



TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK: HOW TO BE A GREAT TEAMMATE

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YOUNG REVIEWER:



STELLA

AGE: 11

Teams are groups of people who work together to achieve a common goal. Maybe you play on a sports team, perform in school plays, or work on a group project for a class. These are all examples of teams. You may have heard your coach or teacher talk about the importance of teamwork and being a good teammate. Teamwork is what teams do to maximize their chances of achieving their goals, like winning a basketball game, putting on a stellar school play, or obtaining a high mark on a group assignment. Sometimes it can be difficult for people to come together and work effectively as a team. In this article, we talk about what teamwork is and how teams can improve the way they work together before, during, and after games. We also explain how teammates can support one another when faced with obstacles and conflict.

At some point in our lives, most of us will be a part of a team. Maybe we will join a sports team, be cast in a school play, or be assigned a group project to complete. You may have heard your teachers, parents, and coaches talk about the importance of teamwork and how

working together as a group can help teams achieve their goals [1]. But what exactly is teamwork? Teamwork behaviors are the things that team members do as a group to meet team goals, like winning a basketball game or completing a group assignment [2]. In this article, we will describe how the members of a basketball team can use teamwork before they play a game, while they are playing, and even after a match, to improve the way they play as a group (Figure 1). While we will be using a basketball team as the main example throughout this article, everything we discuss can apply to *any* type of team, in any sport or other activity.

HOW CAN TEAMS WORK TOGETHER BEFORE COMPETITION?

PREPARATION

Getting ready for an upcoming competition by practicing skills or plays, or simply talking with your coaches and teammates about what you want to work on.

The first part of teamwork that we must consider is **preparation**. This is when team members figure out what they want to achieve during the season or even in the next game. It can be very helpful for teams to take some time to plan how they want to play as a team [2, 3]. A basketball team might decide to set some team goals before a game. One goal might be to improve their skills, such as passing, shooting, or rebounding. The team might also set the goal of being supportive toward teammates during the game. To meet these goals, it is important that the team talks about *how* they plan to achieve each goal [2, 3]. For example, if the goal is to improve skills like dribbling or shooting, the team may decide to set aside time during each practice to work on those specific skills. If the team's goal is to be supportive to teammates, the team may choose to talk about how a supportive

Figure 1

Teamwork can happen before, during, and after a game—as well as all season long!



Figure 1

teammate acts, both on and off the court. The team may make it their goal to cheer on their teammates, to give each teammate a high five, or to provide some encouragement to a teammate who may be struggling with a skill. Similarly, we might use preparation with our families when we are planning a trip or a hosting a party. It might be helpful for all family members to discuss what they will do to help prepare for an event, like packing the suitcases before a trip or preparing the food for the party guests. If everyone identifies a way that they can help, then things will likely go more smoothly.

Think for yourself: What are three things your team can do to prepare for an upcoming game, performance, or assignment, to meet your goals?

COORDINATION

Working together to all be in the right spot at the right time; involves being in sync or timing your movements with those of other teammates.

COOPERATION

Working together with teammates to achieve a common goal; involves trusting that everyone will do what they are supposed to do and play the best they can.

COMMUNICATION

Sharing information and ideas with our teammates and coaches; can be expressed out loud or through body language.

GAME DAY: TEAMWORK DURING COMPETITION

The second part of teamwork is focused on what happens *during* a game. For the basketball team to play at their best, they must consider the 3 Cs: coordination, cooperation, and communication [2, 3]. **Coordination** allows each team member to know what his or her role is on the court. For example, when the team is trying to score a basket, each team member needs to be in the right spot at the right time, so that everyone's movements are timed properly [2]. Next, it is important for a team practice **cooperation**, by having all members perform their individual roles to their full potential, while also keeping an eye out for teammates [2, 3]. When a basketball team is on defense, the players on the court not only need to focus on who they are guarding, but they also need to be ready to help a teammate who needs back up. The last of the 3 Cs is **communication**, which means what we say to our teammates during play. Talking with teammates is important because it helps everyone stay on the same page—particularly since things can change so quickly during a game. Communication helps teams adjust or change things up on the fly [2, 3]. Outside of sport, we can use communication to talk to our families, friends, and loved ones about how we are feeling or how our day went. Communication allows our teammates and loved ones to stay up-to-date on our lives as well as to understand when we might be feeling down and in need of cheering up.

