

# Sport NZ's Parent approach & Good Sports®

## Background

We know that if people are physically active, they have better outcomes in life. Sport New Zealand's purpose is to contribute to the wellbeing of every body in Aotearoa New Zealand by leading an enriching and inspiring Play, Active Recreation and Sport system.

Sport New Zealand's approach to enriching the Sport system in Aotearoa New Zealand is underpinned by the Balance is Better philosophy. In order to influence changes in youth sport, and through consultation with our partner network, Parents were identified as one of four focus areas for the Sport Development team.

Sport NZ's Parent approach centres on supporting partners to better engage with parents through tools, resources and systems. In partnership with Aktive, Good Sports® has been incorporated as a component of Sport NZ's Parent approach.

## About Good Sports:

Good Sports is a behaviour change initiative aiming to create positive sporting experiences for children by educating and supporting the key adult influencers in youth sport - in particular, parents and whanau.

### Why?

It is widely accepted that parents are an important influencer of young people in multiple aspects of their lives, and this includes the critical role they play in young people's participation in sport. We also know that the influencing role of parents changes as young people grow, mature and as a young person's needs change. Research from New Zealand indicates that there has been a gradual decline in the number of children and young people participating in organised sport opportunities over the past decade. There are a number of different factors that may be contributing to this decline, one of which is that many of today's sport experiences are no longer meeting children's needs as effectively as they could.

**Importantly**, adults in their various roles (parents, coaches, teachers and sport administrators) are critical for enabling sport experiences which meet the needs of children and young people. Unfortunately, research indicates that (even despite the best of intent at times) adults can inhibit children from having great sport experiences<sup>1</sup>. The following examples of challenges in contemporary youth sport illustrates how pivotal parents and whanau are to young people having good or bad experiences:

- The poaching of players and construction of 'super teams'
- Rigid movement patterns and limited opportunities for children to develop a breadth of functional skills
- Adults berating officials and kids from the sidelines, some leading to violence
- Families starting year-round training earlier in hopes of reaching elite status
- Clubs and organisations holding close to traditional but outdated models of competition that no longer serve the needs of young people
- Adults demonstrating overly competitive behaviour and an emphasis on winning putting unnecessary pressure on young people.

We know that this isn't the case for everyone. There are many examples of adults who focus on creating quality experiences. Unfortunately, problems such as those mentioned above prevail enough for a collective call to arms to address these issues. Too many of our adults around youth sports seem to miss the big picture. They mistake the value of healthy competition for the need to win-at-all costs. Short-term performance becomes a way of unfairly labeling both current and future ability. The culture of professional, adult sport all-too-easily creeps onto the pitch of unassuming eight, 12 and 16-year-old children who trust the experience and passion of a talented former player or well-meaning volunteer parent.

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<sup>1</sup> Walters, S. R. (2011). *Whose Game are we playing? A study of the effects of adult involvement on children participating in organised team sports* (Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology).

Good Sports was established out of recognition that supporting and educating adults is crucial to ensure Kiwi kids have the best chance of having positive sporting experiences and ultimately growing a lifelong love of sport.

This document has been written for sport administrators and system leaders who would like to better understand the philosophies and approaches that underpin Good Sports.

The purpose of this document is twofold:

1. To outline Good Sports as a philosophy. This includes unpacking Good Sport's key concepts, frameworks and tools developed to change the culture of youth sport in New Zealand.
2. Provide an overview of Good Sports as part of Sport NZ's parent approach.

## PART 1: GOOD SPORTS AS A PHILOSOPHY

### Our Vision for Change: The Good Sports Spine

The Good Sports Spine is a sense making tool to help adults understand how they impact children's sport experiences. The two different 'Climates' should be viewed as opposite ends of a continuum. The Good Sports project advocates for adults to move towards the Climate of Development.



Think of the Good Sports Spine as a map that lays out a range of common adult behaviours in youth sports and their relationship to children's needs. This mapping serves an important purpose: it helps us to chart the course for change which underpins the mission of the Good Sports project. On this map you will find two major zones: (1) the Climate of Performance and (2) Climate of Development. Simply put, we believe that those operating primarily in a Climate of performance must collectively shift to a Climate of Development in order to minimize the downsides and maximize the benefits of sport. Our core position reads like this:

*We believe that every young person in sport deserves a Climate of Development where the coaches, parents and other adult influencers in their lives: define success as effort and improvement; include everyone so they feel they matter; share control with kids; design for learning-through-play; and enable children to have a variety of experiences. In so doing, a Climate of Development can better support our*

young people's most basic needs for inspiration, connection, empowerment, play and variety. This makes a positive experience in sport.

