

The 10 Commandments for a Great Sports Parent



**BY
CRAIG SIGL**

The 10 Commandments for a Great Sports Parent



About The Mental Toughness Trainer

Craig Sigl is fiercely committed to guiding young athletes to achieve Mental Toughness and Peak Performance so that they have a repeatable success formula for sports and all areas of life. A former Fortune 500 manager, he has coached and trained adults and youth for over 30 years.

Craig is the parent of two athletic boys, lives everything he teaches, and regularly plays his favorite sports developing new methods. He has been featured on NBC's Evening Show on TV, written about in major newspapers, and interviewed on numerous radio programs. He has over 2,000 clients all around the world using his programs and services, but he is most proud when his young athlete clients write an email to him about how the work has positively changed their life.

Visit: MentalToughnessTrainer.com to read some of those emails and get more information to give your child Mental Toughness.



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“Mental Toughness is consistently: determined, focused, confident, resilient and in control under pressure.”

When I first started working with young athletes to improve their sports performance, I was sure I was going to be seeing robo-kids like the NFL football player, Todd Marinovich. I expected them to be coming in dragged by the ear by their parents, who were interested in making millions or getting them a top college scholarship.

Happily, I turned out to be wrong! I distinctly remember one of the parents saying, “Craig, I don’t care if she wants to be a gold medalist. I don’t care if she wants to quit. I just want her to be happy again. Can you help?”

I am pleased to report, the vast majority of parents come to me with the same mindset. This was my inspiration for developing my [8-week online course for Mental Toughness](#), so I can help kids love playing their sport again.

What I see time and time again, is when the athlete is happy, their performance skyrockets! What most young athletes don’t know yet, is that winning big happens when you create inner peace and the self-confidence that comes with that power. Not the other way around!

This is the basis of my entire work. Peak performance in games and competition will come when your athlete achieves inner core strength and the knowledge of how to make that happen. This is what I teach in my Mental Toughness Trainings. To find out more, go to [Mental Toughness Academy](#).

To be a great sport’s parent you will need to be their role model, sounding board, and a loving presence. Yep, it is just like regular parenting! For simplicity, I’m just going to use the pronouns “she” and “her” to refer to all young athletes. You can make the mental switch, when reading this for your young man. Here we go...



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#1

Show and communicate unconditional love, regardless of performance.



Most of us parents assume all the driving, attending games, cheering and spending huge sums of money should be enough to send the message of unconditional love and support to our kids, but to a kid it isn't enough.

An important opportunity to show your support is when your child doesn't perform well for whatever reason.

It is critical at this time especially, to connect and act like the proud parent you are. Notice the subtle way you may express disappointment or disapproval – you may not be aware of how you're coming across. Kids unconsciously pick up on this with their highly-sensitive radar system that is trained on you. Let your athlete guide the conversation after the competition, with you holding the intention “you are proud of them no matter what” in your mind.

Notice - do you talk more when she wins, than when she loses? Do your facial expressions or your routine to stop for a celebratory treat on the way home change?

If your child senses your disappointment in her performance in any way, then she is likely to put more pressure on herself the next time. Her need to please you, may be the very thing that hurts her performance in the future!

You want to send the message, she is the same person, win or lose, whether her performance was good or bad. It is critical that kids know their self worth is not tied to winning or losing or a good or bad performance and it is fundamental to building mental toughness.



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#2

Create a safe environment for talking.

Sports gives parents and children a golden opportunity to connect in ways they might not otherwise. You can encourage this connection and openness and it will give you an opening into her life in ways you never had before.

The way to start is to let your athlete know you will not judge her no matter what she says about her sport and her participation in it. You will find kids are usually more open to talking to you about their sport and their frustrations than any other area of their life. It can give you the “in” to helping them in all the other areas as well.

The last thing you want is a child who tells you what she thinks you want to hear, clams up... or worse does not tell you the truth. This can cause an internal conflict in your child and definitely adds to her stress.

So what is the best way to communicate? By listening...really listening. That means, don't interrupt her or offer advice. The best way to show you are listening is to repeat or rephrase what you heard. Don't say, “I know how you



feel,” rather say, “I hear you” or “I understand what you're saying.”

You could then ask if she would like your advice. If she says “no” you **HAVE** to back off and respect her request. If you do this, then she will be much more likely to say yes the next time, because she trusts you!

The hard part for you will be when your athlete says something you know darn well is not true or she is having an obscured perception.

