When it comes to signing your child up for a sports program, look before 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."

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas will announce a cease-fire at a summit Tuesday in Egypt, Israeli and Palestinian officials said Monday.

Sharon adviser Raanan Gissin said Palestinians will declare an end to "violence, terrorism and incitement" against Israel.

In return, Gissin said, Israel will refrain from military action "to the extent that the Palestinians will fulfill their pledges and their commitments."

"It will be their responsibility to stop terrorists," Gissin said. "To the extent that will be fulfilled, we can move forward."

Gissin said the cease-fire declaration was being reviewed "in minute detail."

Palestinian Cabinet minister Saeb Erakat said Israeli and Palestinian officials agreed to revive committees set up to deal with prisoners, the redeployment of troops, Palestinian fugitives and deportees.

In the weeks since Abbas was elected to replace the late Yasser Arafat, Israel and the Palestinian Authority have taken confidence-building steps regarding security, Palestinian prisoners and a proposed Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.

Items that will be taken up at the summit include the status of Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories and the West Bank barrier under construction by Israel, Erakat said.

Earlier, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice -- after talks with Sharon and Abbas -- announced the two leaders have agreed to meet separately with President Bush in the spring.

"This is the most promising moment for progress between Palestinians and Israelis in recent years," Rice said. "I depart the region confident of the success of the meeting tomorrow between President Abbas and Prime Minster Sharon."

General has security mandate

Rice also announced Monday that U.S. Army Lt. Gen. William Ward will act as a security coordinator and will visit the region in the next few weeks. Ward also will work on Mideast security issues with Egypt and Jordan, she said.

"Gen. Ward's mandate is on security, which after all, really has to get established and has to be moving forward in order for us to make progress," Rice said.

Ward's responsibilities will include helping the Palestinians train and equip their security forces. Among his duties, Rice said, would be monitoring compliance with Israeli and Palestinian security agreements.

"We are very clear that the parties need to live up to their obligations," she said. "We won't hesitate to say to the parties when those obligations aren't being met."

Abbas has deployed security forces within the Palestinian territories to prevent terrorist attacks, and Israeli officials have approved the release of some Palestinian prisoners.

"There's obviously more to do," Rice said. "The [Palestinian] forces need to be really active in fighting terrorism -- really active in fighting the infrastructure so that terrorist acts cannot continue. But it is an encouraging start and I'm sure that the prime minister and President Abbas will have further discussions."

Last week, an Israeli Cabinet committee approved an end to targeted killings of suspected Palestinian militants and a military withdrawal from five West Bank cities, sources in Sharon’s office said.

"I just can't emphasize enough how historic a decision that is, how fundamental a decision that is," Rice said. "With all of the going back and forth over the last 30-plus years, the return of territory is a major step forward and we shouldn't lose sight of that."

Bush 'impressed'

During his weekly Cabinet meeting on Monday, Bush said he looked forward to meeting with Sharon and the Palestinian leader. "I've been impressed by Prime Minister Abbas' commitment to fighting off terror," Bush said.

"I've also been impressed by the fact that Israel helped the Palestinians have an election, went out of their way to make sure that people were allowed to go to the polls."

A senior State Department official said future international meetings linked to the Mideast peace process are being discussed. Sponsors of the so-called Mideast road map -- the United States, Russia, the United Nations and the European Union -- may gather soon, the senior State Department official said.

Rice is expected to attend a London conference March 1 hosted by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Other road map sponsors may also attend with representatives of Japan, Canada, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia, the official said.

The road map calls for an end to Israeli-Palestinian violence, followed by a "final and comprehensive" settlement of the conflict and the creation of an independent Palestinian state.

Rice arrived in Rome from Israel on Monday, where she will meet with senior Vatican officials and representatives of the Italian government.

On Tuesday, Rice will deliver a speech in Paris. After traveling to Belgium and Luxembourg, Rice is scheduled to return to Washington on Thursday.

U.S. funds for Palestinians

Rice came to the region after a request by Bush for Congress to provide the Palestinian Authority with $350 million in U.S. funds to help rebuild infrastructure damaged or destroyed in the Palestinian territories after four years of Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In addition, another $40 million would be "reprogrammed" from money already authorized for a desalination plant and used for immediate assistance in similar infrastructure programs, Rice said.

