



# The Easiest Parenting Mistake to Correct

I'm convinced that the most common mistake sport parents make is the one I made repeatedly until I figured it out. I thought the car ride home after a competition was a teachable moment. Certainly my kids were just dying to hear my analysis, critique, and words of wisdom once we get in the car. After all, shouldn't we talk about what just happened while it's fresh in everyone's mind? The answer is no.... because it's **not** a teachable moment. Here's why.



On a continuum of logical to emotional, where is your child likely to be after a game? Emotional – he's feeling things more than thinking logically. Perhaps disappointed, perhaps delighted.... but not analyzing. Parents tend to be on the opposite end of the continuum. We're thinking analytically and anxious to share our great insights. Where did we ever get the idea that great conversations happen when two people are on opposite ends of that continuum.

Married people should know this.

If your kids are staring out the side window of the car while you're delivering your brilliant observations about their game, they're really thinking, "I wish we lived closer to the field." If they frequently ask to ride home with someone else, it's not because you have an ugly car. It's because the car ride home is worse than the competition itself.

The solution is so simple. Whatever discussion needs to happen, it's best if they choose the topic and it's on their timetable, not ours. So here's what I learned to do after a competition. When I get in the car, I say only these 5 words: "I LOVE watching you compete." That's it! Then I'm quiet. I learned to wait for the conversation to come to me. And sure enough, eventually, I would get invited into the conversation my child actually wanted to have about the event. It might be several hours later. The goal is to create the safest environment possible in our car so our kids don't feel they're being evaluated and judged....just loved unconditionally, no matter how they performed.

I knew I had arrived when my son said to my wife after a game where we had come in two cars, "Mom, is it okay if I ride home with Dad? We want to talk about the game." Just remember to say only 5 words. "I love watching you play." Then crickets!



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## Discussion Guide for Parent and Athlete

1 What do you notice most about the mood and responsiveness of your athlete after a competition? Quiet, or talkative?

2 What would be the benefits to your relationship if you waited until invited into a conversation about the game?