



The Ride Home

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

Golf is not a linear sport! Your athlete's journey in golf is unique, but every journey features many ups and downs. It may be your first experience in high-performance sport, or you may be well-versed in this type of journey from your own childhood. As a parent, regardless of your personal experience, it is important to be mindful of the messages you are sending your athlete during those inevitable ups and downs. Just like in other aspects of parenting, how a parent feels or reacts to moments can have an impact on how supported their athlete feels. We encourage parents to be mindful to consider their child as a **human first, an athlete second, and a golfer third.**

Regardless of your child's performance in practice or during a round, the conversation should remain the same.

1. How did they feel about the performance?
2. What did they learn?
3. Are there things they need to let go of or forgive themselves for?
4. What were the positives they felt? What do they want to work on in practice?

How can you mindfully support your child...

AS A PERSON

Parents can **provide unconditional acceptance** related to all aspects of the golf journey. That means caring for your child the same, regardless of how they performed on the golf course. It is recognizing that an athlete might need different support from you if they shoot a 68 or an 85- and that it is okay. Both types of scores are expected. All types of reactions are expected. Every type of practice and round gives us an opportunity to grow and tells us something about the human. Be mindful not to judge, place blame, or make assumptions about why something went a certain way. Be open, be curious, and try to understand what your human is thinking and feeling.

AS AN ATHLETE

Every athlete needs a team - where do you fit in?

Each athlete is unique and will require different styles of discussion and support. It is important to consider who is on your athlete's team, and what do they need from you, specifically. To support your child, you can check in with them or have a conversation to understand how to best support them. For example...

- "I know that when we're on the ride home, I ask you how your round went. Does that feel like a helpful question, or is there something else that would feel more beneficial?"
- "I'm struggling in how to support you right now. This is all new to me. Do you have any ideas of how I can continue to show I care, and not just add extra pressure?"
- "Do you want to just share your experience and vent, or are you looking for ideas from me?"

Keep in mind that some golfers may prefer to debrief their round with you, while others may prefer to save that experience for their coach. In that case, the ride home should be about something other than golf- what else is going on in their life, or what's upcoming for the family in the next week.

AS A GOLFER

Be the parent. Not the coach.

It may be tempting to let your child know what you think or how you feel they played. However, to get to this level, golfers are likely already reflecting on their performance and are their own biggest critic. They should have a good idea of what went well and what didn't, and they may feel embarrassed, worried, or disappointed in themselves if they didn't perform in the way they were expected. It is important that they don't perceive any of these feelings from you. Instead of jumping right in to provide advice or your opinion on their golf game, let your child lead the conversation!

"Even though it's so tempting to jump in and let them know what you saw, let your child do the talking. They will learn way more this way and increase their self-awareness."

- Jennifer Ha, Team Canada - NextGen Assistant Coach and former LPGA Golfer

SCORECARD

When we think of parenting an athlete, a helpful hint, especially in big or stressful moments, is to consider yourself and your family values. Those parenting manuals don't tend to come with instructions of 'how to be a high-performance parent,' but by aligning to your values, you can consider how you want to navigate a particular situation.

Dr. Mustafa Sarkar, a researcher and professor studying the psychology of performance excellence shared an interesting analogy on athlete resilience. He highlighted that in order to create a safe space for athletes to strive and open themselves up to big and challenging moments, those around them should think like a farmer. He shared that farmers...

- Don't shout at the crops
- Don't blame the crops for not growing fast enough
- Don't uproot crops before they've had a chance to grow
- Choose the best plants for the soil
- Irrigate and fertilize
- Remove weeds
- There will be good seasons and bad seasons
- You can't control the weather - only be prepared for it

When we think of parenting, we think this analogy really hits home.

FOLLOW THROUGH

When it comes to supporting your athlete as they are cultivating their golf journey, consider how you can offer support in a way that honours your values and your athletes experience and development, based on the human, athlete and golfer.

Consider a situation that is challenging for you to engage with your child on. It may be when you think they're 'not trying,' when they are playing it 'too safe', or when they only respond to your questions in one-word answers.

How would you normally respond to that situation?

Now consider it from your values perspective. What are 3-5 of your personal or family values? Those values may be dedication, compassion, integrity, patience, or toughness. Thinking of the situation, what would a response in line with your values look like?

