



Growing Champions for Life

Choose Acceptance Over Judgment

By David Benzel

When children enter the world of youth sports they unwittingly add one more opportunity for themselves to be judged, evaluated, and corrected. However, it is unlikely any of them thought about this prior to wanting to play.

They sign up for sports to have fun, enjoy their friends, learn new skills, and challenge themselves through competition. They quickly learn that **organized sport is all about being measured against some standard.**



Consider the average day of any child, age 5 to 18. He or she is evaluated and judged by teachers at school for their work, by friends for their clothing, by coaches and teammates for

their performance...and then they arrive home to be once again judged by their parents for a multitude of performance and behavioral issues. It's a world filled with the evaluating, and sometimes it feels like the "3 C's" - criticism, complaining, and condemning - that's all there is.

Parents have a responsibility to guide, redirect, and even correct the misguided choices of their children. However, the three **fastest ways to ruin your relationship with your child** are to spend your precious time together criticizing, complaining, and condemning... especially about their athletic performance. Children expect their parents to set the rules for behavior at home.

They expect parents to establish the boundaries for certain personal freedoms. And they certainly expect the guidelines for financial responsibilities to come from their parents.

What athletic children do not want is for their parents to be their critics when it comes to sport performance. More than anything else your athlete wants your **approval, unconditional love, and total acceptance.**

If your approval, acceptance, and love appear to be attached to your child's performance, the depth of your relationship will be jeopardized - if not right away, in the future.

If you've wondered why your child seems defensive and argumentative in response to your comments after a game or practice, here's the reason. While you may only mean it as constructive help, they hear the message as **"You fell short of my expectations; you let me down."**

Over time, that message attacks the very foundation of a child's self-image, partly because of what you're saying, but more because of who is saying it. They want to please you more than anyone else.

There is an alternative, and the results are amazingly positive : Use the "3 E's" instead!

- **Encourage with affirmations**
- **Educate with good questions**
- **Edify with words of praise**

These are three activities that build people up to become more of what they were meant to be. Each of these three actions send a message of hope by implying "you are excellent, you are intelligent, and you are worthy of praise."

Most of all, when parents encourage the spirit, educate the mind with life lessons, and edify (build up) the character of their athletes, they are saying "I believe in you". This becomes the foundation of athletic performance as well as close relationships for years to come.

Nothing is more important than your relationship with your child...not a game, not a season, not a scholarship. Treat it like gold so that it is built to last.

Practical Tip: Start each day with six quarters in your left-hand pocket. For each instance where you hear yourself encourage with affirmations, educate with a question, or edify with praise, transfer one quarter to your right-hand pocket.

For each negative complaint or critical statement transfer a quarter back to the left side. Check and record your pocket's contents each night.