You are going to be tempted to respond with your TRUTH or telling her she's being ridiculous. Many times this will lose her trust and willingness to be open with you. You are going to have to take a deep breath and decide whether or not it is really worth it to “correct” her. If you do, and the “correction” and your “judgment” of her false idea is not welcome, you risk closing the communication door.

She will listen and absorb your advice best, when the doors of communication are open. You will have to let go of your ego and “better judgment” at times to do so.



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Here is a quick dialog to illustrate my point:

Katie: "The other players hate me"

Parent: "Oh, tell me about that"

Katie: "Well, the other girls don't like me, because they don't like the way I sometimes speak up in our meetings."

Parent: "Hmmm....Having the courage to speak up and then have the other girls be disrespectful to you must be difficult. " Wait and listen for a response.

After taking a deep breath you could say "I'm here to help in any way I can and I'd be glad to give you my thoughts if you want them."

Ideally we want our kids to learn to solve these types of problem on their own. They will do so more often if they are secure in the knowledge that they have you as their emotional sounding board. This builds confidence and self-efficacy.

On a final note, the worst time, although the most tempting time to give your kids advice is on the way home from a game! Don't do it unless they ask for it.



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#3

Offer advice only with permission.



What does that mean? Coming to an agreement or compromise on the rules of engagement between the parties involved. If you are a parent who rules with authoritarian directives, this may be tough for you, when it comes to your child and sports. I'm not here to tell you how to do your parenting, but to delve deeper into what you just learned in Commandment #2 – Make Communication with you a Safe Place.

To have an even more powerful impact and influence on your child, you need to get their permission to give them guidance. You may be saying “no way, no how”, but I think it is important to keep in mind that your child's participation in sports is optional. Yes, I know that some parents require a child to participate in “something,” but if the child isn't into the sport and you force them, they may ultimately learn things that hurt their

confidence and their self-esteem.

Giving corrective advice after a loss, mistake or poor performance is the worst time for you to chime in with how they could have done it better. Instead, wait for her to be in a good mood. The great thing about this is, you will be asking for permission at the perfect time when you are most likely to get a “yes”.

How might you do this? Very simply ... the conversation could go something like this:

Parent: “So Katie, you know, I just want to tell you that I felt so proud and happy watching you from the stands last week. I love seeing you compete and participate and how you were such a good sport when....etc.”

Katie: “Thanks Dad.”

Parent: “I wonder if I could ask you something about your (sport)?”

Katie: “What's that?”

Parent: “Well, you know that I want you to do well right?”

Katie: “Uh, I guess”



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Parent: “I wanted to know if you would ever want me to give you help or advice on your game or would you rather me just cheer you on and let the coaches do that?”

If Katie says “No” then you need to respect that at least for the time being. Chances are, even if she says no, she will still come to you and ask you for advice at times in the future. You could leave that door open by offering something like:

Parent: “Ok, well, if you ever DO want my advice, I’m here for you and will be glad to offer it, but I will wait for you to ask for it.”

If Katie says, “Yes” then the next thing you should ask is “When would be the best times for me to give it to you?”

You, of course, could bypass this whole “permission thing” and just go on giving unsolicited advice, but your brilliance is much more likely to sink into their inner mind when SHE opens the gateway to it. You’ve got to let go of your ego to do this. Trust me, most kids will want your advice eventually and she will feel very loved if you honor her wishes. That will build her confidence!



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#4

Talk honestly and teach reality.

Ok, you've done well in keeping the communication lines open and you only offer advice when asked. Great job! You might still slip into "teaching" and "advice" mode at times, but your athlete will probably give you some slack for having respected her wishes.



When you do give advice, I really believe you should do your best to give your athlete your true perspective and not sugar coat things. I have worked with kids as young as 9 years old and believe me, they CAN handle the truth.

Give them the truth about what it takes to become a gold medalist or professional in their sport. Provide them with stories (I have stories on my site if you need some) of what those at the top of their sport have done to get there. Tell her **OFTEN** you believe she can do anything she sets her mind to do.

Let them know the reality though, that only about 1% of high school athletes get a college scholarship. Tell her it's OK if she wants to play her sport just for the fun of it, to hang out with friends, and you support her in that.

You also need to tell her the truth about how things are not always "fair" in life in a way that

matches her perception of the world, not yours. Like times when she gets chewed out by her coach and takes it personally. She may not understand the underlying reasons why her coach may be acting like such a jerk. Explain to her: "Both parents and coaches have their own

personal issues that cause them to act irrational at times and it has nothing to do with you."

