

Parent Behavior at Children's Sports Events

By Jill Evans Kryston, Etiquette Consultant

Q: Can you please settle an on-going dispute between my husband and me about parent behavior at sports events? He sees nothing wrong with yelling directives at our children from the sidelines and I think he's embarrassing them while interfering with the coaches.

A: As a parent of three athletes, I've had personal experience with becoming overly zealous at sports events. While we all want to see our children do their best, there is an invisible fence between good and bad sports etiquette.

Parents have a responsibility to act mature, be professional and set a good example for their children. Feeling frustrated over a call is normal. However, yelling insults and obscenities crosses the line of acceptable spectator behavior and never helps anyone. Many coaches are volunteers who give their time to our children. Try to give them the benefit of the doubt when you think they're being unfair.

Enthusiastic cheering is a positive way to let our children know we are rooting for their team. However, it's very easy to develop tunnel-vision and focus only on our own child. Emotions tend to run high at games, but parents who scream from the sidelines end up disrupting the players as well as those sitting around them. Also, singling out your child by shouting orders can confuse and embarrass them. Keep in mind, the coach may have issued different instructions from yours on a play.

Children need to know we are proud of them. Praise during practice will build their confidence when it's time to play the actual game. Games are the perfect opportunity to demonstrate compassion and grace by congratulating your child for playing a good game even when they lost.

We all like to win, but it is important to remember, a game is just a game - win or lose, it's meant to be fun for everyone. We encourage our children to give it their best, and as parents and spectators, we need to do the same by practicing good sports etiquette.

Do you have an etiquette question you want Jill to answer in her monthly column? Visit: www.DefiningManners.com and click "In the News" to submit your questions or mail to: P.O. Box 1703, Shavertown, PA 18708.

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