**Find the right sports program for your kids**

When it comes to signing your child up for a sports program, look beforehttp://www.homeenglish.ru/Articles27.htm you leap. Ask yourself, "Why do I want my child to play sports?" Ask your child, "Why do you want to play sports?" And ask the program director, "What can you offer my child?" A good program should provide children with all the positive values that sports have to offer -- and feed their reasons for playing. There is no denying the benefits of participating in sports. Aside from the obvious health benefits that come with activity and exercise, research shows that there are strong physical, social and psychological rewards associated with competition. Dan Gould, the director of the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, stresses that when children participate in multiple sports at an early age, they can develop the "ABCs of sports -- agility, balance and coordination." He adds that children can learn both fundamental motor skills, such as running or throwing, and sport-specific skills that will help them to stay active well into adulthood. In addition to skill development, given the right environment, research has shown that sports can have a positive psychological impact on kids. Dr. Darrell Burnett, a clinical psychologist and certified sports psychologist specializing in youth sports in Laguna Niguel, California, suggests that participation in sports meets the four basic needs that contribute to our self-esteem.

"When kids play sports, they can have the opportunity to feel that they belong, feel like they are worthwhile just for being kids, be treated with respect and learn about a sense of emotional control." For those students who continue to play sports into high school, valuable skills learned on the field can be transferred to the real world. Employers know that to be successful, student athletes must have developed skills such as self-discipline, decision-making, problem solving and time-management. With all of the benefits to playing sports, how can parents motivate their kids to play sports year after year? Experts recommend finding out what's driving the kids first. Recent studies conducted at the Michigan State University Institute for the Study of Youth Sports reveal that kids are motivated to play sports by a variety of factors. "Kids want to have fun, improve their skills, be with their friends, get some physical activity," says Gould. "They like to win, but it's not the top reason nor the only reason." And while sports have real value for kids, experts caution that children will not just catch the positive effects by showing up for practices or on game day. To reap the benefits of sports, they say that children need to be a part of a youth sports program that promotes mutal respect and encouragement. "In order to help develop and enhance positive self esteem, a youth sports program must make sure that every kid feels like he or she belongs on the team," Burnett says. "At the recreation level, the real value of sports is that everybody plays." "Unfortunately, in many situations in America now, in youth sports, and recreational level especially, the less talented kids are being trained to be spectators -- to root for the handful of kids who will be the representative all-stars," he says. Also, in many leagues, some experts are concerned that the focus is on winning, a team's place in the standings and making it to post-season play. "At the real early ages until about the age of 10," says Gould, "you don't really need to worry about score. A lot of parents are forgetting this fun and fundamentals stage." There are two ways to motivate a kid to play sports, Burnett says. One negative method is an all-or-nothing approach:"You have to beat the competitor. You are only as good as the competitor you defeat. There is no place for second place." He suggests an alternate philosophy that motivates kids to participate in sports by getting them to judge their success based on the skills they develop, regardless of outcome. "Now you're competing against yourself. You focus on the skills," Burnett says. "The top athletes focus on tasks, not on trophies." Regardless of what type of program you and your children choose, "When all the dust settles," Burnett urges parents, "You need to make sure that when you look at your child, that you relate to your child as a kid first and an athlete second."