

# The Ride Home

Chatting mental health with our kids doesn't have to be overwhelming.



TALENT ID VIDEO SERIES

UP AND DOWN  
DEEP DIVE

Supporting an athlete through the highs and lows of sport may feel difficult at times. There is no script or one best answer on how to approach an athlete, but there are some things you can keep in mind as you debrief a round and work through challenges. These tough conversations should always aim for openness, deliberate opportunities for connection, and the desire to grow and learn.

It is a gift if an athlete is willing to open themselves up and put that conversation on the table. How you handle these moments will determine whether they continue to engage, open up about what is really going on, or if they are willing to come to you for support in the future.

## OPENING THE CONVERSATION

### Offer unconditional positive regard

Yes, this means caring for the athlete regardless of their performance or behaviour. This can be done by...

- Keeping an open mind and being non-judgemental
- Staying in tune with your non-verbal behaviour
- Speaking with a calm, sincere, gentle tone
- Using open-ended questions
- Limiting interruptions when they are speaking
- Share what you've seen or noticed
- Ask what the athlete wants from you (e.g., share information, feel heard, problem-solving)
- Listening as a solution

## CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

After opening the conversation with an athlete, you can connect, demonstrate you care, clarify information, ask for their guidance on how you can support them, and make them feel valued and supported by using a variety of communication strategies. **Just like any other skill- these are strategies that will improve over time if you practice them regularly.**

### Strategy #1: Acknowledge

- "I can hear that you're really struggling with that"
- "That sounds really hard"

### Strategy #2: Paraphrasing

- Repeating (maybe shortening) what they say back to you to show you have listened
- "So what I'm hearing is that you are feeling..."

### Strategy #3: Inquiry

- "When you say that you're struggling - can you tell me more about what that means or looks like for you?"
- "Can you tell me more about what was going on when that happened."

### Strategy #4: Clarifying

- "What can I do to support you in this moment?"
- "I'm hearing it would be helpful for me to \_\_\_\_\_. Is that right?"

### Strategy #5: Reflecting Feelings

- You can reflect their feelings tentatively. Say, 'I can see how you could feel mad about that' rather than, 'so you're mad.'
- "You sound proud of the progress you have made on that adjustment we've been talking about."

### Strategy #6: Summarizing

- "It sounds like things didn't go the way you wanted with \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_, and \_\_\_\_\_, and now you're feeling frustrated and angry."

### Strategy #7: "I feel" Statements

- "It makes me incredibly sad to hear how disappointed you are"
- "I'm not sure how I can best support you right now, but I'm willing to sit here and listen"

### Strategy #8: Disarming

- Finding some truth in what is said, even if you don't agree
- "It sounds like me asking you about your putting caused a lot of stress."

### Strategy #9: Positive Respect

- Saying something genuinely positive that conveys respect
- "I really admire the initiative you're taking to understand and discuss what went wrong"

**"I never learned anything from a match that I won".**

- Bobby Jones