

FOR TEEN ATHLETE PARENTS & FAMILIES

The Car Ride Home Protocol

How to talk to your athlete after the game without adding pressure.

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01

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

Signs your athlete may be carrying more pressure than they show

01

SHUTS DOWN AFTER MISTAKES

Goes silent after errors.
Can't shake it off
before the next play.

02

LOOKS TO YOU AFTER EVERY PLAY

Checks your face or
body language
immediately after a
mistake or a tough
moment.

03

GOES QUIET AFTER COMPETITION

Gets quiet after games,
even wins. Gives short
answers when asked.

If you've seen two or three of these recently, your athlete is carrying something.

Most athletes don't lose confidence because of one bad game. They lose it slowly. Through repeated small moments where performance starts to feel tied to approval.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Confidence doesn't break all at once. It erodes slowly.

Most athletes get in the car wondering if they let you down.

Most parents get in the car wondering if they're doing enough.

That's why the ride home is harder than it looks.

A question after a tough match. A look from the stands. A correction on the drive home.

None of it is meant to hurt. But over time the athlete starts asking a dangerous question.

"Am I still okay when I don't perform well?"

A mom I worked with last spring told me her daughter started talking about matches on her own around week three. Not because she got better at coaching the conversation. Because she stopped starting it. That's the shift this protocol creates.

FROM ROB

My daughter once told me, "I don't want to talk about the game right now."

I thought I was helping. What I learned later was that she wasn't rejecting me. She was still processing.

THE FRAMEWORK

Calm. Connect. Correct.

The order is the whole thing.

Your athlete does not need another coach right now.
They need a parent.

CALM
FIRST

Slow your own nervous system before helping theirs.

Box breathing before the match. In 4, hold 4, out 4, hold 4. Three to five rounds.

CONNECT
NEXT

Support first. Feedback later.

Extended exhale after the match. In 4, out 6 to 8. "We can breathe together, or just sit quietly."

CORRECT
LATER

Wait until they're ready to talk.

Regulation, not motivation. Save the corrections for when the emotion has cooled.

Breathing is a supporting tool, not the centerpiece.

SIGNS OF PROGRESS

You'll know it's working when

Watch for these signals. They tell you the protocol is doing its work. You won't notice all of them at once. Each one is a sign that connection is replacing pressure.

01 Your athlete brings up the game on their own.

02 The car ride home feels lighter.

03 They ask you questions after tough matches.

04 They recover faster from one bad play.

05 They stop checking your reaction after mistakes.

06 They start sharing what they want to work on.

The shifts are small. They show up in moments.

THE HEART OF IT

Three truths about the ride home

- 01 Most athletes get in the car wondering if they let you down.
- 02 Most parents get in the car wondering if they're doing enough.
- 03 That's why the ride home is harder than it looks.

Most parents don't start these conversations because they want to criticize. They start them because they care. They don't want their athlete to struggle. Sometimes they're carrying fear, too.

WHAT'S NEXT

If this guide made you realize your athlete may be carrying more than you can see, you're not alone. Most parents were never given a playbook for this.

FREE LIVE WORKSHOP

The Car Ride Home Workshop

A free live workshop for sports parents who want to better understand what their athlete is experiencing after difficult games and how to support them without adding pressure.

Save My Spot

inspireandmotivatecoach.com

Want to understand what your athlete is experiencing?

Book a free 15-minute parent/athlete consult. We'll talk about what's happening internally in high-pressure moments and whether mental performance coaching is the right next step. No pressure. Just a real conversation.

BOOK AT

cal.com/inspiremotivatecoaching

LOOKING AHEAD

Athletes thrive when parents and coaches send the same message. When home and sport pull in different directions, pressure grows. When they work together, confidence grows faster.

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