Logically, we hold a second position with respect to a Climate of Performance:

*We believe that a Climate of Performance is inappropriate and can be destructive for young people, whereby coaches, parents and other adult influencers: define success by winning & losing; focus only on the best players; exert strict control; design for performance training; and inhibit opportunities for children to sample a variety of experiences. In so doing, a Climate of Performance can undermine, ignore and thwart children's basic needs for inspiration, connection, empowerment, play and variety.*

### Our Journey to Change: Transformative Learning

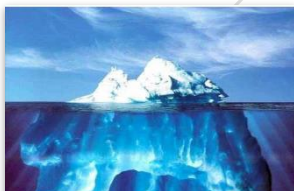
In many ways, developing the Good Sports Spine has been the more straightforward part. We are not the first to argue for a long-term focus in youth sport that prioritizes fun, wellbeing and development over winning and competitive success. A quick Internet search would quickly generate similar messages in documentary films, popular books, TED talks and info graphics (see image). We are also not the first in New Zealand to address this issue with coaches, parents and other key influencers. Some have created powerful media campaigns, purchased sandwich billboards, posted revised codes of conduct, hired sideline monitors and instituted mandatory education programmes.



*Why then, do problems remain?*

In our view, these tools and approaches are necessary but insufficient. We refer to them as first-order efforts that target surface-level actions – what to say on the sideline, how to respond when your child wants to quit. As standalone tools, they are one-way methods where learners passively receive universal, one-size-fits-all guidance. In this way, learning is understood as a straightforward process, solvable by simply providing the *right* or *correct* information.

**We believe that the problematic behaviours we continue to see in youth sport are symptoms of something more profound about what adults assume to be true about youth sports.**



*We often use the iceberg metaphor, to help frame to adults the different levels of learning (i.e. what we see on the surface, e.g. behaviours, is underpinned by something deeper, e.g. attitudes and beliefs).*

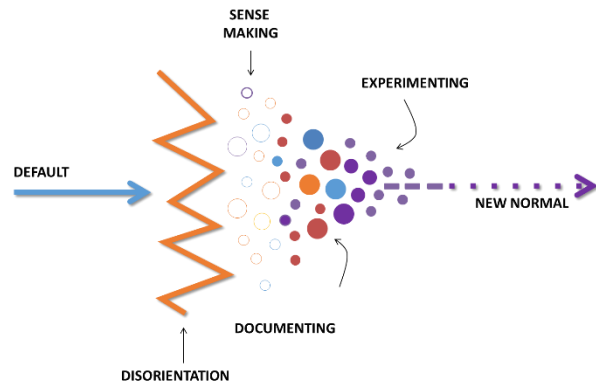
For this reason, our approach to behaviour change involves a transformative learning process that goes to the root cause of issues, beyond surface-level, right-wrong information. In order to truly create change in youth sport, we must shift our focus from actions to assumptions.

This requires second and third order approach that specifically targets the unique underlying 'sense and meaning making systems' that guide our behavior in the first place. Rather than adults simply "doing things better," we want them "doing better things" and, if possible, "seeing things differently." These learning goals require a different approach that demands more of the learning environment. Rather than provide a one-size-fits all standard, we advocate for a learning approach that must flexibly adapt to the wide variety of experiences, histories and life situations that our coaches, parents and other

adult influencers bring to youth sport. It must open the door for us to question our deeply held yet oft-unexamined assumptions (about what we believe to be true about youth sports).

### The Journey to Change

Change can be hard, especially those raised in highly competitive, results-based environments. It is not uncommon to face hesitation and even a little resistance to a Climate of Development in youth sports. This is why we must take care in our approach. We view this journey as a process that unfolds over time through four distinct but interrelated processes:



Process	Description
(1) Disorientation	"...something happens that is inconsistent with 'my experience,' my construction of reality, and my assumptions..."
(2) Sense-making	"I begin to mull things over by myself...a reflective phase"
(3) Documenting	"put change I have experienced into words that represent that change"
(4) Experimenting	"Introduce changes into my behavior that allow me to feel more congruent...many small experiments or action steps in which I try out, assess, and revise my behavior."

