

How can I help my child manage set backs and challenges?

As a parent it can be really hard to see your child facing challenges and set backs. Unfortunately they are an inevitable part of the youth sport experience and as a parent you can play an important part in helping your child cope with this. However, before you can help your child you first need to make sure that your own emotions are not impacting on the situation (see the parents' experiences section for some suggestions).

Supporting the Development of Coping Strategies

For athletes to develop coping strategies it is important for parents to:

1. Develop a supportive relationship with your child. They need to know that you are there for them when things don't go well. Take time to ensure you show your child that you understand what they are experiencing but also allow them to develop their independence, so that they have confidence in their ability to manage.
2. Help your child to reflect on the experience they are having. Ask them questions about the situation, help them to put the experience in perspective, share your experiences with them, and where possible provide opportunities for children to practice coping skills.

Athletes Learning to Cope

It is important to realise that encountering challenges is not always a bad thing. As athletes encounter different challenges, they will also learn new coping strategies. For example, athletes are likely to try a number of different strategies in different situations, some of these will work and others won't. As a parent you can encourage them to reflect on their coping attempts to identify what they might try the next time they encounter a challenge. Through this process of trial and error, athletes will gain a whole range of coping skills which will help them as they progress in sport.

The importance of supporting the development of active coping strategies

Research has shown that those parents who help children to engage in active coping strategies, that is strategies that aim to address issues and challenges are seen as more supportive than parents who encourage children to ignore or downplay challenges. By actively helping your child to manage challenges, you are demonstrating that you understand the situation and you support your child's development and growth.

Based on:

Tamminen, K. A. & Holt, N. L. (2012). Adolescent athletes' learning about coping and the roles of parents and coaches. *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, 13, 69-79.