

# **Navigating the Challenges: A Guide for Parents of Struggling Athletes**

**Helping your young athlete navigate the pressures of sport.**

**Dear Parents,**

**Recognizing the signs of a struggling athlete and understanding how to respond is crucial in helping them grow as a person. All athletes cope with stress differently. In this guide, you'll learn how to step in when coping becomes unhealthy.**

**This comprehensive one-pager provides insights into identifying struggle, understanding the impact of environment, and encouraging continuous growth through adversity.**

## **1. What struggling looks like**

**It's vital to identify the signs that your child may be struggling. Problems can often overlooked because life in sports is both full of excitement and disappointment. You might also not want to get in your athlete's way in times of pressure.**

**But if you notice something wrong, you can act.**

**What are you looking for? Normal emotions are good. Failing to cope and keep moving forward is not. If your athlete cannot maintain their healthy progress, this means there is more room for your athlete to grow. Look out for:**

- Severe emotional Changes: Heightened frustration or a noticeable dip in enthusiasm/passion.**
- Behavioral Shifts: Withdrawal from teammates, coaches, or family members, and volatile responses to normal challenges or others.**
- Increased Anxiety: Excessive fear of failure or decreased confidence.**

## **2. The Overarching Influence of Environment**

**As crucial as your support is, your athlete is always more influenced by their life at their sport and their peers than they are their parents. Multiple factors in their**

**environment contribute to their mental state.**

- **Coaching Style:** A good fit (or not) with the methodology and communication style of coaches.
- **Team Dynamics:** Interpersonal relationships within the team affect their comfort and performance.
- **Cultural Pressure:** Society's and sports culture's expectations of athletes to live a certain way compete with the athlete's personal desires.
- **Social media:** the excessive presence of motivational messages and highlights can often discourage the relative "beginner".

### **3. Fostering Growth Through Adversity**

**What do you do about all the things that might be going wrong? Encouraging your athlete to navigate these challenges is pivotal to their development.**

- **Normalize dealing with adversity:** Convey that obstacles and setbacks are a natural part of sports and personal growth.
- **Tell them they work hard:** If your athlete does something well, encourage a growth mindset by connecting it to some effort or experience. Avoid connecting rewards with 'being great' or innate talents. This will only demotivate them.
- **Encourage Emotional Expression:** Listen while they express their feelings without judgment. Offer and encourage solutions to their problems.
- **Set Realistic Goals:** Help them establish achievable goals for both sports and life. Don't assume they can achieve more than the next kid.

### **4. Conclusion**

**You may also be inclined to seek professional guidance in hard times. Be willing to reach out to mental health professionals, particularly if the problem seems beyond your immediate ability to help. If your athlete asks, be open to the idea.**

**There is one more proactive thing you can do. Set the environment for your athlete. Put your athlete in a place that you believe is good for them. That means evaluating if the coaches/teammates believe things that you believe are good and useful for your athlete to learn (potentially like those in section 3). Choose a place that prioritizes the person. Your athlete will learn more from their time at their sport than at home. The best situations teach them strong character and mental fitness.**

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**We hope to contribute to the well-being of your athlete. To learn more about how we can help your athlete solve a performance or personal problem in 6 weeks, visit our website.**

***This guide is intended as a supportive resource and not a substitute for professional medical advice.***