

How to Keep your Kids Confident and in Control



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.



How to help your child be confident and in control

At some stage in our lives, we are all likely to have to navigate and control our nerves, pressure situations and wavering confidence levels. Sport can present such concerns for children and parents alike. This resource will allow you to learn ways to assist your child in developing their confidence so they can enjoy their sport and perform at their best

Let's explore how to help your child be confident and in control so they can enjoy their sport and perform at their best

There are many ways to assist your child with improving their confidence and handling pressure situations. One way is to help them develop good routines in order to obtain positive consistent performance.

A very common problem sports people of all ages and levels experience, is "inconsistent performances".

Performing inconsistently becomes very frustrating, annoying and tends to take the enjoyment out of participating in sport. Not to mention the knock to one's confidence levels.

So why is it that some players/athletes perform consistently well

all the time, while others experience this type of performance once in a blue moon?

The answer in part may lie with the development of routine behaviour. Routines are specific patterns of behaviour and thoughts that are done the same way every time. A bit like tying our shoelaces. When players/athletes develop positive routines, they put themselves in pole position for a positive performance to happen.

Players/athletes should develop routines in many areas. Three key areas include the following:

1. Warm-up



The warm-up routine - which involves physical and mental skills.

2. Re-group



The re-grouping routine - used in the sports arena when a mistake is made, or when they need to reset their focus.

3. Warm-down



The warm-down routine - which involves physical and mental skills, especially around the evaluation of their performance.

We all know that a 'traditional' warm-up routine comprises physical activities like running, stretching exercises and some sport specific drills.

A warm-up is done to get our child's body ready, but what is done to help them switch their mind on?

Generally speaking, very little.

As parents we can play a vital role in this.

Firstly, we need to remain as calm and as positive as possible especially on game day. What they see in us, is what we will see in them. In other words, if you are stressing out about whether you will get them to the game on time or not, or whether they will score a goal today or win or whether you will get out of the house on time, that tension can be transferred to them. It is quite natural that stress and tension will create expectations, pressure and a mind that is racing with information.

Remember the aim is for all involved to arrive to the venue with a clear mind and calm body ready and excited to play and perform or as parents watch the game or event.

Another suggestion to get your child mentally warmed up and ready to play and perform, is to have them listen to

some music that could motivate them, calm them and or distract them from the perceived or real pressure they may be dwelling on.

Not getting to the venue too early is also an advantage as it limits their 'over thinking' time i.e., when they think too much about how they are going to play/perform, replaying over and over in their minds the 'what ifs' of the upcoming game/event.

Let them arrive confident, free of stress and tension and excited to join their teammates or squad members.

There is a lot of merit in having a mind that is free and decluttered. Once physical warm-ups begin and routines are engaged, they will naturally start to switch on mentally and focus on their role and how they can best perform that role by focusing on the things they can control.

We all make mistakes. The key however is to **see the mistake as a lesson and learn from it.** This is an

important message parents should pass onto their children. Whilst playing sport players/athletes don't have a lot of time for this learning to take place as not only do they have to learn, but they also have to recover and get back in the game or event.

This is why having a **resetting or re-grouping routine** is of great value.

In these routines players/athletes develop skills to overcome mistakes, block out external noises or pressure and refocus on the task at hand. e.g., recovering from that first bad touch or tackle or missed pass.

As parents we can encourage our children to focus on aspects of the game/event they can control like their passing, tackling, effort and attitude. We can also point out that **everyone makes mistakes so be kind to yourself, view mistakes as lessons, learn from them and move on.**





One practical way they can do this is to maintain **positive self-talk**, e.g., use positive action words that are simple, specific to the task at hand and words that help them focus on the process rather than the outcome.

For example, for a soccer player after a missed tackle, words like ball and *dominate* can help and redirect the player to focus their attention on the ball, after all wherever the ball is will determine where they should be.

The word *dominate* could remind them to have urgency and be strong in their tackles and passes.

These words help remind the player to deal with the mistake, learn from it and get their head and body back in the game.

Done often and well, this will allow for confident play and positive performance.

Warming down is an important part in a player's recovery from the game or event and readiness for the next competition. Closing one chapter and being ready for the next.

A warm-down routine typically involves some jogging, exercises, refuelling food wise and hydration wise, maybe a massage and a good night's sleep.

As parents we try to facilitate all of the above. As an addition we could also add value to their recovery by making sure the evaluation of the game or event is positive regardless of the outcome.

A way to decrease your child's confidence and enjoyment for the game/event is to give a detailed lengthy critique of their performance, especially when it only focuses on mistakes they have made, things they should have done better or detailed criticism

of coaches and/or other players/athletes etc. So be mindful of the amount and delivery of your evaluation.

A positive way to package the feedback and move on from the game/event is to think about feedback as a basic ham sandwich! I know this sounds strange but let me explain.

In the basic ham sandwich feedback system, the two slices of bread represent positive feedback and the ham represents a single piece of constructive feedback or an area to work on.

All players/athletes should be aiming to get an idea of the ingredients needed to create their recipe for success. Knowing what you need to work on and what you did well is the first step to getting that elusive recipe!

It is suggested that on the car trip home, ask your child what are 2 things they were happy with regarding their performance and effort and one thing they would like to improve on in relation to their effort and performance.

Getting their perspective first is important, after all they played the game/event and not the parents!

However, parents are on the sideline, and we do have a different view of the game so giving feedback in the sandwich effect way is of value.

Allowing this two-way feedback approach keeps things simple, short and specific. There is no need for lengthy evaluations and criticising.

Short, simple, balanced and specific feedback provides your child with enough information to learn from

and move forward, with creating their recipe for success.

Asking himself (self-reflection) why their performance was good or not so good allows them to develop a formula that allows for positive, confident, consistent performance.

For example, identifying that they played well today because they had a good night's sleep, a healthy breakfast, relaxed warm-up and confident attitude may be the start of what ingredients are required for positive consistent performance.

Remember like all mental skills, regular practice is essential! The more they practice their routines the more confident they will be, and their performances will become automatic, enjoyable and be consistently successful.

The above three routines should be part of all training sessions and competitions. Performing such routines in training, helps enable thoughts and actions in competition to be more accurate and automatic.

As parents we can help our children develop the above-mentioned routines. Thus, allowing training and game day to be a positive, stress-free experience for all involved and assist in facilitating your child's confidence and performance.



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.



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