

Parent Guide:

What to Say When Your Athlete Struggles – Without Hurting Their Confidence



Why these words hurt...

It puts the mind in defense mode and shuts down learning.

Rule...

Connection first. Always.

2

Focus on effort, not outcome.

What NOT to say...

- You need to get more hits.
- You should've caught that.
- You have to be better.

Why these words hurt...

They tie worth to performance.

What TO Say...

- I love how hard you competed.
- I noticed you didn't quit after that mistake.
- You stayed locked in even when it was tough.

Rule...

Effort builds confidence.
Outcomes build pressure.

4

Let the athlete lead the conversation.

What NOT to say...

- You need to work on...
- Next time you should...
- When I played, I...

Why these words hurt...

They steal ownership & create resistance.

What TO Say...

- How are you feeling about today?
- What did you learn from that?
- Is there anything you want help with?

Rule...

Ownership builds confidence.

1

Lead with connection, not correction.

- Why did you swing at that?
- You've got to be more aggressive.
- You weren't focused today.
- You're better than that.
- Calm down.
- It's okay. It's just a game.

What TO Say...

- I love watching you play.
- I'm glad I get to be your parent.
- I'm proud of your effort today.

3

Normalize failure.

What NOT to say...

- It's fine. It doesn't matter.
- The ump was terrible.
- Your coach doesn't have a clue.

Why these words hurt...

It teaches avoidance & blame.

What TO Say...

- That was tough. It's part of the game.
- Every great player goes thru this.
- Struggle means you're growing.

Rule...

Failure isn't a threat. It's information.

5

End with identity. Not performance.

What NOT to say...

- You're better than that.
- That's not like you.
- Silence (This feels like disappointment.)

Why these words hurt...

Kids interpret silence as judgment.

What TO Say...

- One game doesn't define you.
- I'm always on your side.

Rule...

Identity strengthens confidence.