This has been very valuable in my experience of working with kids in my office. I find I need to remind them of this concept often and this is how we protect our child's confidence. You do not want her to get the wrong idea that something is wrong with her, because her coach raised her voice to her. Coaches are humans and bring their own "stuff" to their coaching.

Let's face it, you too may get emotional and lose it at times. It would be in your child's best interest for you to come clean when this happens and apologize. Scary, I know. Tell her, "It has nothing to do with you." Kids really get this and appreciate it.

So letting them know that playing sports is both fair and unfair at different times. A bad call, team politics and who gets to start or who is first team

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can feel very unfair and is all just part of playing sports. On the other hand, playing sports can be the most “fair” thing we humans get judged on, because there are numbers and stats to look at, at the end of the day. Your merits show through and are rewarded better than most any other areas of achievement. Numbers don’t lie and that’s a good thing for fairness!

On a final note, make sure you think before you speak and ask yourself “how can I give my child the most realistic and empowering perspective on what she’s experiencing right now?” Filter all your conversations through that and you will just naturally say the right things and be amazed as you watch her grow as a person and an athlete.



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#5

Prepare your athlete for difficulty.



It is so much easier to have a profound influence on your young athlete, if you do it proactively instead of after-the-fact. Since you are now in a great position of open communication, you want to take every opportunity you can to introduce and prepare her for tough situations like losing, sitting on the bench, not making the team, not getting a scholarship, needing to go back to the basics, choking in a clutch situation, etc.

You need to bring them up before they happen, while at the same time not suggesting they will happen. You can do this by talking about OTHER people who have experienced these issues and how they overcame or solved the problem.

Use the tools I've taught you, to get across these ideas with the perspective they are the same person, win or lose. Don't wait until they actually

lose the big game or make a huge error to have this discussion. Life is not all roses and trophies and the kids that are prepared for difficult experiences will thrive with these lessons firmly implanted in their minds. The real beauty is that they will also use these lessons in other areas of their life as well.

Use age-appropriate language and stories and your intuition to guide you to what you think your child is ready to hear. Remind her that mental toughness is repeated exposure to difficulty and then recovering from it.

You want to show her how to pre-live difficult situations in her mind, before they happen and so she can come out on top by knowing what to do and how to act. Total preparedness comes from mentally rehearsing, just like physical practice, in advance.

Champions win in advance!



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#6

Focus on the positive and repeat it often.



When I first got into this field and learned about how we as parents have such a tremendous influence over our kids, I had an “uh oh” moment. I looked back at how I had been parenting and what I had said and taught my two boys. I started to get a little worried about what they had learned from me that I may not have been aware of.

I reflected back to my own experiences as a child and young athlete and what really stood out for me was my mom constantly telling me: “You can do anything you want if you put your mind to it. I believe in you.” I can still hear her voice in my head.

Was my mom a perfect parent? Absolutely not, but she put a lot of energy into teaching my brother and I that one big lesson that has always overshadowed whatever she did that was not so great as a parent. I am going to encourage you to have a “theme” or an idea that you put a lot of emphasis on for your child that is totally empowering and works with your family’s values.

For example, I recently read about Archie Manning’s family. He brought up 2 successful NFL Super Bowl quarterbacks and Archie, himself, was an NFL quarterback in the 80s. He taught his boys over and over that they should feel lucky they were brothers and to cherish that connection and support. To this day, they both point to that as their secret to success.

The main take away point is to be consistent with a positive message. You have my permission to bring this up at any time with your child, without permission, often and everywhere. Even if she rolls her eyes when you mention it for the 100th time.

You are going to make mistakes as a parent. Accept that and get on with the job of preparing your child for this game of life by always bringing your guidance back to the powerful, positive message that you stand for.



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You can borrow mine or come up with your own. When your child reflects that statement or value back to you in her words or actions, make it a point to NOTICE it. Tell her how proud you are and how great that makes you feel to witness her living that value.

Get creative in finding ways to keep her thinking positive and focused. Kids can learn the habit of focusing on the positive and you are just the person to show them how to do it.



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#7

Model the behavior you want to see in your young athlete.



We have all been told not to scream out directions or yell at coaches or officials at games, right? If you didn't know it, for young athletes, this is as embarrassing as being seen with you at the mall. I, myself, have been guilty of yelling advice to my son through the chain link fence in the past. Trust me, it does no good and usually hurts rather than helps their performance.

