

Dear AYSO Region 43 Parent:

Sometimes we do not go far enough to bring you, the parents, into the spirit, training, and philosophy that represents AYSO. One way to improve this is by implementing the **Kids Zone** and the respective pledge that reminds parents of the philosophy of soccer, youth sports, and AYSO. Please familiarize yourself with this material and sign the pledge in support of your kids. Most importantly, put the pledge and material into practice anytime you are near the field. It is not enough to modify your behavior. You also need to help police and politely improve the behavior of others. Remember, the field is simply an extension of the classroom. Thanks for your cooperation and understanding.

Sincerely, your Board of Parents

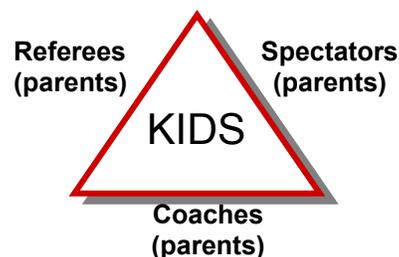
AYSO Philosophy

(taken from the AYSO Youth Manual, 1993 ed.)

AYSO is one of the premier youth soccer organizations in the United States and is a National Affiliate of the [United States Soccer Federation \(USSF\)](#), the National Governing Body for soccer in the United States. Your AYSO region is one of more than 1500 across the country that provide youth soccer programs for children 4 - 18 years old based on five basic principles:

- **Everyone Plays.** Every child plays at least half a game, and everyone plays three quarters before anyone plays a full game. No benchwarmers.
- **Balanced Teams.** Teams are re-formed each year so that all teams have the same chance to succeed and are closely matched. When games are one-sided, neither the teams nor the players benefit. Coaches are expected to restore balance during games.
- **Open Registration.** AYSO does not restrict membership on the basis of talent, race, religion, or any type of belief or attitude. No tryouts or cuts.
- **Positive Coaching.** Soccer is FUN for the players, coaches, referees and spectators because the parent volunteers are trained to make it so. We believe in “Double-Goal” coaching – a term introduced by the Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA).
- **Good Sportsmanship.** Players and adult volunteers learn how to win and lose gracefully and avoid any form of abuse toward one another.

AYSO is based on a cooperating team of parent volunteers supporting a single goal– the positive development of the kids. This is depicted in the diagram here with the coaches forming the foundation, the spectators and referees providing the additional support to make it a safe, fair and fun environment for all, and the player kids the real focus of attention.



Here are further guidelines for putting these five principles into action at the field:

Don't bunch up!

Quit playing around out there!

Remember what we practiced?

Wake up!

What's the matter with you?

How could you miss that shot?

If it starts with "Don't", then don't say it. Telling a child one of these has no value. Instead, tell players what to do right (set the goal) and encourage them when they try.

It must be achievable and understandable to have value. "Play smarter, not harder", may sound good, but how does the player accomplish it. "Pass to Tommy" has a lot more value to younger players than "pass outside".

Do no harm. The lessons kids learn go far beyond the game. It's your responsibility to be sure that they are the right lessons. Remember, it's about more than the game.

If you attach a child's name to it, it must be positive, instructive and encouraging (PIE: all three, no exceptions). Every child on the team should be singled out for a positive, encouraging and instructive comment at least once in every game. The natural tendency is to focus on your child, the high performers and the low performers. In any game, this leaves a lot of kids in the middle who never hear their name.

Laugh--a lot. Remind everyone (including yourself) that this is a game and it's supposed to be fun. Remember, your actions set the tone for the other parents and the children. If you're having fun, they will too.

Cheer--a lot. Cheer for both teams when they do something right. Don't forget that a positive comment from a coach or parent is powerful stuff, even from the other team's coach or parent. If you are not familiar with soccer skills, then provide a generic cheer such as one found in "101 Ways to Praise a Child" (<http://www.workingparents.com/101ways.htm>)

Prescriptive Coaching versus Descriptive Cheering. There can only be two active coaches who provide prescriptions as to what a player should do before it happens. Everyone else should be cheering with an after-the-fact description of what happened. Going a step further, soccer is to be played with as little interference as possible. So in fact, coaching during the game should be limited and strategic so as to encourage independent thought, development, and team building among the players.