At an appearance Sunday with Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom, Rice said: "There is a need to help the Palestinians with the development of the democratic institutions that will form the foundation of statehood to make certain that we are all doing what we can for peace."

Shalom said there is "a new opportunity that we are determined to seize," and called the upcoming summit "a very important event."

About 100 fans of pop star Michael Jackson cheered and chanted Monday as the singer arrived for the first day of his trial on child molestation charges.

Jackson arrived at the Santa Barbara County courthouse in a black SUV with tinted windows. He stepped out of the vehicle wearing an all-white suit and waved to his fans.

An assistant held an umbrella over his head as he entered the courthouse, where he underwent a brief security check before going into the courtroom.

Jury selection was set to begin with the first pool of 300 potential jurors, who are to appear in two groups of 150 for the morning and afternoon court sessions.

Though Jackson will be in the courtroom, Superior Court Judge Rodney Melville, wanting to make room for potential jurors, ordered the pop star to leave behind the entourage of assistants and family members who accompanied him in previous court appearances.

Monday's proceedings come a day after Jackson issued a video statement calling leaks from a grand jury "disgusting and false."

"Please keep an open mind and let me have my day in court," he said in the message posted on his Web site. "I will be acquitted and vindicated when the truth is told."

He added that the proceedings have been "a nightmare for my family."

Melville approved the release of the message.

A grand jury indicted Jackson, 46, on four counts of child molestation, four counts of administering an intoxicating agent, one count of attempted child molestation and one count of conspiracy to commit child abduction, false imprisonment and extortion.

He has pleaded not guilty to all of the charges.

Earlier this month, ABC News reported details of secret grand jury testimony that included lurid allegations from Jackson’s accuser about what the cancer-stricken boy said happened between him and Jackson behind closed doors at the singer's Neverland ranch in 2003.

Jackson’s attorneys blasted the release of the material, noting that Melville had ordered it sealed. They also complained that, because grand jury proceedings include the prosecution but not the defense, the accuser's statements were never subject to challenge during cross-examination.

Last week, Melville denied a defense motion to question prospective jurors individually. Defense attorneys had argued that group questioning could contaminate the jury pool.

The boy making the accusations and his brother should testify in open court, Melville ruled, but he said he will prohibit sketch artists from drawing them during their testimony.

The prosecution wanted the boys to testify in a separate room without showing their faces in court. Jackson’s attorneys disputed the prosecution's claim that the boys needed protection from the public eye, saying they had testified in other cases and had recently been spotted shopping in Beverly Hills with the district attorney.

In addition, Melville granted the prosecution's request to submit adult material seized from Neverland. However, the prosecution cannot refer to the material as "pornography," "obscene" or "erotic." Instead, the judge ruled that the district attorney must use the terms "adult" or "sexually explicit."

He ruled against admitting any material seized outside Neverland or any materials from a 1993 case in which Jackson faced similar allegations.

The self-proclaimed "King of Pop" resolved that case with a multimillion-dollar, out-of-court settlement, and no charges were filed.

The prosecution has said it plans to submit a sexually explicit magazine with the boys' fingerprints as well as Jackson’s.

Jackson attorney Brian Oxman said evidence will show his client took the magazine away from the boys, but prosecutor Ron Zonen said that explanation fails to account for why there are fingerprints on the inside of the magazine.

Sibling filmmakers Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne's "The Child," about a 20-year-old petty crook suddenly faced with the responsibilities of fatherhood, won top honors at the Cannes Film Festival.

It was the second time a film by the Belgian brothers won the prestigious Palme d'Or, coming six years after their teen drama "Rosetta" took the main Cannes prize.

The award was presented Saturday by Hilary Swank and Morgan Freeman, who won Academy Awards in February for Clint Eastwood's boxing saga "Million Dollar Baby."

Receiving the second-place grand prize was U.S. director Jim Jarmusch's "Broken Flowers," a droll drama starring Bill Murray as an aging Don Juan in pursuit of the son he never knew he had.

Tommy Lee Jones was honored as best actor for "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada," his feature-film directing debut in which he plays a Texas ranch hand who forces his best friend's killer (Barry Pepper) to dig up the body and haul it for reburial in Mexico. The film also won the screenplay award for Mexican writer Guillermo Arriaga.

Hanna Laslo earned the best-actress prize for her role as a gabby cabdriver in Israeli director Amos Gitai's "Free Zone," a road-trip tale through the Middle East.