But let's take this a step further. If your daughter sees you cheering on her teammates, she is more likely to do that herself. If she witnesses a level-headed conversation with her coach, she is more likely to follow your lead there too. I believe this commandment is actually one of the most powerful ones I teach. Kids learn as much from

you by your actions than by what you say... sometimes more!

One of the best actions you can model is calmness in the face of pressure. In dealing with young athletes, probably the most common issue is being anxious before and during an event. Imagine how powerful it would be for your child to watch you in the stands acting calm and collected, when every other parent is screaming at a bad call. What are you like, right before a game or while packing for a travel tournament? Model what you want them to learn.

This doesn't begin or end on the field or court either. How you react to tough situations at home will go a long way toward how your athlete handles difficulty. Sport is a fabulous place to practice how they will deal with adversity in real life and showing her is 10 times more powerful than telling her.

Most importantly, kids need to develop ways of dealing with their difficult emotions and if you wait until they are in the midst of experiencing one, it could be too late. This is a big part of my **8-step Emotional Mastery Process** taught in my [Mental Toughness Academy](#) that empowers teens to feel in control of their lives.



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#8

How to deal with the coach issue.



Now that you've got some of the fundamentals down, you're ready for the nitty gritty of being a great sports parent. There are some excellent coaches out there and some not-so-good ones and it will always be like that. Generally, kids look up to their coach as they do to you and so they easily get disappointed, when the coach shows she's human. Your job is to assist your young athlete to come up with an understanding of her coach's actions that build her self-confidence.

This can be difficult when your child has gone beyond reasonable thinking and is stewing, stuck, or wallowing in difficult emotions. At this point it is hard to have any effect. The best tactic is defense or prevention.

When the time is right and you have good rapport, engage her in a conversation about

her best and worst coaches.

The easiest ways to get your child talking is to:

1. Keep asking open-ended questions that cannot be answered with a "yes" or "no."
2. Use a technique that I call "Qtone." You will repeat the last couple words or last word of their sentence and you put a questioning tone on the end. That gives them a subconscious cue to keep talking and they do!

Qtone works like this:

Katie: "The coach should be starting Jane instead of Mary."

Parent: "Instead of Mary?"

Katie: "Well yeah, Mary is OK I guess, but Jane is so much more reliable out there."

Parent: "More reliable."

Katie: "Yep, Jane is always the one who makes the play and keeps us in the game."

Parent: "Keeps you in the game?"

You get the picture? You can keep a conversation going for a long time by doing just this. Sometimes, there will be an uncomfortable pause. That's OK, just observe how she handles it and use your common sense when you think it best to change it up.



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Once you get her talking, then slip in some useful perspectives, but do everything you can to get your child to think that she came up with the idea. This kind of conversation will “imply” permission if you do it right!

I once had a 12-year-old athlete tell me about his coach and how he hated him. I said: “Hate him?” and of course, he kept the story going. And then, at one point, I said: “I wonder if this coach might be the best thing that could happen to you.”

He thought I was crazy, of course, and wanted to know what I meant. I said, “Well, this coach got you to come into my office so you can learn mental toughness right? What if you had breezed through for 4 more years and then got a tough coach who didn’t see your talent? What if right before the big game you were so rattled you choked, right when scouts were there to watch you? Good thing you are getting this mental toughness training now!”

He was floored, but it opened up his mind and from then on was really ready to get to work in toughening up his mind. You are creating once again - Exposure and Recovery.

I want to cap this section off with a simple rule for dealing with coaches. Talk to the coach like you would talk to one of your child’s respected teachers or counselors. Assume that the coach is a reasonable person and is just doing her best (while understanding she has her own personal issues and biases that she brings to the table, just like you). Speak directly, politely and respectfully and if that doesn’t work, find another coach or program.

I have worked with and talked to enough coaches to know this...you aren’t going to get anywhere in influencing your coach by being a pain-in-the-butt parent. That plan never works; just ask any coach. Definitely be an advocate for your child, just do it in a way that they will hear and want to work with you.

Now we get to the fun part! A great sports parent doesn’t just teach and advocate for their athlete...a great sports parent is her biggest cheerleader and fan!



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#9

Encourage competition without pressure.



For the life of me, I don't understand where some parents get the idea that berating their kid for a poor performance is going to make them a tougher or better player, much less a stronger human being. It doesn't.

You always can and should find something positive to say to your child no matter the situation.