Stay in your prescribed area. Per FIFA, USSF and AYSO requirements, coaches must remain within 10 yards of the halfway line (i.e. no further from the halfway line than the center circle edge) and 1 yard or more off the touch line and field. No one is allowed behind the goal line except a silent photographer with the referee's permission. AYSO further requires no one be outside the touchline and nearer to the goal line than the penalty area. These rules are there to prevent unfair and unsporting behavior of coaches and spectators that would alter the play near the critical goal area. Even if the behavior is intended in an innocent way like helping a first time goalkeeper. Also, as per FIFA requirements, everyone must stay off the field of play unless invited on by the referee.

Respect the authority of the referee. Anytime near the field, the referee has the complete and unquestioning authority to control the match and all its participants. For most kids, this is their first introduction to an authority figure. Although the referees are parents and learning, respect the authority they represent and handle any issues outside the presence of the players and with respect.

Kids Zone Parent Pledge

Please read, initial each item, sign coach or the appropriate AYSO



at the end, and return to the volunteer.

1. I pledge to be on time or early when dropping off my child for a practice or game. I understand that it is embarrassing for my child to be late to a game or practice and that I am putting him/her at physical risk by not providing adequate time for warm up. I understand the importance of picking up my child on time for all games and practices. This shows respect for the coach, who has other time commitments, and it tells my child that he or she is my top priority. _____
2. I understand that the top three reasons kids play sports are to have fun, make new friends and learn new skills. I understand that the game is for the kids, and that I will encourage my child to have fun and keep sport in its proper perspective. I understand that athletes do their best when they are emotionally healthy, so I will be positive and supportive. _____
3. I will redefine what it is to be a "Winner" in my conversations with my child. A Winner is someone who makes maximum effort, continues to learn and improve, and does not let mistakes, or fear of making mistakes, stop them. I understand that mistakes are an inevitable part of any game and that people learn from their mistakes. I understand that all children are born with different abilities and that the true measure is not how my child compares to others but how he/she is doing in comparison to his/her best self. _____
4. I will "Honor the Game." I understand the importance of setting a good example of sportsmanship to my child. No matter what others may do, I will show respect for all involved in the game including coaches, players, opponents, opposing fans, and referees. I understand that officials, coaches, and players make mistakes. If the referee makes a "questionable" call, I will continue to respect the individual and be silent! _____
5. I understand that games can be exciting times for my child who is trying to deal with the fast-paced action of the game, respond to opponents, referees, teammates and listen to coaches. I will not add confusion by yelling out instructions. During the game, I will limit my comments to encouraging my child and other players for both teams. _____
6. I will not make negative comments about the game, coaches, referees or teammates in my child's presence. I understand that this plants a seed, which can negatively influence my child's motivation and overall experience. _____

I agree to honor the AYSO Parent Pledge in my words and actions.

Parent Signature

Print Child's Name

Tools for Parents

The following ideas may be helpful for being an AYSO supportive parent.

Conversations before the games

- Tell your child you love him/her regardless of the outcome.
- Tell him or her “Go for it, give it your best shot and have fun!”

During the game

- Understand that kids are over-stimulated during games. The coach may be giving instructions, opponents and teammates are talking, the crowd is cheering, and the referee is blowing the whistle. To a youth sports participant, the atmosphere is much like that of a fighter pilot with enemy jets racing all around. Do not yell instructions to your child during the game because it only adds to the confusion. Sometimes the best thing you can do as a parent is to be quiet.
- Cheer and acknowledge good plays by *both* teams.

After the game

- Thank the officials for doing a difficult job.
- Thank the coaches for their efforts. Understand that after a difficult loss is not a good time to question a coach.
- Thank your opponents for a good game.
- Congratulate your child and his or her teammates for their efforts.
- Compliment individual players on good plays they made in the game.

During the car ride home

- Point out a good play your child made during the game.
- Avoid criticizing or correcting mistakes.
- Ask open-ended questions about how the game was played rather than how many points were scored. Here are examples of open-ended questions that might apply:
 - ✓ Did you have fun?
 - ✓ Did you give it your best effort?
 - ✓ What did you learn from the game?
 - ✓ What was the best play you made and how did it feel?
 - ✓ Did you bounce back from your mistakes?

AYSO recognizes the efforts and advancements made by the Positive Coaching Alliance in Honor of the Game. The Kids Zone Parent Pledge is adapted from Positive Coaching Alliance's Parent Pledge (www.positivecoach.org)