



BETTER ATHLETES  
BETTER PEOPLE

# Empowering Conversations with Your Child

It is important that parents intentionally converse with their children about the youth sports experience. However, too often that means the parents talk and the child listens; it's better when children also talk and parents also listen. Here are more suggestions about engaging your children in a conversation about sports.

**Establish Your Goal – A Conversation Among Equals.** Remind yourself that the youth sports experience belongs to your child, not to you. Your goal is to convey support and unconditional love, not necessarily advice on how to become a better athlete.

**Adopt a Tell-Me-More Attitude.** Let your children know you really want to hear what they have to say, and then listen – even if you don't agree with it or like it. Think of the conversation as an Olympic event with judges, where scoring a 10 depends on the child talking and the parent listening.

**Use Open-Ended Questions.** Some questions elicit one-word responses: "How was school today?" "Fine." Ask questions that require longer, more thoughtful responses. "What was the most enjoyable part of today's practice?" or "What worked well in the game?" or "What did you learn that can help you in the future?"

**Ask About Life-Lesson and Character Issues.** For example: "Any thoughts on what you've learned in practice this week that might help you with other parts of your life?"

**Show You Are Listening.** Make it obvious you are paying attention through use of nonverbal actions such as making eye contact and nodding your head or making "listening noises" ("uh-huh...interesting," etc.).

**Let Your Child Set the Terms.** Forcing a conversation soon after competition, when emotions may still run high, is often less successful than waiting until your children indicate they are ready to talk. (Boys may take longer than girls to talk about an experience.) Open-ended questions may prompt more substantive conversations, but they need not always be lengthy to be effective. Defer to your children's wishes for a brief discussion. Forcing longer conversations will lead to your children avoiding them. And don't be afraid of silence. Stick with it and your child will open up to you.

**Connect Through Activity.** Playing a board game or tossing a ball around can allow space for children to share their thoughts and feelings. This is especially important for boys, who often resist a direct adult-style of conversation.

**Enjoy.** The most important reason to listen to your children with a tell-me-more attitude is because then they will want to talk to you, and as you all grow older, you will learn there is no greater gift than a child who enjoys conversations with you.

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