Think for yourself: How could you use communication, coordination, or cooperation with your friends, family, classmates, or teammates, to improve teamwork?

IMPROVING TEAMWORK POST-GAME

The final phase of teamwork focuses on how we can improve teamwork after the game is over. During a game, things happen quickly and sometimes we do not have time to make big changes or discuss

EVALUATE

Talking about the parts of practices or games that were good and the parts that might need improvement.

ADJUSTMENTS

Small or big changes that a team can make to play together better.

how we performed as a team until *after* the game. A team can do two things to improve their teamwork after the game is over: **evaluate** or discuss as a group what the team did well and what needs to be improved, and decide how the team will make any **adjustments** or changes to the way they play [2, 3].

It is not only important to *identify* your team's strengths and weaknesses but also to discuss how your team can *maintain* their strengths while also *improving* their weaker aspects. Perhaps your basketball team did an excellent job defending your opponent during the game, but only made half of their free throws. With this information in mind, it is key to make the necessary adjustments as a group. To help the team score a higher percentage of free-throw shots during a game, maybe the team needs to spend more time in practice, breaking down free-throw shooting technique; or perhaps the team can create drills to help players make their free-throw shots under pressure.

Think for yourself: Think back to a game or situation in which your team did not perform at their best. Name one thing your team could improve on and suggest one way that the team could improve that aspect before the next game.

STICKING TOGETHER THROUGHOUT THE SEASON

Working together as a team is not always easy! Each team member is different and unique. We all have different strengths, weaknesses, personalities, and past experiences. Often, individual team members and the group as a whole encounter obstacles during a season. Therefore, it is important that every team is prepared to respond to obstacles and support its members when problems arise. Even though you or one of your teammates may be dealing with a personal problem that is separate from the team, it could still have an effect on how the team performs [4]. Supportive teams and teammates always find both big and small ways to help team members who need it. Support might be as simple as offering words of encouragement to a teammate who is struggling or talking to a trusted adult (parent, teacher, or coach) about a problem you or one of your teammates are dealing with.

In any team, it is possible that conflict between teammates will arise. Not only is conflict normal, but it can also be a positive learning opportunity for teams. Teams, families, and friendship groups can prepare for potential conflicts between members by having strategies to help manage those situations. Strategies that help individuals express themselves and communicate their concerns can limit the amount of damage that a disagreement or issue can cause a team, family, or friendship group [5].

Think for yourself: Imagine one of your teammates or friends is feeling nervous before a big game or other challenge. What could you, as a teammate or friend, do to help that person?

FINAL THOUGHTS ON TEAMWORK

We will all find ourselves on a team on the field, court, classroom, or stage at some point in our lives. How we interact with our teammates massively impacts not only the way we perform but also how much fun we have with our teams [1, 2]. We hope you have learned some tools to help you and your teammates work together before, during, and after a game or other event. Being a good teammate is not solely about helping your team *win*, but also about supporting your team members and helping each other be the best we can be. As they say, teamwork makes the dream work.

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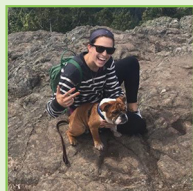
Hi, I am Stella! I enjoy dancing, playing tennis, watching Star Wars, singing/acting (and especially making jokes, that crack me up!), and I also really like reading Percy Jackson. When I am at school, I really enjoy doing STEM projects with my friends and working in a team, one of my favorite projects is Spike LEGO! I live near the beach in Sydney, with my mum, dad, and sister, and we like to go for walks along the coast. Peace out!



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Kaitlin L. Crawford is a first year Ph.D. student at the University of Bath in Bath, England. She is originally from North Vancouver British Columbia, Canada. Kaitlin grew up playing lots of different sports including field hockey, basketball, figure skating, soccer, track and field, and her favorite, volleyball (both indoor and beach). Before she went to university, Kaitlin also performed in many school plays and was an active member of her school student council. She believes that dogs, like her best friend Thad the Bulldog (see photo), are often cooler than people and that Cap'n Crunch is the best breakfast cereal!



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Dr. Desmond McEwan is a chartered psychologist and assistant professor at the University of Bath. Originally from western Canada, he now resides in Bath, England. He is interested in learning how teams can work most effectively together and achieve their goals. When he is not working, he is typically spending time with his wife (Alicia) and dog (Ella), watching sports (especially Formula 1 and ice hockey), and eating far too many chocolate chip cookies! *d.a.mcewan@bath.ac.uk

