

The Ride Home Might Be the Worst Part of the Game

Posted by [Jodi Murphy](#)

After a loss, many sports parents want to talk about the game on the ride home: what went wrong, what went right, how can they do better next time? While you may not mean anything by all this talk, what you say, what you mean, and what your child hears can be three very different things. "Next time you'll do better at bat" might be your way of telling your child to not let this game get them down, but your child might actually be hearing "You didn't do good enough." When reviewing the results of an informal survey that lasted three decades, [hundreds of college athletes were asked to think back](#): "What is your worst memory from playing youth and high school sports?" Their overwhelming response: "The ride home from games with my parents." Is the ride home the worst part of the game for your youth athlete?

Take Your Coach Hat Off

Most coaches are volunteer moms and dads willing to give up their free time to teach a dozen 8-year-olds baseball, football, or soccer. Being a parent-coach is tough; you have to be careful to not show any favoritism to your own child (without being overly critical of them), keep a dozen other parents at bay on the sidelines, and still be mom and dad when they get home. Parent-coaches need to know when to take their coach hat off at, and it should be right when they get into the car. [The Trophy Mom](#) calls it "the car cone of silence;" the car should be a safe place for players to vent or blow off steam without fear of repercussion. Be mom and dad in that moment, [not the coach](#), and just be as supportive as you can. A good parent-coach needs to be able to switch back and forth between the two roles as needed.

Let Them Steer the Conversation

If your youth athlete wants to talk about the game on the way home then let them steer the



conversation. Let them vent, or cry, or get mad on their own terms but don't push or prod to make it worse. "If only you had done..." is only going to make them more frustrated, and chances are after a hard loss your child is already plenty disappointed.

If they blame themselves for their team's loss don't add fuel to the fire by pointing out their mistakes; concentrate on what went right as much as possible. If they don't want to talk about the

game then just let it rest. You can always talk about it later that night or later in the week if need be, when the pain of loss isn't as strong.

Don't Play the Blame Game

Sometimes parents try to lessen the sting of loss by giving their child an out. The referee made a bad call, their teammate didn't catch a pass, the coach called the wrong play. But that can backfire and make the ride home even more miserable. Your child is supposed to respect their coach, and rely on their teammates--it's kind of hard to do that if you bad-mouth them every chance you get. Don't try to make your child feel better by blaming someone else as it puts them in an awkward position.

Those same college athletes in the aforementioned study were also asked what their parents said that made them feel great, that amplified their joy during and after a ballgame. Their overwhelming response: "I love to watch you play."