

CAR RIDE PLAN: HOME FROM THE GAME

Imagine this. You've had a high-pressure day out with the kids and/or at work. You are exhausted and emotionally drained. A friend who watched your entire day is now driving you home. You just want to relax with no demands so you can start to recover. Shortly into the car ride, your friend asks you about your mistakes with your kid or work:

- *"Why did you get so mad at your daughter? It wasn't her fault that you couldn't find your keys."*
- *"Why were you so nervous in your work presentation? That's why you keep getting passed over for a promotion."*

How would you feel in these situations? Probably resentful, angry and hurt.

Now, imagine that your friend is going to drive you home **every time** after you have these stressful and demanding situations. How would you start to feel about those car rides? More importantly, how would you start to feel about your friend? It wouldn't take long before you stopped hanging out with your friend and found another way to get home.

Unfortunately, this is how many kids feel about their car rides home after games with their parents. Many kids say this is the part of their soccer games they dislike the most. To better understand this, let's look at this car ride home from a kid's perspective:



Kid perspective: I am mentally, physically, and emotionally spent. I just want to relax (maybe listen to music) and not think about the game. Some negative thoughts about my mistakes, missed opportunities, and things my teammates said come into my mind. I try to push them out. I try to think about other things instead. I can see in my parent's face that they are about to say it. Why do they do this? I already know I made some mistakes. I don't want to get criticized for them too. This stinks.

Then my parent tells me their analysis of my performance and how I need to improve. Now, I feel frustrated and upset. Does my parent really think this motivates me to work harder and makes me want to keep playing soccer? Why does my parent put all this pressure on me? Soccer used to be a lot more fun when I didn't get criticized so much. It feels like my parent cares more about how well I play than how I am feeling. I wish my parent could understand they are not my coach and just be my parent. I wish someone else was driving me home.



Most parents have good intentions and are trying to help their kids improve with feedback about their kid's performance. As parents, we have taught our kids other things so why would soccer be any different? Over time, however, some parents can lose perspective and become too invested in their kid's performance. This shows itself when parents are feeling more frustrated, worried or disappointed about their kid's performance, as their feedback is more negative and critical. Even though many kids will not listen and take in parent feedback after a game, parents continue to give their feedback believing it will improve their kid's performance. If your kid isn't receptive to your feedback, it is unlikely to improve their performance. However It is very likely to lower their self-esteem, raise their performance anxiety and build resentment in your relationship. This actually makes your kid less likely to perform better the next game!

You may be wondering, "Is it best to say nothing to my kid on the car ride home from my kid's game?" The answer is, it depends. It depends on what your kid thinks is more helpful to unwind and feel supported and less stressed when you get home.

DO'S & DON'TS FOR THE CAR RIDE HOME

“Do's & Don'ts” for parents as they drive their kids home from their game.
As you read them, put a mark by the things you do sometimes.

DO

- Be a supportive parent
- Have your kid do something enjoyable
- Think of 3 things you feel good about in your kid's performance
- Think of at least one time your kid responded well after a mistake
- Smile and keep the mood light
- Have a warm and calm tone of voice, smile, relax your shoulders and upper body, good eye contact
- Focus on how you value and love your kid regardless of their performance
- Keep your stress level lower
- Ask, “Did you have fun?”
- Say, “I loved watching you play today.”
- Give your kid space
- Focus on your kid's courage to play with the pressure of a game
- Listen well when your kid wants to talk about their game
- If your kid asks you for advice, give growth mindset feedback
- Remind yourself that your kid is still learning their position

DON'T

- Be your kid's coach
- Tell your kid to watch instructional soccer videos
- Focus on your kid's mistakes and missed opportunities
- Focus on the times your kid did not respond well after mistakes
- Be very serious and intense
- Have a harsh or irritated tone of voice, squint your eyes, shake your head, sigh, tense your lips, grip the steering wheel harder
- Focus on your kid's mistakes from the game and that you don't want them to happen again
- Put your frustration or stress onto your kids
- Talk about your kid's mistakes
- Tell your kid how they can improve
- Say negative things about your kid's coach, teammates and/or parents
- Interrupt your kid when they want to talk about their game
- Talk about how your kid should play like one of their teammates
- Give unasked advice on how to play their position

Develop A Plan

Now that you've marked some things you've done on the Do's & Don'ts list, it's time to create your helpful plan for the car ride home from the game. How do you do this? You start by talking with your kid. Each kid is unique. Find out what your kid thinks is helpful and unhelpful. Below are some steps you can follow to help you and your kid develop a more helpful car ride home plan:

- Find a time that works well for both of you when you're both more calm and open to having this conversation (i.e., don't do it at the end of a stressful day or after an argument about chores).
- Start the conversation and say something like...
 - "I was thinking about our car rides home from your games. I want to do my part to help you unwind and feel supported and less stressed when you get home."
 - "Let's figure out what you would like me to do, and not do, so I'm being helpful."
- Identify and share at least **two things** you have said or done on past car rides home from the game you think were unhelpful to your kid.
- Identify and share at least **two things** you have said or done on past car rides home from the game you think were helpful to your kid.
- Ask your kid to say at least **two things** you have said or done on past car rides home from the game your kid thinks were helpful.
- Ask your kid to say at least **two things** you have said or done on past car rides home from the game your kid thinks were unhelpful.
- Praise your kid for sharing their experiences and suggestions to improve the car ride home from the game.
- Agree on, and write down, 2-5 Do's and 2-5 Don'ts for your car ride plan home from the game.

If your kid is not currently open to having this conversation, then challenge yourself to honestly reflect on what you could change to better help your kid riding home from the game.

Remember, just because it feels like your feedback will make your kid play better next game, that doesn't make it a fact. What is the best way for your kid to unwind and feel supported and less stressed when you get home? Listen to what your kid needs from you on the car ride home - and do it. This can also help improve your connection and relationship with your kid because they will feel you value them over their performance.

Listen to 2-time World Cup Champion and 2-time Olympic Gold Medalist, Mia Hamm: "On the car ride home from the game be their mom, not their coach."

RESILIENCE BUILDER

1

Train your brain by practicing the car ride home plan driving home from practice and training.

2

Review your car ride home from the game plan before practices, training, and games to steer your mind to focus on, and follow, your car ride plan.

3

Check-in with your kid every Sunday to see what's working and what can be improved in your car ride home from the game plan.



Soccer
Resilience