Austrian filmmaker Michael Haneke received the directing award for "Hidden," his cryptic thriller about a couple menaced by a video stalker.

The third-place jury prize was given to Chinese director Wang Xiaoshuai's "Shanghai Dreams," a love story set among workers who dutifully obeyed the government's call to relocate to factories in a remote new territory in the 1960s.

The award for best film by a first-time director was shared by U.S. filmmaker Miranda July for "Me and You and Everyone We Know" and Vimukthi Jayasundara of Sri Lanka for "The Forsaken Land."

On Friday, Romanian director Cristi Puiu's "The Death of Mr. Lazarescu," a tale of a lonely widower living with three cats, won the top prize in a secondary Cannes competition called "Un Certain Regard." July's "Me and You and Everyone We Know," took main honors in a third Cannes category overseen by critics.

Awards night was a quieter affair than last year, when firebrand Michael Moore took the top prize, the Palme d'Or, for "Fahrenheit 9/11," his scathing critique of U.S. President George W. Bush over the September 11 attacks and the Iraq war.

The lineup of 21 films in the main competition did not produce any universally loathed turkeys such as Vincent Gallo's "The Brown Bunny" two years ago, but it also did not offer any odds-on favorites that had audiences raving.

The consensus among Cannes crowds was that the main competition produced a solid but unremarkable crop of films.

The main attractions during the 12-day festival were two films that played outside the competition. "Star Wars: Episode III -- Revenge of the Sith" was the festival's centerpiece, with the sci-fi franchise's creator George Lucas and stars Hayden Christensen, Natalie Portman and Samuel L. Jackson parading down a Cannes red carpet swarming with actors in white storm trooper costumes and a black Darth Vader outfit.

Woody Allen's "Match Point," a comic drama starring Scarlett Johansson, Jonathan Rhys Meyers and Emily Mortimer, proved to be his most crowd-pleasing film in years, with some critics saying it would have been a key contender had it been in the competition.

After handing out awards Saturday night, the 58th edition of the world's most prestigious film festival wraps up Sunday with encore screenings of the winners and runners-up.

The festival's closing film, British director Martha Fiennes' comic drama "Chromophobia," premiered immediately after the awards. The ensemble cast includes the director's brother, Ralph Fiennes, plus Penelope Cruz, Kristin Scott Thomas and Ian Holm in the story of a dysfunctional family coming apart at the seams.

Iraq still has not let the International Committee of the Red Cross visit U.S. prisoners of war, Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said Sunday.

"We would hope that the Iraqi regime would do the honorable and the right thing and allow the International Committee of the Red Cross in to visit these prisoners of war," Myers said on CNN's "Late Edition With Wolf Blitzer."

"That's their obligation. They said they were going to do it, and we just hope they follow through."

The United States has agreed to let the Red Cross visit more than 4,000 Iraqi POWs, Myers said. He said the Red Cross wanted to wait until conditions are more secure. He said he did not know whether the visits had taken place yet.

"I think they have probably been inside," he said.

Myers said it is unclear how many Americans are POWs in Iraq. At least five soldiers were captured after an ambush near Nasiriya. More troops are reported as missing in action, he said.

The International Committee of the Red Cross in Baghdad has been trying to negotiate a visit to check on the condition and treatment of POWs, the organization's Roland Huguenin-Benjamin told CNN.

He said his organization does not comment on POW visits until one has occurred. He said some technicalities need to be worked out, including taking the POWs to a safe place under the supervision of Iraqi officers.

"We are very hopeful that this will not be delayed," he said.

Before the war started, Iraq said the Red Cross would be allowed to visit any POWs, he said. He said the Red Cross has a long history of visiting POWs in Iraq.

In what is believed to be the first independent, on-the-scene report of Iraqi civilian casualties, Huguenin-Benjamin said an average of about 100 civilians are injured daily in Baghdad.

Iraqi officials said more than 4,000 civilians have been killed or wounded in Iraq since the coalition operation began 11 days ago.

Some injuries are superficial, but many have required surgery, Huguenin-Benjamin said.

He said he also is concerned about civilians in the cities between Basra and Baghdad, home to the most intense fighting in the war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross does not yet have staff in those cities, he said.

The morning after Japan was struck by the most powerful earthquake to hit the island nation in recorded history and the tsunami it unleashed -- and even as the earth continued to twitch with aftershocks -- the disaster's massive impact was only beginning to be revealed.

