Character Development and Good Sporting Behavior
Session Outline

• Defining character and good sporting behavior
• Approaches to developing good sporting behavior
• Moral reasoning and moral behavior
• Do sport and physical education enhance character development?
• Guiding practice in character development
Defining Character and Good Sporting Behavior

- There is no one universally accepted definition of sportspersonship, or what is called good sporting behavior in this text.
- Character and good sporting behavior fall within the general area of morality in sport.
Three Components of Morality in Sport

- Fair play
- Character
- Good sporting behavior

(continued)
Three Components of Morality in Sport (continued)

• Fair play requires that all participants understand and adhere not only to the formal rules of the game but also to the spirit of cooperation and unwritten rules of play necessary to ensure that a contest is fair.

• Character involves four interrelated virtues: Compassion, fairness, good sporting behavior, and integrity.
Three Components of Morality in Sport (continued)

- **Good sporting behavior:** Concern and respect for the rules and officials, social conventions, and the opponent, as well as one’s full commitment to one’s sport and the absence of a negative approach toward participation.
Kids’ Takes on Moral Issues in Sport

- Categories of moral issues identified by youth are fairness, negative game behavior, and negative teammate behavior.
- These findings confirm and extend adult perspectives on moral issues in sport.
- They also show that issues of rightness and wrongness occur in practices, before and after games, and at home, not just during the game.
Approaches to Developing Good Sporting Behavior

• **Social learning approach**: Good sporting behavior and attitudes are learned through models, reinforcement, and social comparison.

• **Structural–developmental approach**: Moral reasoning and behavior depend on how psychological growth and development change in a child and interact with the environment.

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Approaches to Developing Good Sporting Behavior (continued)

• **Social–psychological approach:** To understand morality and character, one must consider the *personal* elements in the structural–developmental approach plus *social factors* that go beyond reinforcement, modeling, and social comparison elements of the social learning approach.
Components of Social Learning

- **Modeling or observational learning**: Learning by watching what others do (or do not do)
- **Reinforcement**: Being reinforced or penalized for one’s actions
- **Social comparison**: Exhibiting behaviors in an effort to fit in with one’s peer or comparison group
Structural–Developmental Approach

• **Moral reasoning**: The decision process whereby the rightness or wrongness of action is determined

• **Moral development**: The process of experience and growth through which a person develops the capacity to morally reason

• **Moral behavior**: The execution of an act that is deemed right or wrong

(continued)
Figure 24.2

Level 1: External control—it's okay as long as I am not caught

Level 2: An eye-for-an-eye orientation

Level 3: The “golden rule” or “altruistic view”—treat others like you would like to be treated

Level 4: Following external rules and regulations

Level 5: What is best for all involved

Adapted from Seefeldt 1987.
Moral behavior is best understood from an interactive perspective.

The interactive perspective considers the characteristics of the individual and the social environment.
Hazing in Sport

• Hazing is any activity expected of someone joining a group that humiliates, degrades, abuses, or endangers that person, regardless of a person’s willingness to participate.

• Hazing occurs more often in contact, team, and competitive sports.
Hazing may do more to negatively influence team chemistry than contribute to it.

Sport leaders and educators have a moral obligation to stop hazing practices and teach athletes how to team build in positive ways.
Moral Reasoning and Moral Behavior

- Although aggression is linked with immature moral reasoning, the connection between reasoning and behavior is not perfectly understood.
- The link between moral reasoning and behavior is not absolute because several moral-action stages must be completed.
Moral Reasoning and Moral Behavior: Stages of Moral Action

- Interpreting the situation as one that involves some sort of moral action
- Deciding on the best course of moral action
- Making a choice to act morally
- Implementing a moral response
Do Sport and Physical Education Enhance Character Development?

• Character is not caught but taught in sport, exercise, and physical activity settings.

• Teaching character involves the systematic use of certain strategies.

• Research has shown that the systematic and organized delivery of moral development information can change children’s character (e.g., Fair Play for Kids curriculum).

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Fair Play for Kids Curriculum
Sample Activities

• The problem-solving running shoe approach to resolving conflicts (problem identification, alternative, consequences, solution)

• Fair-play dilemma improvisation cards

• Self-directed and organized relay games followed by “let’s talk” time to discuss conflicts that had to be resolved
Conclusions in Moral Development Research

• Professionalization of attitude occurs—winning becomes the dominant value the longer one is in sport.

• Game reasoning occurs in athletes.

• Athletes have lower levels of moral reasoning than nonathletes in some sports (e.g., contact sports) (Shields & Bredemeier, 2001).

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Conclusions in Moral Development Research (continued)

- Athletes characterized by lower levels of moral reasoning are more likely to sanction and use aggression.
- Females tend to use higher levels of moral reasoning than males.
Conclusions in Moral Development Research (continued)

- Ego orientations are associated with lower levels of moral development and action, while task orientations are associated with higher levels (Shields & Bredemeier, 2001).
- Physical activity offers an attractive vehicle for effective moral and social development change in children and adolescents (Weiss & Smith, 2002).
Sport Participation and Delinquency

• Participants in organized sports are less likely than nonparticipants to engage in delinquent behavior (Seefeldt and Ewing, 1997).

