



Quieting The Mind For A Competitive Edge **CHECKLIST FOR SPORTS PARENTS PRE-GAME BEHAVIOR**

This checklist is designed to help sports parents create a positive pregame experience for their young athletes before games and competition. Help your athlete perform with confidence and simplicity, and have fun! Keep these tips in mind prior to games:

1. Help your child or teen feel confident about today's game or competition. If you discuss the game, remember to be positive about your athlete's past experiences and successes. Don't point out mistakes or losses. Stay away from the subject of avoiding mistakes from previous games. Say, "Have fun! I know you'll do your best!"
2. Convey that you love and appreciate your athletes no matter how they perform. Sometimes, kids feel that in order to feel loved and appreciated, they need to perform well all the time. Be sure to let them know this isn't true! Say, "You're the best no matter what happens during the competition."
3. Keep your emotions in check. Be a good role model for composure. If you show that you're jittery, nervous or worried about the game or competition, your child or teen will likely be affected by these feelings.
4. Don't over-coach your athlete or over-analyze your child's state of mind or past performances. Less is better before a game. Keep your comments brief, supportive and positive. You don't want your kids to feel overburdened by instructions before they begin competing. Avoid saying things like, "Don't forget to bend your knees when you're shooting free-throws," or "I hope you can tackle your fear of failure today."



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5. Leave the coaching to the coach. Show that you support the coach's decisions. Don't talk about how you'd like the coach to manage the team or how you disagree with some of his decisions. This will undermine your athletes' confidence and trust. They need to enter the game trusting their coaches.

6. Avoid burdening your children with expectations. Be careful of saying things like, "I want you to score four goals today!" Or, "I know you can beat her to the finish line." Children sometimes spin your statements intended to build their confidence into expectations. They will likely try to adopt these expectations as their own, which pressures them to perform. Athletes then become frustrated and can lose confidence if they don't meet their expectations.

7. Be a good fan. Be composed on the sidelines before the game. Demonstrate your trust in the coach, the players and the referees. Don't express your feelings about who should play, or how the coach should play the kids, or how you view a particular ref. Be only positive and supportive. Find ways to support the team—by bringing water or snacks, for example, or serving as scorekeeper if the team needs a parent to do this.

8. Avoid prolonged discussions about your athlete's technique or mechanics before the game. Practice time is over. Just before a game, athletes need to believe in what they've learned and trust in their abilities. If you focus too much on mechanics and technique, they may freeze up. It may be difficult for them to play freely and with trust in their abilities. Avoid saying things like, "Remember the Square Drill and be sure to kick with the side of your foot instead of your toe." Say instead, "Go for it! Have a blast."



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9. Be clear that your athletes' performances don't reflect on them as people. Many children link their self-esteem with their performance. If they perform badly, their self-esteem suffers. It's your job to assure your children that they're wonderful no matter how they perform. Say, "Enjoy yourself. You're the best no matter what happens out there today."

10. Focus on ensuring your children have fun. Keep it light. Remind them about the people or events that make sports fun for them. This may be playing alongside a best friend, being with a coach they love, or getting to see an old friend who's a member of the opposing team. Kids just want to have fun! Focusing too much on winning, beating an opponent or obtaining game stats puts too much pressure on young athletes. Let them know you want them to enjoy themselves out there.