

Supportive and Unsupportive Comments

Make supportive comments. If you want to reinforce a single simple key for the competition, keep it brief and to the point. Here are some examples of supportive comments

“have fun in that race”	“think light and fast”	“one jump at a time”
“pop on those throws”	“think <i>tough</i> ”	“one throw at a time”
“just have fun”	“one step at a time”	“go enjoy yourself”
“run hard that last lap”	“one lap at a time”	“go get ‘em”

Avoid comments relating to failures such as “don’t choke” or “don’t lose it in the last lap” or “don’t foul on your jumps like last time.” Your comments provide a focal point. Performances are enhanced by focusing on what to do as opposed to what to avoid. Too many instructions create a mental overload for a child competitor. Even at the highest levels with elite adult athletes, the best coaches practice simple targeted specific comments.

If your comments focus solely on a time or distance or a win or loss then you demonstrate that those things are most important to you. If you ask if they had fun today, did their best today, tried their hardest today, learned something today, or met someone interesting today; then you place an emphasis on process goals and other more global values instead of just “wins and losses.”

Be sure that you demonstrate that you love your child regardless of how they perform. Do not withhold affection or hugs. Even remaining silent after a poor performance will convey that you do not accept them - win or lose. Your body language as well as your verbal interactions will demonstrate clearly how you feel. Children often attach their self-esteem to how they perform.

Your post competition discussions are important. Your post competition questions and discussions shape what you value. You have to start with tempering your own reactions to the performance. After a competition allow for some time before analyzing the performance. Find a couple things that you observed that were done well. Ask your child what they think they did well in that race, jump or throw. This is a time to have a

two-way open discussion. Picking apart a performance on the ride home is not a good idea. Leave coaching observations for practice.

Failure in sports is normal. Making mistakes is a part of sports. In baseball getting a hit 30% of the time makes you an All-star. That means they failed to get a hit 70% of the time. Athletes will not set records or even get faster or jump longer in each successive competition. You will not see that at Olympic levels and it most certainly won't happen at the youth level. Perfectionistic qualities are a double-edged sword. They can help focus practices to improve. They also make athletes too obsessed with stats, places, scores while losing perspective of competition.

Get back to being a parent. Your lives should not revolve around discussing competition successes and failures or performance improvement. Focus on a balanced life.

Can I take pictures at the meet?

Though we do not intend to make this a photography how-to manual; there are some important pointers for the average parent-photographer to help make the most of your picture taking.

First and foremost, ask an official before ever getting on the track or in the field to take any pictures at all. To get any pictures worthwhile you'll need to get close to the action with most cameras. Otherwise, you'll end up with some unidentifiable athlete in the middle of the track or field. Even if you are getting close to the action – get permission. There is a lot of action going on and it's not just your son or daughter's event. Do not obscure other spectator's views. Field events have zones you cannot enter and throwing events can be quite dangerous to just hang out if you are not fully aware of flying implements. If your focus is on the camera focus and not the 12 pound piece of metal hurtling through air, you could end up really out of focus... for good! One way to keep your position for picture taking in perspective is to think what would happen if every parent in the stands decided to take the same picture from where you are! The competition comes first. Spectators come second. Your picture is in third place.