• Four explanations for the sport participation and delinquency relationship exist.

• Most likely, the relationship is best defined by all four of these explanations.
Explanations of Delinquency and Sport Participation

- **Differential association**: Sport keeps kids off the street because they have less interaction with delinquent others.

- **Social bonding**: Children who participate in sport develop attachments with significant others who represent dominant, prosocial values.
Explanations of Delinquency and Sport Participation (continued)

- **Labeling hypothesis:** Sport does not teach values; being labeled an athlete leads to special treatment, while being labeled a delinquent leads to a negative self-fulfilling prophecy.

- **Economic strain:** Sport participation allows youngsters to gain prestige and status and reduces the strain between their dreams of a better life and beliefs about attainable goals.
Sport Participation and Gang Behavior

• Sport can serve as a deterrent for gang behavior by increasing self-esteem, providing an important source of identity, lending social support, and giving participants positive role models.

• Sport deters gang behavior only if programs are properly run, organized, and implemented. (See Trulson’s 1986 study of delinquent teenagers and taekwondo.)
Strategies for Enhancing Character Development

• **Strategy 1**: Define good sporting behavior in your particular program.

• **Strategy 2**: Reinforce and encourage good sporting behavior and penalize and discourage inappropriate sporting behavior.
Sample of Written Code of Good Sporting Behavior

- **Area of concern**: Behavior toward officials
- **Sporting behavior**: Questioning officials in the appropriate manner
- **Unsporting behavior**: Arguing with officials; swearing at officials
- See table 24.2 on p. 565 of text.
Strategies for Enhancing Character Development

• **Strategy 3:** Model appropriate behaviors.

• **Strategy 4:** Explain what behaviors are appropriate:
  – Emphasize why.
  – Emphasize intent of actions.
  – Emphasize role taking.
  – Emphasize empathy.

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• **Strategy 5:** Discuss moral dilemmas and choices.

• **Strategy 6:** Build moral dilemmas and choices into practices and classes.

• **Strategy 7:** Teach cooperative learning strategies.
Strategies for Enhancing Character Development (continued)

- **Strategy 8:** Create a task-oriented motivational climate.

- **Strategy 9:** Transfer power from leaders to participants.
Hellison’s Levels of Responsibility

• Level 4: Caring
• Level 3: Self-direction
• Level 2: Involvement
• Level 1: Self-control
• Level 0: Irresponsibility

As levels of personal responsibility are gained, greater social responsibility can be taken on.
Character Development as a Mind-Set

• Moral development and good sporting behavior must become part of a leader’s mind-set.

• Constantly look for opportunities to develop and enhance these positive qualities in participants.

• Developing positive sporting behavior takes forethought and consistent efforts of adults.
Guiding Practice in Character Development

• Physical educators, coaches, and exercise leaders are in positions to positively influence character, behavior, and development.

• Recognize the two sides of winning:
  Pressure to win can cause people to cheat, but those who resist temptations may learn very meaningful lessons.
• **Teaching for transfer:** Transfer is not automatic. Discuss how values learned in sport can transfer to nonsport environments.

• **Realistic expectations:** Character development is an imperfect process. Be optimistic, but be realistic!
Guiding Practice in Character Development

- Build resilience in students and athletes.
- Resilience is one of the most important life skills in character education.
- Resilience is the ability to bounce back after exposure to severe risk or distress.
- Resilience can be developed through physical activity programs.
Attributes that Make Up Resilience

- **Social competence:** The ability to interact socially with others and, by doing so, create strong networks of social support.

- **Autonomy:** Resilient youth have a clear sense of who they are, feel they can exert control, and feel they can act independently.

- **Optimism and hope:** Resilient youth have a clear sense of optimism and hope.
Developing Resilience in Youth

• Focus on the athlete’s strengths rather than the weaknesses. Build the athlete’s self-confidence.

• Don’t focus only on the sport or physical activity. Focus on the whole child and the child’s emotional, social, economic, and educational needs.

• Be sensitive to the youngster’s individuality as well as the child’s cultural differences. Get to know the child as a person.

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Developing Resilience in Youth (continued)

• Encourage independence and control over one’s life by providing the athlete with input about the program and leadership responsibilities.

• Incorporate a strong set of values and clear expectations into the program. Make sure the athlete knows what you expect and value.
Developing Resilience in Youth (continued)

• Help youth see possible future occupations for themselves.

• Provide a physically and psychologically safe environment.

• Keep program numbers small and emphasize long-term involvement.
Developing Resilience in Youth
(continued)

• Provide leadership that makes the program work despite obstacles.

• Make sure the program links with community and neighborhood.

• Provide good contact with adult models who care and offer support.