Rescue efforts began with the first light as military helicopters plucked survivors from roofs and carried them to safety.

The 8.9-magnitude temblor, which was centered near the east coast of Japan, killed hundreds of people, caused the formation of 30-foot walls of water that swept across rice fields, engulfed entire towns, dragged houses onto highways, and tossed cars and boats like toys. Some waves reached six miles (10 kilometers) inland in Miyagi Prefecture on Japan's east coast.

"The earth shook with such ferocity," said Andy Clark, who said he had gotten used to earthquakes during his 20 years in Japan but never experienced what he felt Friday at the airport outside Tokyo. "I thought things were coming to an end ... it was simply terrifying."

Buildings shook, heaved and collapsed by the score, and numerous fires ignited.

Hundreds more people were missing, Japanese media reported, citing local and national police. Tens of thousands of people were displaced, according to Japan's Kyodo News Agency.

Prime Minister Naoto Kan said the "enormously powerful" earthquake had caused "tremendous damage over a wide area."

The quake, which struck at 2:46 p.m. (12:46 a.m. ET), prompted the U.S. National Weather Service to issue tsunami warnings for at least 50 countries and territories.

The epicenter of Friday's main quake was located off Miyagi Prefecture, about 230 miles (370 kilometers) northeast of Tokyo, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

Also in Miyagi, officials reported that a train had derailed and authorities had lost contact with four trains in coastal areas, Kyodo reported, citing the East Japan Railway Company.

Six million households, more than 10% of the total in Japan, were without electricity, said Japan's ambassador to the United States, Ichiro Fujisaki.

In Tokyo, rail service was suspended overnight, elevated highways were shut early Saturday and surface streets remained jammed as commuters -- thousands of whom had spent the night in shelters -- tried to get to their homes in outlying areas.

Video aired by Japanese broadcaster NHK showed extensive fires in Miyagi and in the port city of Hakodate, in the southern part of Hokkaido island in northern Japan. An oil refinery was burning in Chiba Prefecture near Tokyo, according to NHK. And Kyodo News said fires could be seen in extensive areas of Kesennuma in Miyagi.

Aerial views of Kesennuma showed plumes of white smoke emanating from the center of the city and large, black areas the flames had already traversed.

In the city of Minamisoma in Fukushima Prefecture, all that was left of many structures were their foundations. Only concrete and steel buildings appeared to have withstood the wash. No people were visible in the streets of the town, whose population on Friday had been 70,000.

And a dam in Fukushima Prefecture failed, washing away homes, Kyodo reported. There was no immediate word of casualties, but the Defense Ministry said 1,800 homes were destroyed.

The National Weather Service sent a warning to 50 countries and territories it said could be affected by the tsunami.

Scores of aftershocks jarred the country Saturday, punctuated by a pair of strong earthquakes in the early morning, including one with a magnitude of 7.1 and another with a magnitude of 6.8.

A leak occurred in an atomic power plant in northeast Japan, a spokesman for Japan's nuclear agency said Saturday. Cooling equipment stopped working when generators failed in the quake, and the temperature inside the plant in the Fukushima prefecture had risen; officials lowered the pressure inside the plant hangar by venting it, said spokesman Kazuo Kodama.

But high levels of radiation led officials to suspend the release, NHK said. Alternative plans were being evaluated, the broadcaster said.

Citing Japan's nuclear safety agency, Kyodo said radiation levels were 1,000 times above normal in the the control room of the facility's reactor.

An evacuation order was extended to people who live within 10 kilometers (6 miles) of the plant, named Fukushima Daiichi, about 160 miles (260 kilometers) north of Tokyo.

The agency said the radiation amount posed no immediate threat to the health of nearby residents, Kyodo reported.

Cooling problems also appeared to have affected to another of the Tokyo Electric Power Company's nuclear facilities.

Kyodo reported the power company alerted authorities that the cooling system at three units of another plant in the same prefecture. That prompted Japanese authorities to add that plant to its emergency list, along with the another plant, Kyodo said.

Prime Minister Kan inspected the plant and the rest of the affected region from a helicopter.

The government ordered the evacuation of residents nearest the plant as efforts to keep it cool after it was shut were initially hampered.

Japanese public broadcaster NHK reported Saturday that the death toll is more than 900, with about 700 others reported missing. Earlier Saturday the nation's Kyodo News News Agency, citing police, reported that the death toll was 433, with at least 784 missing.

