

ABCs of Parenting



Preamble

The following resource for parents has been developed by Fiona McCarthy on behalf of the NSW Office of Sport, as a key initiative of the NSW Government's Future Champions strategy.

For more information on Future Champions, please visit www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/parents-guardians-and-carers

Getting to know the author

Fiona McCarthy is a psychologist who owns and operates Mind and Body Balance, a business she set up 25 years ago. Fiona is a registered psychologist, specialising in the area of sport and performance psychology. She is a member of the Australian Psychological Society and the Australian College of Sport and Exercise Psychologists.

Fiona lives in Newcastle NSW and is the Hunter Academy of Sport, Sport Psychology Consultant and a New South Wales Institute of Sport, Sport Psychology Service

Provider. Over the last twenty-five years, Fiona has assisted many local, state and national teams, athletes, coaches and parents in the areas of confidence, concentration, handling pressure, motivation, goal setting, time management, performance preparation and general well-being. She has worked with numerous sports assisting recreational level athletes to professional, international, Olympic and Paralympic level athletes.

Fiona recognises the valuable contribution parents make to their child's sporting pursuits. She

believes that parents want the best for their child and hopes that these resources provide parents with the skills needed to be the best sporting parent they can be so that they can best guide and support their child at all ages and stages of their sports journey.

These resources aim to provide parents with the support, encouragement and skills/tools required to assist their child(ren) in reaching their sporting potential in an environment that promotes fun, connection, success and positive well-being.



Introduction

Parents play a vital role in sport and provide valuable contributions to the sporting community. As parents, we all want to support our children as best we can and see them enjoying their sport.

The following resource aims to empower parents and guide them in playing the best role they can in their child(ren)'s sporting pursuits. Parents are role models to their children and sport is a valuable vehicle to teach life lessons.

As a parent, have you ever wondered how to best help your child deal with success and disappointment? Or what to say to them when their nerves take over and they feel pressure to perform.

Do you find yourself rushing from sport to sport, child to child and not having much time to enjoy watching them play?

Have you ever wondered whether your child is doing too much sport?

How do you help your child believe in themselves and be confident with their sporting pursuits, rather than worried about other competitors or results?

This resource will help parents find the answers to these very common questions and much more.

They will provide parents with information and practical tools and tips to ensure they play their role as a parent to the best of their ability in order to allow their child to enjoy their sport and assist them in reaching their full potential in sport and life.



A.B.C of Parenting

Are you and your child focusing on results, competitors and what others are doing?
Do you find yourself rushing from sport to sport with little time to spare?
Do you want to strengthen your communication with your child?

In the following resource, you will learn what to focus your attention on, how to create balance in your parenting and strengthen your connection with your child.

Being a parent is at times the most joyful job and at other times we often find ourselves questioning whether we are doing this 'parent thing' right! Add sport to that and we have a unique mix of ingredients that requires us to guide our kids and ensure we are playing our role as parents as best we can.

Sport is a fantastic vehicle to teach children about life. It allows them to learn about teamwork, commitment, resilience, handling pressure, overcoming mistakes and building confidence to name a few. So as a child develops in sport, we are presented with an exciting situation of development for ourselves.

Parents are an important piece of their child's sporting jigsaw. This jigsaw is unique to each child and is made up of many people playing very specific roles in

sports development. Some key stakeholders typically include the player, coaches, teammates and parents/carers. A child's development through sport can also be assisted by sport psychologists, physiotherapists, dieticians, strength and conditioning coaches etc.

So how can parents play their role to help assist their child reach their full potential and enjoy their sport?

Let's break it down into three key points, the
A.B.C's of parenting



Attention

Where is your
Attention?



Balance

Do you have
Balance in
your life?



Connect

And what is your
Communication like
with your child?

A. Attention

Let's start with attentional focus. This is a really important ingredient to be aware of. Players/athletes perform best when they focus their attention on aspects on and off the sports arena they can control. Things like their effort, attitude and the processes required for them to play and perform well.

Essentially the only thing they can control is themselves. So, it is paramount as parents we foster this. There is very little value in constantly comparing ourselves to others and that runs true for our kids.

It is natural to ask your children how they went at training and how their teammates went at training. If, however your attention and questions to your child is more often than not based around outcomes, performances and other people be they teammates or competitors, it will start to distract you and your child's attention from what can be controlled.

This may lead to your child feeling like they have very high expectations placed on them to always perform at their best, which can create poor performances and feelings of lack of enjoyment. This in turn, can lead to the situation where players/athletes start to pass blame onto their teammates.

Remember as adults and parents, we have to lead by example and help our children direct their attention and control on themselves and their efforts and attitudes. It starts with how we project our thoughts and communication, making sure to not compare our child's efforts and attitudes to others.

Always acknowledge your child's efforts and attitudes and let them be their own benchmark for performance. Teach them about their own effort and attitude. Be the best you can be and work towards implementing that verbally and physically each day.

Remember, we are a mirror to our children, what they see and hear from us is what we will get in return from them.



B. Balance

Balance! Managing our time and energy with all that is on our plate, is most of the time an intricate juggling act!

It is great to be invested and support your children, but their sporting journeys can't also entirely become yours.

Make sure that each day, you find time to be kind to yourself and look after your own mental and physical health.

