

POST GAME CONVERSATIONS

COMPETITIVE SPORT CAN BE AN EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE FOR CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND COACHES. FEEDBACK FROM PARENTS GREATLY INFLUENCES HOW A CHILD PERCEIVES THEIR ABILITY, ENJOYS THEIR SPORT, AND FEELS MOTIVATED TO CONTINUE PARTICIPATING. IN AN ENVIRONMENT THAT CAN BE EMOTIONALLY CHARGED, ENSURING WELL-TIMED AND DELIVERED FEEDBACK IS CRUCIAL.



THINGS TO REMIND YOURSELF OF BEFORE THE CONVERSATION

1. Be a positive source of support and encouragement. Leave the evaluation of player performance to the coaches, they are the experts.
2. Be an active listener! Remember that a conversation is a two way experience, allow your child to talk about the game. Listen to understand first, and then reply.
3. Avoid undermining the coaching staff in post-game conversations. Second-guessing the coaches can confuse your child as to what he or she should do and will be counterproductive.
4. Following a difficult experience remind your child that their worth as a person is not related to their abilities as an athlete. Helping them recognise that tomorrow is a new day and that with hard work they can overcome what is keeping them from their goals will help your child deal with the frustrations of sport.
5. Be honest and sincere. Some parents get into trouble by saying "good game" or "you did your best." If your child does not think this is true you will be entering into a negative conversation. Be supportive in your comments but do not lie or exaggerate. Children will see through your well-intentioned attempt to support.
6. Stick to your normal routine no matter the outcome of the game. Follow through with plans made before a game whatever the result, otherwise, your child might relate the activities after the game with winning and losing.
7. Avoid comparing your child to other children. It can create hurt feelings and pressure.

Importantly, before the post match conversation remind yourself of what matters –

'Being a good sport and giving your best effort.'

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WHEN

Emotions can be extremely high after a game and it's important to allow time for your child to process their performance. You should:

- allow your child to complete their cool-down and team debrief with the coach and conversations with teammates before giving your own feedback
- ask if your child feels ready to have a conversation about the match, give them the opportunity to delay.

Circumstances will vary game by game, so it's important to regularly talk with your child about how they prefer to receive post-game feedback. Find out about these preferences at a time when your child is calm and able to communicate clearly.

WHERE

Some children may be conscious about receiving feedback in front of their peers, especially if it is overly positive or negative. Most young people prefer post-game feedback to be saved until they are in a private environment, away from their team.

- The car journey home from a game has been shown as a valuable space for conversations. Research shows that it can be less stressful to talk to someone when you're side by side, with minimal eye contact, than conversing face to face.
- A boundary walk. Many of the most informative conversations occur when walking side by side. Cricket lends itself well to this, a stroll around the boundary during or following a game can give the opportunity for beneficial conversation
- Stopping for a meal or drink on the way home gives a good opportunity for a conversation, the distraction of the meal reducing the stress

WHAT

Focusing feedback on the outcome of the game can leave children feeling under pressure. Instead:

- help to keep motivation high by focussing feedback around aspects your child can control, such as attitude, behaviour, and personal skills development
- remain consistent with the coach's message
- ensure feedback is appropriate for both yours and your child's level of knowledge

HOW

It's important to wait until your child indicates they are ready to talk about the game or by asking them if they would like to talk (rather than just assuming they want to talk) before initiating the post-game conversation.

Post-game feedback through a two-way conversation, in which parents and children share their views, rather than a one-way lecture from parents will be much more positive. When your child is ready to talk, you should:

- encourage your child to share their views, and be ready to listen
- ensure your feedback is positive and focused on areas for improvement, rather than appearing critical

FINAL THOUGHTS

Providing post-game feedback can be difficult, as the direction of the conversation is driven by the game outcome, individual performances and particular events that arose during the game that may have had a particular effect on your child.

You also need to cope with your own emotions (either positive or negative) and ensure these emotions do not dictate the feedback that is provided. Engaging in frequent discussions with your child regarding the types of feedback they like and how they perceive the comments you make are likely to ensure the best possible reactions and responses to feedback. This is best done when you are both relaxed and there is no feedback to be given (if your child seems relaxed on the drive to a game, offering suggestions while side by side of how they might like any post-game conversation could give positive ideas)



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