

HOW TO LOWER YOUR STRESS & ENJOY YOUR KID'S GAMES

Your kid's playing in a game. Your tension rises. Your mind starts to focus more on what could go wrong than what could go well. You worry more about your kid's performance.

How did watching my kid play in games become something more stressful? What happened to those times when watching my kid play was more enjoyable and fun?

While it's sometimes not as clear when we started to feel more stressed at our kid's games, it's easier to figure out why this happens. The answer is found in our brain.

As a reminder, remember, our brain's **hardwired to overly focus on the negative** in the past, present and future to protect us from danger. This is why your mind will sometimes dwell on your kid's past negative soccer experiences and also predict your kid will have future negative soccer experiences. Unfortunately, this can become a negative thought pattern that can rob you of some of your enjoyment and lead to more stress and worry.

What magnifies the increased stress from our brain's negative bias? When you and/or your kid becomes more invested in your kid's soccer. This often leads your mind to focus more on your kid's playing time, role, performance and winning. **Focusing more on outcomes steers your mind toward a fixed mindset** where mistakes and lesser performances are interpreted as a disaster. When is this most likely to occur? During games where both the pressure to perform well, and potential for disappointment, is greater.



If you have experienced this shift in your thoughts and focus, you are not alone. Like many parents. There's great news! You can learn proven, effective strategies to steer your mind to lower your stress and regain more enjoyment watching your kid play in games. And this will likely lower your kid's stress too! Below are three ways to do this:

1) Name 5 Things You Appreciate About Your Kid's Game

What if your kid shut down the other team's best player and scored the winning goal, but consistently put down their teammates and yelled at their coach? Would you feel good about your kid? Of course not! Yet, we often don't focus on, and then miss, the things a kid's do during games that we value.

Here are some areas you may want to focus on in your kid's game:

- Taking on a challenge and trying something difficult.
- Working hard after setbacks and adversity.
- Displaying a skill that is an improvement from previous games.
- Helping a teammate (i.e., encouraging a teammate after a mistake).
- Being respectful to the coach and referee.

2) Have a Growth Mindset: Focus on the process of growing and improving

After a few seasons of watching my son and daughter play competitive soccer, I began to focus more on if my kids' play would help them keep their starting role and/or get more playing time. When they played well, it was sometimes more of a sense of relief than enjoyment. I had more of a fixed mindset!

How did I get myself out of this negative focus and fixed mindset? I went back to the growth mindset I had when my son and daughter began playing soccer. I viewed games as opportunities to take on challenges, push through mistakes, grow their skills and strengthen their perseverance. I trained my brain to notice when they took on a challenge and when they kept working hard, and taking risks, after mistakes. I would also notice at least once a game when I saw them perform a new skill or show improvement in a skill. I reminded myself that these were the things that I admired the most in my kids both on and off the field. By focusing on their process of growth instead of outcomes (i.e., starting, winning), my stress was low and I really enjoyed watching them play.

3) Stop Comparing Your Kid to Their Teammates

Comparing your kid to teammates is a quick way to go from feeling happy to discouraged - even when your kid made a good play! How do you change this? Before your kid's next game, remind yourself that your kid's growth and improvement is not related to other kids' skills and performance. If your kid puts in minimal effort and their teammates put in even less effort, your kid still put in minimal effort. If your kid puts in a lot of effort and their teammates put in more effort, your kid still put in a lot of effort. This mindset helps you celebrate your kid's willingness to take on challenges and improvements regardless of your kid's teammates' play. Your kid will appreciate this too!

RESILIENCE BUILDER

These three activities below will help you steer your mind toward a growth mindset where you notice your kid's effort toward growth and where they are improving. This will help lower your stress and worry and find more enjoyment in your kid's games.

1) Before your kid's next game, remind yourself that your kid's growth and improvement is not related to other kids' skills and performance.

_____ Check here to show I steered my mind to focus on my kid's game and not comparing my kid's play to my kid's teammates performance.

2) During the game, write down or notice five things you appreciate about your kid's play.

Examples: taking on a challenge, pushing through a setback, encouraging a teammate, winning a tackle, making a run toward goal

What you noticed:

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

3) After the game, enthusiastically share with your kid at least two specific moments from the game when your kid displayed effort toward growth (i.e., trying something difficult or new, calling for the ball) and/or where they improved (i.e., dribbling, passing, defending):
