

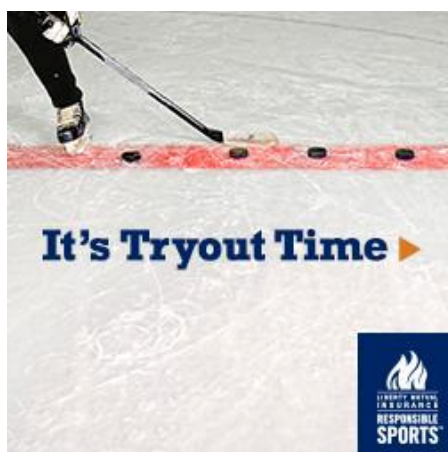
USA Hockey National



Tryouts Tips: A Responsible Sports Playbook

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By USAHockey.com



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Making the youth hockey team can be on the most difficult challenges that youth athletes can face – both physically and emotionally. And making the team can be hard, no matter how talented or driven the athlete -- as the well-documented tale of basketball icon Michael Jordan not making his high school team as an underclassman illustrates.

So this preseason, as tryouts get underway, how about taking a Responsible Sports approach to tryouts? How can Responsible Sport Parents and Responsible Coaches help kids manage this process and stay positive?

It's important to remember the positives in the tryout experience – and that these positives exist whether or not your young athlete makes the final cut. Tryouts are one of the many experiences in youth sports that prepare us for similar situations in our adult life, such as college applications, job interviews and more.

"Disappointment is a great opportunity to reinforce positive character traits like determination and resilience," said Jim Thompson, Founder and CEO of Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA). The experts at PCA have a few good tips for you and your youth athletes as the tryout process unfolds this preseason:

1. **Set Goals:** Before the tryout process kicks off, Responsible Sport Parents can sit down and have a conversation with your young athlete about what their goals are for trying out and playing on the team. Give them positive assurances that no matter the outcome, you support them and are proud of them. Talk about other opportunities that might be available in your area if they don't make the team. By talking about goals and outlining alternatives, the tryout process won't feel so "do-or-die" for your young athlete.
2. **Focus On Effort:** As your young athlete enters the tryout process, remind him or her that they can't control the outcome – whether or not they make the team. What they can control is their effort and attitude. Remind them to give maximum effort at all times, and to focus on their own effort, not what other athletes are doing.
3. **Keep Athletes Active:** The pressure to perform and the fear of failure can wreak havoc on young athletes. Responsible Coaches organize tryouts where athletes are constantly in motion, not standing around watching other players perform or getting nervous before their turn.
4. **Have Fun:** Laughing, having fun and learning new things can all be part of tryouts. Regardless of the outcome, kids should have a good time during the tryouts themselves. Laughter can also really help young athletes let go of stress and stay relaxed. Responsible Coaches never purposely create a stress-filled environment if they want to elicit the best performance from athletes.
5. **Open To Learning:** While coaches are certainly looking to evaluate players based on skill levels, coaches also look for athletes who have the potential to improve (aka a player who is "coachable"). Remind your athletes that they might make mistakes in the tryouts, but how they handle those mistakes may be even more important. Responsible Sports Coaches look for this attitude just as much as they evaluate skills.
6. **OK To Be Disappointed:** As Responsible Coaches and Responsible Sports Parents, we can help kids cope with their disappointment by reminding them that it is in fact OK to be disappointed. Empathize with them. Don't try to make your child feel better by saying the tryout wasn't important. Instead, consider sharing a story of when you were disappointed and how you overcame that disappointment.
7. **"You're The Kind Of Person":** The team at PCA reminds us that "You're The Kind Of Person" statements can really help kids manage through the disappointment of not making the team. "I know it means a lot to you, but you're the kind of person who doesn't give up easily." Or "You're the kind of person who doesn't let setbacks keep you from playing the game you love." Use these statements to help shape your athlete's self-image in the face of disappointment, and to begin planning how to move beyond that disappointment.
8. **Check Your Emotions:** Responsible Sports Parents keep their own emotions in check when it comes to their children's youth sports experience. Having parents who get upset or angry, or want to challenge a coach's decision about tryouts, just puts added pressure on kids.
9. **Feedback:** As Responsible Coaches, one of the best things you can do is give kids honest feedback about their tryouts, including areas where they can improve for next year. Feeling rejected is hard enough, but not knowing why you didn't make the team is even worse. Try to give young athletes some direction on what they can do to improve, and encourage them to try out next year.

As you and your athletes prepare for tryouts this season, consider taking a Responsible Sports approach to ensure that, regardless of the outcome, our kids gain valuable life lessons.

Good luck this season from your friends at Liberty Mutual Insurance and our Responsible Sports team.

In an effort to benefit millions of youth athletes, parents and coaches, this article is among a series created exclusively for partners in the Liberty Mutual Responsible Sports Program powered by Positive Coaching Alliance.

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