The better we feel within and about ourselves, the better we communicate with others and the more we are able to pay attention and engage in the important aspects of life and enjoy being able to watch your child participate in their sport, rather than focus on the outcomes of their sporting pursuits.



C. Connect

Communication can connect or disconnect individuals.

We need to make sure we always keep communication channels open with our children. The way in which we communicate with them can play a role as to whether they feel comfortable telling us things that matter to them. We need to stay connected with them, encourage open, honest and positive two-way communication.

Try not to always talk with them about their sport, they are more than a sportsperson. The car trip to and from training and games is the perfect environment to find out about school, friends, what has happened in their day.

Show an interest in things they like, such as the latest hobby they have. Things they are looking forward to is a great way to start a conversation and connect with them. You don't want to only be able

to communicate with them about their sport, especially if the focus is on outcomes. This can easily and quickly become very exhausting for all involved and can lead to negative communication, arguments and can disconnect communication channels between parent and player/athlete.

It is a privilege for us as parents, to be able to watch our child grow and develop as a person and a player.

Likewise, it is a privilege for our kids to have the opportunity to participate in sport and grow from such an experience. As parents we have a responsibility to play our role as best we can, to nurture and embrace such an opportunity.

As parents we need to be mindful of what we are paying attention to and what we are focussing

on. Encourage process thinking rather than focussing attention and conversations on outcomes. If the processes are done well, positive outcomes will be a by-product.

Look after yourselves and take time out each day to recharge your batteries. Balance is the key!

Stay connected with open, honest communication both verbally and non-verbally.

Challenge yourself to find out something new about your child and their interests or suggest trying new activities with them away from the sporting arena.

Increasing your awareness on the above aspects puts you in pole position to continue playing the positive role you do in your child's life.

The key take home points for the **A.B.C** of parenting are:

1. Make sure your conversations and **attention** are on your child's efforts and enjoyment rather than other players and results.

For example, after training or a game, ask your child how the session was, if they enjoyed it and what they felt they did well and what could be something they would like to work on for next time.

As a parent, it is important to also let your child know how proud you are of them regardless of the score line. Understand some games are better than others and some performances are better than others.

By encouraging them to always try to do their best, and that their best is good enough, is very reassuring to children.

2. **Balance** is the key!

Each week find time for yourself to recharge your batteries. Things like going for a walk or run, catching up with friends or doing a hobby are great mental "pit stops" needed to ensure your mind is clear and your body is calm and ready to tackle the next day and week.

Remember – A happy and calm parent equals a happy and calm child.

3. **Connect** with your children regularly through open and honest communication.

Try to engage in conversations related to things other than sport. The car trip to and from training and games is a great environment to 'catch up' with your children and have a chat about 'stuff'.

Organise a movie night or board game or go for a walk with them.

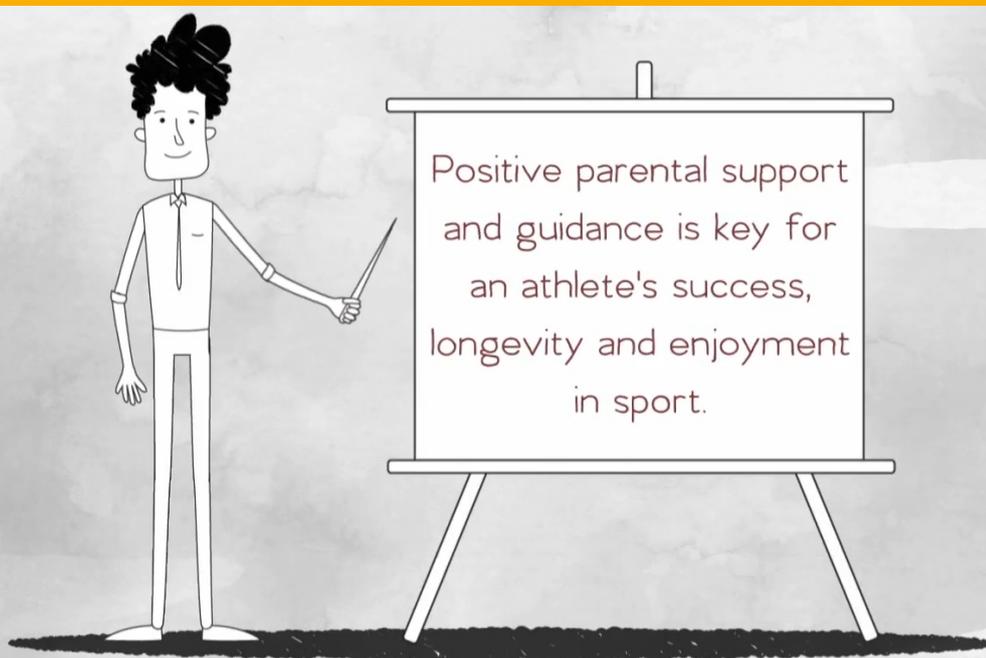
There are lots of adventures to be had off the sporting arena! Explore the possibilities.



We hope you enjoyed our tips!

You might like to check out our animated video, ABCs for Parenting on the NSW Office of Sport website.

Go to <https://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/pathways-and-development/parents-guardians-and-carers> to access this video and other parenting resources on offer by the NSW Office of Sport.



Positive parental support
and guidance is key for
an athlete's success,
longevity and enjoyment
in sport.



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