

Want your kids to be more resilient and empathetic? Try sports, new study says

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"Playing sports also teaches students how to be humble after winning, how to treat each other and how to treat members of the opposing team." Credit: BYU Photo

The transition to high school is often one of the most difficult changes for youth to make. Unfamiliar peer groups, increased class sizes,

exposure to drugs and alcohol and mental health disorders all contribute to high levels of stress and unsafe behaviors among adolescents. A new study from BYU researchers reveals how students can prepare for these challenges by developing levels of resilience through participation in youth sports.

Results of the study, published this week, provide evidence that adolescents who participate in sports have significantly higher levels of parent-reported [resilience](#) than adolescents who don't participate. This means encouraging students to participate in sports, whether [high school](#) or recreational, could help them face challenges now and in the future.

"Adolescents are constantly faced with challenge and adversity while playing sports and have to figure out how to navigate it," study co-author and BYU graduate [student](#) Jason Johnson said. "Sports teaches kids to participate with peers towards a common cause that's bigger than the individual, a behavior that teaches them how to be resilient."

Researchers' findings also show that [adolescent](#) sports participants display significantly higher levels of self-regulation, empathy and social competence than nonparticipants, traits that contributed to increased resilience.

"Team building and being a part of a group is really important in sports," said BYU education professor Paul Caldarella, a co-author on the study. "Playing sports also teaches students how to be humble after winning, how to treat each other and how to treat members of the opposing team."

For the study, researchers surveyed the parents of 276 [high school students](#), 214 of which participated in sports and 62 did not. Survey questions asked parents about their students' participation in sports and levels of resilience, social competence, and empathy.

"Resilience requires self-discipline and perseverance through adversity," Caldarella said. "You could get hurt, lose the game or get a bad call against you, but you have to figure out how to channel that into a positive focus and move forward after these negative moments."

Researchers also found a positive correlation between the number of sports played and increased resilience levels, meaning that students may benefit more from playing three or four sports, rather than specializing in just one.

"This study serves as evidence that resilience is something that can be learned and developed over time," Caldarella said. "It's not something that you either have or don't have."

More information: Paul et al. Adolescent Sports Participation and Parent Perceptions of Resilience: A Comparative Study. *The Physical Educator*, doi.org/10.18666/TPE-2019-V76-I4-8451

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