

# The Bond Of Youth Baseball

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One of the greatest pleasurable experiences of raising your children is the active participation with them in youth sports. The creation of wonderful memories together is the stuff that relationships are made of, and through the process of making those memories, child and parent can form a bond which will last a lifetime.

The physical acts of “having a catch” or “let’s bat awhile” afford both parent and child the opportunity to engage in physical release together. So many of today’s “activities of choice,” are passive and involve little chance for interaction. Television watching, video game playing, and the like offer little in the form of physical stimulation and verbal interaction (Unless you count **“Awwwww mannnn!!!”** when your spaceship blows up).

Just gathering the gloves and a ball should be an enjoyable experience. The enthusiasm displayed by the parent can set the tone for what can be a great way to while away the time together. Each of us can recall a time as youngsters when we assumed the role of our favorite ballplayer and made play after sparkling play in our backyard (and in our imaginations). Again and again we saved the day with a diving catch or a clutch grand slam in the bottom of the ninth inning, only to be carried away in triumph on the shoulders of our imaginary teammates.

It can be the same for your child and you. Once you’ve established a pattern of “having a catch,” your child can be as heroic as you can make him. Demonstrate the proper fundamentals first obviously, but once those are mastered reasonably well, allow your youngster to be his favorite player and “save the day.”

My own son has pulled more would-be home runs back over the imaginary center field wall than I could begin to count, and he never tires of it. He especially likes it when I give the play-by-play from a bombastic color analyst to go along with his heroics. **“That ball’s deep ... it’s got a chance ... it’s going ... going .... OH! It’s caught at the fence with a an incredible leaping catch ...”** – well, you get the idea.

So what does that prove? All my son knows for sure is that his Dad is probably a frustrated would-be baseball announcer. But more importantly, he’s been doing something fun and imaginative with his Dad, that involves baseball. He is probably totally unaware he has been learning how to frame himself under a fly ball, when to raise his hands to catch the ball, how to use both hands to catch the ball, how to catch a fly ball on the run, and anything else I have made a part of our little game.

The most incredible part of it all is that we have spent some precious time together doing something physical and fun. He hears me call out, “Ohhhhh, good try! You almost had that one! Close that glove a little earlier next time,” or, “WOW! What an effort! I’ll bet you ran twenty feet to try to catch that one!” And what’s the purpose of that, you may ask? It’s confidence building, pure and simple. If he’s having fun being a hero, he’ll develop confidence and assurance in his ability, and he **will** get better. Most of all, he will enjoy being his Dad’s hero for a change.

And afterwards, it’s a great time to listen again about how remarkable his catch was, and how many runs he saved on that last grab. And while you’re listening, you’ll be able to praise him again for his great effort during all those “tough situations” and sandwich some instructive suggestion in there without him even realizing it. Above all, keep the conversation light, free of criticism, full of positives and good humor.

He's learned something painlessly and in a demonstrable way and the two of you have had fun to boot. What could be better? As your child grows older, you'll still be able to have fun "pretending" in this way while building his skill and confidence level without him even realizing it's happening. The "pretend" games simply become more sophisticated, and they continue playing this fantasy game even if only in their minds and not aloud.

But what he **will** realize is how much fun having a "catch" with Dad is.

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