



What to say to your athlete or performer

To build real confidence and increase performance
(PLUS, what NOT to say)

As parents and caregivers of young athletes and performers, we want to build lifelong confidence and support performance both in and outside of competition! We know that excelling in athletics and performance is a combination of knowledge, physical training, AND mental training. All three aspects need to be supported for success.

Our words MATTER! The words we use to coach and support our children significantly affect their ability to perform well, feel confident, and recover quickly from mistakes. These words become the internal dialog in your child's mind, in a competition or performance, in practice, and throughout life. The words we use as parents/caregivers to coach and support our children will impact their resiliency in and out of competition.

What to say...**BEFORE** the competition or performance

Play/perform your best. Have fun. I love you.	Do your best. I believe in you.	I can't wait to watch you.
You got this. Trust your training.	Play hard. Be a good teammate.	Be awesome.
You've prepared for this, go get it.	I love you; show them what you got.	You got this!
No regrets, have fun!	Play hard, have fun, take risks!	Play/perform free, I love you no matter what!
Do YOU! Can't wait to watch!	Do your best, do your part.	Be YOU!

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What to say...**DURING** the competition or performance

Before the competition or performance, ask your child, "What type of cheering and encouragement do you like to see from me?" and/or "Is there anything you need from me from the stands/audience?"

Sometimes this might mean saying NOTHING at all!

Your body language will speak more than your words.

Keep body language positive like cheering, clapping, and staying engaged. This is especially important when your child makes a mistake! You are their safety net, so no eye rolls, throwing hands up, yelling, turning your back, crossing arms and/or pacing. If your child looks at you, be the face they need to see when they are struggling.

If using words, keep them positive:

"You got this!", "Dig deep!", "Next play!"

Remember

Do what works best for your personality and honor what your child needs from you during the competition or performance.

What to say...**AFTER** the competition or performance, **WIN OR LOSE**

Allow space. Be a good listener and let your child control the conversation.

- "Where do you want to eat?" *This says: Everything will be okay, and life goes on.*
- "Do you want to talk about the game/performance?" *Honor your child's response.*
- "I'm here for you."

If your child wants to engage:

- If there is an issue, do not try to fix the problem. Help brainstorm if asked.
- Be a quiet and reflective listener.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Win OR lose, reward effort and attitude rather than outcomes.

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What to say....AFTER A LOSS OR DISAPPOINTING PERFORMANCE

"It's okay to feel upset and it's hard to lose. You're the kind of person who bounces back, and every experience will help you in your next game."

This statement acknowledges your child's feelings, praises a positive attribute and points to future successes.

"I saw you on the bench, and even though you didn't get the playing time you may have wanted, you were a great teammate by high-fiving everyone and staying engaged."

If your child pointed out a mistake they made:

"Even though you made that mistake, you made the adjustment."

This acknowledges and hears their pain and brings their attention to the positive that was in their control.

What to say....AFTER A WIN

Allow space. Listen and let them approach you.

- "It looked like your hard work paid off out there today!"
- "I can tell you were having fun and playing your hardest!"

BONUS QUESTIONS TO ASK:

- "Did you try your best?"
- "Did you have fun?"
- "How did it go?"
- **In response to your child's observations:**
"How did you feel about that?"
- **If your child talks negatively about their own performance:** "Sounds like you learned a lot and want to work on some things during your next practice."

The best, most profoundly impactful thing to say after ANY competition or performance:

"I love watching you play/perform."