

## Are Your Kids in Sports? Memorize These 6 Words

What's the best way to handle ourselves at our kids' sports events?

Brad is frustrated by his son's baseball schedule. After spring sign-ups, the family was notified the team would be starting "spring training" right away, and those pre-season skill-building sessions would take place four nights a week until the season started.

To some dads, that may not sound excessive, except that Brad's son was six years old, this was all for T-ball at the local park league; it wasn't even so-called "competitive" T-ball. As he wrote, "I didn't sign up for this."

In that kind of atmosphere, there's a higher likelihood of the parents and kids buying into an atmosphere of high expectations and a "win or go home" mentality. And that kind of atmosphere too often fosters all kinds of drama on the sidelines and the bleachers from parents watching or coaching their kids. If you've been around youth sports at all, you've probably seen plenty of examples. And sports events are where we think about this most often, but it also happens at other kinds of kids' performances and events.

It might surprise you to know that some research has been done about the best way to encourage our kids in these situations. We want to be positive, but we don't want to make it all about their performance, so they might feel pressure to do well in order to earn our approval or love.

One study looked at psychological research about the best statements parents can make when watching our kids play or perform.

*Before* the competition, the best statements are: "Have fun." "Play hard." And, "I love you."

The three things to say *afterward* are: "Did you have fun?" "I'm proud of you." And, "I love you."

Another study asked college athletes what they most appreciate hearing from their parents. It can be summarized in six words: **"I love to watch you play."**

Now, you might think this is all dreamed up by people who want to take all the healthy competition out of sports. Or you might be thinking, "My kid needs a little constructive criticism about how to get better." Those might be valid points in some cases, although sometimes it seems as though there's a lot of the parent's ego wrapped up in the child's success, like *they* will be embarrassed if their child forgets to tag up on a fly ball to the outfield. We have to be discerning here, and some of us may need to take a hard look at our mindset and our behavior.

Sometimes it's better to trust the coaches and try to see the bigger picture. With so many parents going too far and saying too much, a lot of kids would be thrilled if all their parents said was simply: "I love to watch you play." It doesn't pump up a child to the point of pride, and it doesn't give the impression that you're only noticing things he needs to improve.

Dad, keep these six words in mind and use them or something similar at your child's games and events: *"I love to watch you play."*

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**What is your mindset when you're watching your kids' games and performances?** Share your tips and ideas on our Facebook page.

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