



Good Sportsmanship for Kids

Win Graciously, Lose with Dignity

CHILD'S NAME

DATE

Good Sportsmanship for Kids

Four lessons on congratulating others, handling defeat, accepting a referee's call, and ending every game with a handshake — because how you play tells everyone who you are.

ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

Sports are one of the most character-revealing contexts a child encounters. Victory reveals pride. Defeat reveals resilience. Conflict reveals self-control. This toolkit prepares children for all four: how to win without gloating, lose without sulking, accept a bad call calmly, and end every competition by looking the other person in the eye and shaking their hand. These habits, built young, carry into boardrooms and marriages decades later.

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"How you handle the final handshake tells everyone in that gym who you are. Prepare your child for that moment before it arrives."
— Vernon J. DeFlanders Sr., MannersMatterNow.com

HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

Use this toolkit before a season begins — not after a meltdown. Practice the scripts during a neutral, calm moment. Then when the real moment comes, the habit is already there.

Winning Without Gloating

Grace in victory

1 Celebrate — then check on the other person

Celebrating a win is fine. Prolonged celebration that makes the losing team feel worse is not. After your moment of joy: turn, look at the opposing players, and offer acknowledgment. Their day was hard.

2 Don't boast — let your play speak

Saying 'I destroyed you' or 'that was too easy' after a win is small. Saying nothing — or 'good game' — is large. The best competitors let their performance speak and keep their mouth quiet in victory.

3 Congratulate specific great plays by the other team

If your opponent made an outstanding play during the game, say so after: 'That was a great shot — seriously.' Generosity in victory is one of the rarest and most admired character traits in any sport.

4 Ask what they did well — and mean it

After a game: 'What did you think went well for you today?' That question is sportsmanship in action. It says: I see you as a player, not just as someone I beat.



PRACTICE SCRIPT

TRY IT TOGETHER

After a family board game or backyard sport: winning child practices — celebrates briefly, then turns to the other player: 'Good game. That was a tough one.' No gloating. If the other player made a good move: 'That [move] was really smart.' Run it both ways — winner and loser.

Leader Tip: Watch sports with your child and point out when athletes show grace after winning. Ask: 'Did you see how [player] handled that?' Those real examples make the standard visible and attainable.

**1 Take a breath before you respond**

The first ten seconds after a loss are the hardest. Take one breath. Don't speak until you can speak calmly. Everything said in those first ten seconds after a loss tends to be something you wish you could take back.

2 No pouting, sulking, or blaming

Slumped shoulders, silence, walking away without a handshake, blaming the referee or your teammates — these are the faces of poor sportsmanship. They are noticed. They are remembered. And they are a choice.

3 Find something to acknowledge about the winner

'You played really well today' or 'Congratulations — you deserved that win.' This is hard. It is supposed to be hard. Doing it anyway is the definition of good character under pressure.

4 Talk about what you'll do differently — privately

After the handshakes, privately with your coach or parent: what would you do differently? That question turns a loss into a lesson. Public complaint is weakness; private reflection is strength.

PRACTICE SCRIPT

TRY IT TOGETHER

After a loss in any game: child takes one visible breath, walks over to the winner: 'Congratulations — you played really well.' Handshake, eye contact. Then walks with you privately and names one thing they'd do differently. Practice until the breath and the handshake feel natural, not forced.

Leader Tip: Share a time you lost something — a job, a competition, a negotiation — and chose grace. Tell your child specifically what you did and what it cost you emotionally. That honesty teaches more than any script.

Accepting a Bad Call

Composure when it isn't fair

- 1 **Accept the call out loud — immediately**
When a referee makes a call you disagree with, say 'Okay' or nod and keep playing. The response is visible to everyone watching. Children who argue calls are noticed — and not favorably — by coaches, parents, and opponents.
- 2 **Don't show it on your face**
An eye roll, a head-shake, a disgusted expression — these are all arguments made without words. They communicate disrespect just as clearly. Train your face to stay neutral after a call you disagree with.
- 3 **If you genuinely believe there's been an error, ask once — calmly**
'Excuse me — I thought that was out of bounds. Can you clarify?' Once. Calmly. If the call stands, it stands. That's the end of it. Arguing beyond that first respectful question is never appropriate for a young player.
- 4 **Remember: referees miss calls. You also miss calls.**
Every athlete makes errors in judgment. So do referees. The standard you hold others to should be the standard you apply to yourself. Humility about your own performance makes bad calls easier to accept.



PRACTICE SCRIPT

TRY IT TOGETHER

During a game: parent plays a referee who makes a questionable call against the child. Child practices: takes a breath, says 'Okay' or nods — face neutral. Option: child asks once calmly: 'May I ask — was that out?' Parent replies. Child accepts whatever the answer is. Practice both accepting silently and asking once politely.

Leader Tip: Ask your child after a game: 'Were there any calls you disagreed with? How did you handle it?' Both good and poor responses deserve honest acknowledgment. Children who self-assess their sportsmanship improve faster than those who only receive external feedback.

The Post-Game Handshake

The tradition that defines character

1 Line up — don't lag, don't rush

After every game, line up for the handshake without being told. Walk steadily — not dragging your feet if you lost, not rushing triumphantly if you won. The line requires the same posture from both sides.

2 Make eye contact with each person

Look each opponent in the eye as you pass. Not at the ground, not past them. Eye contact in a handshake line communicates respect. It also communicates that you're not ashamed of the result, whatever it was.

3 Say something real — not just 'good game'

'Good game' repeated 15 times is a ritual, not a courtesy. To at least two or three opponents, say something specific: 'Great defense in the second half' or 'That was a really close one — well played.' Specific is respectful.

4 Finish the line — every time

Don't leave the line early. Don't skip the coach on the other end. Complete it. Fully. Every time. That completion is a commitment to the tradition of sportsmanship, not just the players you happened to shake hands with.



PRACTICE SCRIPT

TRY IT TOGETHER

Set up a mock handshake line at home — all family members participate. Child walks the line after a pretend game: eye contact, real words to at least two people. Practice both winning and losing versions. Notice: does the energy change based on the result? The goal is the same composure regardless.

Leader Tip: Attend games — not just to watch the score, but to watch the handshake line at the end. Point out specific players who did it well. 'Did you see how he looked everyone in the eye? That's what we're working toward.'