



LITTLE SNOOPERS

A Parents' Companion Guide to...

Developing Teamwork Skills



Overview

There is perhaps nothing more important to our long-term success and growth than understanding how to work with others effectively. This is why team sports are such an informative experience for many children as they are growing up: by collaborating, we learn what it means to make contributions to something greater than ourselves. In turn, we learn what it means to respect and appreciate the contributions that others are making as well.

The concept of teamwork is critical enough that it's impossible to start teaching it to your child too early. In the long run, this skill will open up untold doors and reveal unforeseeable opportunities. The more capable your child is at teamwork, the more deftly they will be able to thrive in any and all environments.

To start you out in your efforts, these are the top 5 ways you can help your child develop teamwork skills.

1. Teach Them Organization

While many people hear the word "teamwork" and immediately start picturing inspirational speeches and remembering stories of persistence, there is a quieter, lower-key side to it. Teamwork is not only about the moments in which we ask ourselves whether or not we can do something together. It is also about the moments in which we are planning our next steps and keeping our collective strategies in order. You can guide your child toward a stable understanding of teamwork by emphasizing the value of organization. Even though this is not the most glamorous aspect of teamwork, it is a critical one, especially for more complex (and thus more rewarding) projects that he or she will undertake.

As a test run, encourage your child to find organization in even the most mundane and everyday parts of the day. When they are figuring out how they are going to spend their weekend, show them how to put together a flowchart and a schedule. You want to make organizations second-nature for your child so that he or she is able to lean into this concept later on. They will then get older and become the go-to person on any team for a sense of structure.

2. Teach Them How to Assert Themselves

There is a fine line between assertiveness and aggression, and once someone has crossed that line, it is difficult to step back or to make it up. On the other side of things, people who never assert themselves tend to feel ignored and left out. In the workplace and in all other relationships, your child will need to be able to assert themselves, knowing when it is appropriate to do so. It is up to you to draw the distinction here. As always, you can accomplish that by making yourself a positive role model.

Think about it this way: in your own parent-child dynamic, there is a clear power imbalance. Your child has to listen to you. In all other relationships that your child builds, that is not going to be the case. You want to avoid imparting any damaging lessons to your child, which means you want to avoid relying on your power imbalance to get your way during disputes. If your child questions you about something, treat it as you would any other conversation. Make sure that he or she knows where you stand – but don't cross over from assertiveness to aggression.

3. Take On Leadership Roles

Most of us tell our children that they can be anything when they grow up: an entrepreneur, an artist, or even a world leader. To prepare your child to pursue their wildest dreams, though, you need to take an in-depth look at what those dreams entail. Someone who aspires to build houses should, for example, learn how to swing a hammer and cut up boards. Those who aspire to leadership positions should, in the same way, learn how to feel comfortable directing, managing, and guiding others. There are two sides to this: you are teaching your child how to embrace leadership roles and how to live up to them.

For the first side, you can focus on the balance between assertiveness and aggression. You are teaching your child to pay attention when other people are talking and also to offer his or her opinions as appropriate. The second side is that you are encouraging ethics and compassion. You prepare your child not merely to wield power however possible but to use positions of authority to better other people's lives. Moral as this is, there is a practical benefit too: as an ethical and compassionate leader, your child will become more popular with the people that he or she is leading.

4. Delegate Responsibilities and Trust Others

As you are raising the next leader of the free world, you want to remain aware that you are not raising someone who feels inclined to control others. Teamwork requires, after all, a high degree of trust. To work together effectively, we need to be able to let go of certain things. We need to cede oversight of this task or that one, delegating responsibilities to people who have proven themselves capable. Your child will make long strides toward teamwork mastery by cultivating a little faith in other people.

Rather than telling your child to trust others, show your child that you trust them. One useful exercise in this area is to draw up a list of chores. Explain to your child that those chores now belong to them. Go on to explain that no matter what happens, you are not going to check in on the list of chores. You have delegated responsibility for the chores to your child because you know that they are going to follow through on them.

5. Teach Them How to Stick with a Plan

Tying together all of these skills – organization, assertiveness, leadership, delegation – consistency will equip your child with the discipline he or she needs to play an important role on even the highest-pressure teams and in the most competitive environments. Rather than looking for an out any time something gets a little more difficult than it has been, your child will develop a habit of persistence. Obstacles will serve only as inspiration.

The next time one of your plans goes awry, show your child what it means to troubleshoot and look for new solutions. Maybe there is traffic along your normal route to the grocery store, or maybe the grocery store is out of your favorite cereal. Either way, explain to your child that when difficulties arise, the most important thing is to keep a level head and find a way to adhere to the plan that you have already laid out. As a team, you want to be able to turn to something – the plan – so that you remain aligned with each other.

In Conclusion

Teaching your child the power and value of teamwork, you are affording them an immediate and distinct advantage. Challenges may arise, but because your child knows how to work with others, they will feel the confidence that comes with numbers. Whether they are in the boardroom or on the basketball court, teamwork will matter, and they will feel grateful to you for giving them that gift.