

Reacting to your child's performance

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As part of your child's sports environment, you are expected to be a source of feedback about their performance. You need to be sensitive to this role. When your son or daughter first started participating in this sport, you probably discussed with them some of your expectations about their performances. Depending on how much you know about the sport, it might have been something as simple as "We just expect you to try hard and do your best" or it may have been much more specific and detailed.

Now that your child is performing it is important that your reactions to their performances are built around the framework of the previously discussed set of expectations. Be prepared to react to both good and poor performances.

Feedback is used for three purposes:

1. error correction,
2. motivation, and
3. reinforcement.

You should be especially aware of opportunities to provide motivation and/or reinforcement.

Team environments often tend to utilize feedback only for error identification and error correction purposes, sometimes causing in athlete to develop feelings of frustration or a feeling that they are not doing anything right. This focus on mistakes/errors in sports is a universal problem. I even heard a television sports commentator recently lament the negative tone of most sportscasts and the frequent failure to comment on positive plays when they occur.

We must convince ourselves and our children that mistakes are a natural part of sports, and most activities in life, for that matter. While it is true that athletes should strive to reduce the mistakes they make, they will never totally eliminate them. Perfection rarely occurs in sports. Even the very best athletes, the professional athletes and Olympic level athletes make mistakes. Consider how rare the "Perfect Game" is in baseball. For that matter, consider how rare an error-free game is.

In one of the recent major league baseball all-star games, the best players in baseball made 5 errors! We certainly should never expect children in youth sports to play without making mistakes. It is important that they understand this and set realistic performance expectations for themselves. Accentuate the positive!

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