important values such as the spirit of competition and how to cope with defeat is in their formative years. They need to be taught at an early age how to celebrate accomplishments even if they don't win the competition. Coaches play a very important role in shaping the environment of children."

Parents and coaches can teach youngsters how to cope with defeat by keeping losing in perspective. Remind them that every athlete loses at one time or another — even superstars.

Minimizing criticism also helps children to cope with defeat. When children lose, they don't need to be reminded about the loss. They should be rewarded for their attempt and reminded that everyone can learn important lessons from every defeat.

Sometimes children are put in situations where success may be next to impossible. Sport organizers, unfortunately, tend to group children according to chronological age rather than by size and weight. Through no fault of his or her own, one child may not be as mature physically or mentally as another, making it difficult to master a particular skill or to win a competition.

“The coach’s job is to structure and fine-tune workouts to produce a guaranteed success. Athletes succeed on success.”

Dr. Doug Clement
Olympic athletics coach
Success Stories