The official death toll is likely to rise as authorities continue rescue and relief efforts in the worst-hit areas. Kyodo predicted the death toll would surpass 1,000.

The news agency, citing Japan's defense forces, also said 60,000 to 70,000 people were being evacuated to shelters in the Sendai area of Miyagi Prefecture.

The prime minister said an emergency task force had been activated, and he appealed for calm. The government dispatched 8,000 troops to assist in the recovery effort and asked for U.S. military assistance, according to Kyodo.

A spokesman for the U.S. military bases in Japan said all service members were accounted for and there were no reports of damage to installations or ships.

By early Saturday, more than 50 countries had offered help, said Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. U.S. President Barack Obama offered his condolences and said the United States was standing by to help "in this time of great trial."

The U.S. Navy initiated reconnaissance flights to map the disaster zone and was moving the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan into position to assist the Japanese government with relief efforts, defense officials said.

Images from Japanese media and CNN iReporters showed smoke pouring from buildings and water rushing across fields, carrying away entire structures.

"I wasn't scared when it started ... but it just kept going and going," said Michelle Roberts, who lives in central Tokyo. "I won't lie, it was quite scary. But we are all OK. We live on the third floor, so most everything shook and shifted."

The quake toppled cars off bridges and into waters underneath. Waves of debris flowed like lava across farmland, pushing boats, houses and trailers in their paths.

The quake also disrupted rail service and affected air travel. Hundreds of flights were canceled, Kyodo said. Some 13,000 people were stranded at the Narita airport, and 10,000 were stuck at the Haneda airport, the news agency said. Flights into and out of both airports had resumed Saturday.

At Tokyo Station, one of Japan's busiest subway terminals, shaken commuters grabbed one another to stay steady as the ground shook. Dazed residents poured into the streets, and offices and schools were closed. Children cried.

"This was larger than anyone expected and went on longer than anyone expected," said Matt Alt, who lives in Tokyo.

"My wife was the calm one. ... She told us to get down and put your back on something, and leave the windows and doors open in case a building shifts so you don't get trapped."

The magnitude of the earthquake and its shallow depth -- 15.2 miles (24.5 kilometers) -- created a lot of energy, said Shenza Chen of the U.S. Geological Survey.

The impact was felt far and wide. In McKinleyville, California, a wave swept three men into the Pacific Ocean as they were reportedly trying to take photos of the incoming tsunami waves, according to the U.S. Coast Guard.

Two of the men returned to shore, but one died, officials said.

Japanese government officials said large tsunami waves were still a risk to coastal Japan, and they urged residents in coastal areas to move to higher ground.

The tsunami brought waves of nearly 7 feet to a harbor in Maui, authorities said, but other areas reported lower levels.

On the U.S. mainland, wave heights from Alaska to California ranged from less than a foot to more than 8 feet. The highest measurement, 8.1 feet, was at Crescent City, California.

Tsunamis are a series of long ocean waves that can last five to 15 minutes and cause extensive flooding in coastal areas. Sometimes, the waves hit in succession -- often the highest not being the first, CNN meteorologist Ivan Cabrera said.

Humanitarian agencies were working with rescue crews to reach people affected by the earthquake and tsunami.

"When such an earthquake impacts a developed country like Japan, our concern also turns to countries like the Philippines and Indonesia, which might not have the same resources," said Rachel Wolff, a spokeswoman for World Vision.

Wolff said her agency is helping people in Japan and teaming up to help others in countries along the path of the tsunami.

The quake was the latest in a series around Japan this week.

On Wednesday, a 7.2-magnitude earthquake struck off the coast of Honshu, the country's meteorological agency said. Early Thursday, an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude of 6.3 struck off the same coast.

Friday's quake is the strongest earthquake in recorded history to hit Japan, according to U.S. Geologic Survey records. The previous record was an 8.6-magnitude earthquake that struck near the Chubu Region near southwestern Honshu on October 28, 1707, that may have killed 5,000 people, CNN meteorologist Sean Morris said.

That quake generated a 33-foot (10-meter) tsunami wave, and some scientists believe the quake may have triggered the eruption of Mount Fuji 49 days later, Morris said.

The world's largest recorded quake took place in Chile on May 22, 1960, with a magnitude of 9.5, the USGS said.