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Wildcat Extension

Author: Chuckie Hessong

Title: Say These 6 Words



Bruce E. Brown and Rob Miller of Proactive Coaching LLC are two former coaches, who over time became staunch advocates for the player, for the adolescent, for the child. They are devoted to helping adults avoid becoming a nightmare sports parent. Over 30 years, they asked hundreds of college athletes to think back: "What is your worst memory from playing youth and high school sports?"

The most common response by far: "The ride home from games with my parents."

Those same college athletes were also asked what their parents said that made them feel great, during and after a ballgame.

The most common response by far: "I love to watch you play."

Brown and Miller also found that young athletes especially enjoy having their grandparents watch them perform. They say that, overall, grandparents are more content than parents to simply enjoy watching the child participate. Kids can identify that. A grandparent is more likely to give the child a smile and a hug and say, "I love watching you play," and leave it at that.

As a parent, this is what you want to avoid:

- Overemphasizing sports at the expense of sportsmanship: The best athletes keep their emotions in check and perform at an even keel, win or lose. Parents who show displeasure during a contest are sending the wrong message. Encouragement is crucial -- especially when things aren't going well on the field.
- Having different goals than your child: Brown and Miller suggest making a list of what you want for your child during their sport season. Your son or daughter can also make a list. Lists that are largely different raise a red flag. Kids generally want to have fun, enjoy time with their



friends, improve their skills and win. Parents who write down “getting a scholarship” or “making the All-Star team” probably need to re-think their goals.

- Treating your child differently after a loss than a win: Almost all parents love their children the same regardless of the outcome of a game. However, often their behavior expresses something else. "Many young athletes say that conversations with their parents after a game make them feel as if their value as a person was tied to playing time or winning," Brown says.

- Undermining the coach: Young athletes need a single instructional voice during games. That voice has to be the coach. Kids who listen to their parents yelling instruction from the stands or even glancing at their parents for approval from the field are not fully focused on the game. Second-guessing the coach on the ride home is just as harmful.

- Living your own athletic dream through your child: When the outcome of a game means more to a parent than to the child. If you as a parent are still upset by a loss when the child is already off playing with friends, remind yourself that it's not your career and you have no control over the result.

Based on psychological research, the three healthiest statements moms and dads can make as they perform are:

Before the Competition:

1. Have fun.
2. Play hard.
3. I love you.

After the competition:

1. Did you have fun?
2. I'm proud of you.
3. I love you.

Brown and Miller say that it's easier to be an ideal sports parent than a nightmare. “It takes less effort,” Miller says. “Sit back and enjoy.” Here's what to do:

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- Cheer everybody on the team, not just your child: Parents should be supportive, yet allow young athletes to find their own solutions. Continue to make positive comments even when the team is struggling.
- Model appropriate behavior: When a parent projects control and confidence, the young athlete is likely to do the same. When a parent doesn't dwell on a tough loss, the young athlete will be very appreciative.
- Know what is suitable to discuss with the coach: The mental and physical treatment of your child is absolutely appropriate. So is seeking advice on ways to help your child improve. In addition, if you are concerned about your child's behavior in the team setting, bring that up with the coach. Topics to avoid: playing time, team strategy, and discussing team members other than your child.
- Know your role: Some adults have the impression that by being in a crowd, they become nameless. People with poor sportsmanship cannot hide. Here's a clue: If your child seems embarrassed by you, take a good look at yourself and how you can improve.
- Be a good listener and encourager: When your child is ready to talk about a game or has a question, be there for them. Above all, be positive and be your child's biggest fan.

And remember to say those six words: "I love to watch you play."

For more information on adult development, aging, nutrition, food safety, health, family finance or family and child development contact the Wildcat Extension District 620-724-8233 (Girard) 620-331-2690 (Independence) 620-784-5337 (Altamont), or email chuckiehessong@ksu.edu or check out our website: <http://www.wildcatdistrict.k-state.edu/>

Adult Development and Aging News Column

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6 Words You Should Say Today. University of Wisconsin Extension.

<https://parenthetical.wisc.edu/resources/parenting-skills/> *What Parents Should Say as Their Kids Perform.* Tim Elmore, Growing Leaders.