



B. F. Skinner stated, in his discussion of radical behaviorism that behaviors are the sum of the consequences of many previous behaviors.

Like any other behavioral pattern children exhibit, their attitude takes a relatively long time to develop. It is important to remember that the behaviors you observe are the external representation of internalized attitudes: the child's thoughts, feelings, and opinions. These attitudes are not the result of one experience the child has had, but rather, they represent the accumulation of many years of socialization.

So where am I going with this scientific mumbo-jumbo.....

Attitude is defined as "a person's behavior, which indicates his/her thoughts, feelings, or opinions."

In youth sports, you can often tell a kid's attitude by watching their behavior or actions during a practice or a game. Speaking with the head coach of a national hockey team, he was mentioning that when he scouts players he likes to stay down at ice-level so that he can read a player's body language and how he carries himself. Body language tells him all he needs to know about what that player will bring to the rink.

So where on earth do these kids get that attitude..... As the saying goes, "The acorn doesn't fall far from the tree." As parents, we have to be aware that our behavior often sets the tone for our kids' attitude and behavior in youth sports. As adults, we often tend to focus on the "end product", rather than the "process". So that's what the kids focus on as they participate. If they see the game as an opportunity to learn skills, compete, increase confidence, and have fun, they're able to go with the flow, have fun, and relax. Look let's not kid ourselves; everyone plays to compete and win. It would be foolish to think otherwise. Youth sports are a great deal like life, in that it teaches that work, sacrifice, perseverance, overcoming adversity, competitive drive, selflessness and respect for authority is the price that each and every one of us must pay to achieve any goal that is worthwhile. They're able to learn from their mistakes. However, if they see the game as a pressure-filled event, with winning as the only acceptable outcome, most of their energies will be spent trying not to make mistakes. If they make mistakes (which is inevitable with kids and some adults...not all of course), they'll use lots of energy making excuses, blaming others, complaining about officials, etc. (hmmm sound familiar) Mistakes are no longer viewed as opportunities to learn. Instead they are seen as occasions of failure. An article I read recently spoke about how elite athletes focus on tasks, not trophies. That is, they focus on the process of their development, measuring their progress in terms of frequency, endurance, and/or intensity. They have an intense desire to win, but most of their energy is spent competing against themselves. Success in their eyes is measured by progress, not trophy size. How much have they progressed, how much better have they become?

So where does that leave us, well we parents, if we're looking to develop a positive attitude in our kids, would do well to watch our own behavior at athletic events. Do we give positive encouragement, or critical judgmental remarks? Do we show a calm demeanor, or heated overreactions to mistakes? Do we praise participation, or game statistics?

Next time you go to a game, remember, your attitude is showing, and the kids are watching.