### Good Sports isn't just a workshop!

Despite our affection for them, it's worth stepping back for a moment to remember that Good Sports is more than a workshop. At its most basic, Good Sports is a sense making tool to grow understanding of what quality experiences are in youth sports. More than a handout, the Good Sports Spine represents a composite of ideals that can guide how parents view and respond to sport. We know that every child in New Zealand sport deserves a Climate of Development. If we believe in these ideals, then we have a responsibility to promote meaningful change - wherever that may lead.

Good Sports is well aligned to Balance is Better and is a useful tool to bring the Balance is Better conversation to a local communities and Parents.

Often, it's hard to articulate quickly just what Good Sports is and so we like to think about it in the following way:

- The Good Sports Spine - is the *What* and the *Why*
- The Journey to Change - is the *How*
- Leverage Points - is the *Where* and the *When*

## **PART 2: GOOD SPORTS AS A PROGRAMME**

In this section, we will detail the components that make up Good Sports from a programme perspective. We believe the following section will be useful for organisations and people wishing to understand Good Sports and either embed or lead Good Sports as a programme of work within their own business, organisation and/or communities.

### **Good Sports® and Sport NZ National Parent approach**

Through Sport NZ's 2019 Parent Evaluation project, it was identified that there was a need to provide national leadership to the sector. In partnership with Aktive, Good Sports® has been incorporated as a component of Sport NZ's Parent approach. Good Sports is a well-established and highly regarded initiative that was initially designed by Aktive as a Sport NZ funded Active Communities Project and then further developed over the last three years. The aim is to *"raise adults' awareness about their behaviours in children's' sport, and if necessary, promote a positive shift in that behaviour"*.

Good Sports is well aligned to the Balance is Better philosophy. It's a useful tool to help better understand the challenges facing youth sport and bring this important conversation to local communities and parents

First and foremost, **Good Sports will be used to influence Parents** however it is acknowledged that there will be a level of overlap and impact on other primary stakeholders i.e. coaches and local level administrators in clubs and schools.

Over the next 3 years, we will be working in depth with National and regional partners to embed Good Sports and support improved engagement with parents in sport.

### **Good Sports Education & Delivery Framework**

Part of the success of Good Sports is its approach to developing a capable workforce through a train-the-trainer approach. The national roll out has continued with this approach by supporting key individuals at national and regional level. The initial onboarding for partners as part of the national roll out includes a 2 ½ day residential learning programme. At the end of the residential, participants will be able to:

1. Explain the Balance is Better philosophy and how it relates to parents.
2. Explain the key components that underpin the Good Sports spine – Self Determination Theory, Growth Mindset and Cotes Developmental Model of Sports Participation
3. Interpret and apply the Transformative Learning approach and change process
4. Demonstrate how to engage with parents and identify leverage points in the system (including the connection to Participation & Development Opportunities area)
5. Articulate their plan to implement Good Sports as a key initiative for engaging and influencing Parents.

Importantly, the residential will also provide the opportunity for participants to connect as a group and established as a community of practice.

Additional to the residential organisations involved in the national roll out receiving accelerated support from Sport NZ and Aktive over a 12 month period to:

- Understand key youth sport issues, that interrelate with parents involvement in youth sport (Knowledge component)
- Understand how to create effective environments that support adult learning (Education component)
- Develop effective interventions targeting parents (Programme component)
- Integrate Good Sports within their wider youth sport initiatives (System component)
- Evaluate the effectiveness of parent interventions



As previously mentioned, Good Sports is more than just workshops delivered to parents. As part of Sport NZ's Parent approach, Good Sports will help organisations better connect with parents through facilitating conversations in clubs and schools and grow capability to take a systems approach to supporting parents better.

The delivery model for Good Sports is designed to be flexible and modified to meet the needs of the community organisations are working into. Through the national roll out, partners will be supported to design, test and evaluate Good Sports and ongoing learning and development will be provided to Good Sports leads and local workforces.

### **Resource support**

Good Sports as a programme has a number of resources that can be used to support implementation at a local level. These include;

- Workshop templates (for community workshops and developers courses)
  - Presentations
  - Planning and evaluation tools
  - Handouts and activities for participants
  - Videos to support the disorientating dilemma (these have been recently updated using New Zealand examples).
  - Facilitator guides and FAQ answers
- Digital collateral
  - Social media tiles
  - Photos
  - Promotional video
- Project planning templates
- Monitoring and evaluation frameworks

For more information about the national roll out of Good Sports, please contact;  
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