Parents provide an essential support system for a middle school athlete. Your involvement in your child’s sports may range from simply driving to and from games, to supporting your child’s skill development. Children may come to you with technical questions like how to throw a baseball better or with tougher issues like feeling upset when they lose a game. Parents’ awareness of their role within the context of youth sports helps them support their child’s athletic development in a nurturing and encouraging way. So how can a parent help their child feel competent and successful in sport?

An important topic to discuss with your child is winning and losing. At an early age, children observe how sports fans place importance on the outcome of a game and this lesson stays with them through their early athletic development. For this reason, it is important for parents to help their children focus on the process of playing the sport and not the end result. If a parent defines success and failure by wins and losses, children are likely to perform below their potential or feel unable to meet expectations. Rather than focusing on uncontrollable factors such as the score, parents should instead encourage their children to look for improvements in their effort and skill as a sign of success.

Being a good role model is another way you can foster the good lessons that sports can teach your children. In an era where the media constantly showcases negative examples of fan behavior, it is extremely important for young athletes to witness their parents being supportive of fairness and sportsmanship so that they will be more likely to adopt these positive behaviors on their own. For example, making positive remarks about teammates and opponents’ performances, complimenting coaches and officials, and valuing teamwork over individual performance are all ways parents can be a positive example for their children.

Finally, reminding children that sports are for fun is another important issue that often goes overlooked in youth athletics. It is easy to lose perspective and put pressure on children rather than keep them motivated to participate. Parents can build their children’s self-esteem by complimenting effort and giving positive feedback after performances. Another way to keep sport enjoyable is to practice sport skills at home with family members or play sports together in a non-competitive setting. Emphasizing skill development and enjoyment gives children something positive to focus on and enables them to feel competent and successful on the field and off. Parents can also remind children that sports are a great way to make new friends and build positive and empowering relationships with peers.

For additional information visit: https://www.nays.org/parents.