Here are a few starters for you: "I believe in you." "I am so proud of you." "I felt so happy/excited watching you compete." "You are just an

awesome kid/player/son/daughter." Cheer as loud as you can, when your kid does well or her teammates do well. Constantly keep pumping them up, especially when they aren't doing well. You, of course, want to encourage her competitiveness and that being competitive is awesome. The great thing about competition is that it gets you to FEEL things and that is why we do anything! But the big caveat here is that you DO NOT want to put any more pressure on her to win.

Yes, of course, winning is good and the pursuit of winning is also good. That's where it should end though. If winning becomes the main reason for playing and competing, that is when the pressure starts and could lead to all kinds of problems.

You want your athlete to play for the fun of competition...not just to win, right? If the fundamental joy of playing the game is not there, they will not have the spirit to practice and compete for the long haul. You can't force that!

Ask your athlete why they play the sport and what they like about it. Before the game, remind her of those things and that the nervousness is just really her excitement.

In fact, if you think about it, you get the same heart racing, the same tension, maybe some heat to the extremities, as she does



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Help her realize it is only her thoughts about those bodily sensations that are difficult or make it difficult to perform.

Assure your child that getting nervous is normal; everyone gets nervous before a game. It's struggling against the nerves that makes it worse. Lots of kids get the idea they HAVE to win or MUST perform well or they will face rejection or disapproval. This is a critical concept that your child will blast through in my [Mental Toughness Academy Training Course](#).

You though, can be the best person in your child's life to teach her how to eliminate that pressure. You could tell stories of your own experiences in feeling anxious about competition and pushing through it and being so glad you did. If you need stories to tell, go to my [Website](#), [Facebook page](#), and [Twitter](#) to read stories of world-class athletes, who themselves, have overcome great odds and adversity and then went on to win.

Another way is to go and have some fun WITH your athlete playing her sport with her. Let her teach YOU how to do some moves. Model for her having fun by doing it yourself!

One final thing... Unless you've been living in a closet, you know that there is such a thing as Home Field Advantage. Yes, IT'S REAL and it exists at the highest levels of sport. I could write a chapter on this alone, but basically, it's all about the energy you send to your child and her team. Send that energy as a positive intention you hold for her as often as you can! Give her the home field advantage even as a visitor.



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#10

Guide your athlete to bigger thinking.



Once you have established a good communicative relationship with your teen, you can move her to the next level of a champion's mindset by putting sports participation into a broader perspective.

Having worked with hundreds of young athletes, I've noticed some all too common, limiting thinking patterns. Many of these patterns come from their having a very narrow perspective of the world and from what most teens consider important...i.e., their friends, fitting in, their sport, school, social media, and keeping parents happy.

To create a winner's attitude and more importantly a healthy, happy adult, they need you to help

them expand their world perspective. With your perspective and larger picture of the world, it diminishes the importance of any one game or event and the disappointments and frustrations they may experience.

I'd like you to consider the differences between the way a child looks at their life and the way you do for a moment. Values like: sacrifice, delayed gratification, accountability, patience and responsibility could be at the top of the list that you might want to instill in your child and sports is the perfect vehicle to make that happen.

What you need to remember is your child is in the process of turning into an adult. Like most teens, they cannot wait to grow up, to have the freedom to go where they want and not to be told what they can and can't do. Use this desire! It can be your ticket to getting your teen to start thinking bigger, longer term, and have a wider perspective of the world, all of which she will need as she enters the competitive adult world. Tie together your wanting her to learn maturity, her desire to gain the freedoms of an adult and her sport as the teaching example and you can make magic happen!

You could start off with easy questions like: "How do you think this one upcoming game will affect your sporting career? Your choice of college? Your vocation? See if you can get her to admit that one game or one choke on the court means nothing in the grander scheme of life.

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In my coaching sessions with teens, I have been subtly injecting broader perspective questions into my mental toughness training with surprising results. I do this by, once again, asking questions. I might ask them, “What do you think your purpose in life is?” “What do you want your life to look like after high school and college?” If they say “I don’t know”, then I come back with a question like “If you did know, what would it be?”

The key is not to say things like: “It’s time for you to grow up” or “You need to man up” or “I want you to take some responsibility.” If you were to say those phrases out loud to yourself and listen, you would realize they would not make you want to open up or listen.

Once you get the conversation going, tie in her sports participation to some of these bigger thoughts and let the seeds take root in her mind. You definitely just want to ask questions and not judge any of her answers. Remember, the point is to assist her in creating thinking more like an adult, in her sport and in life.

I know you can take it from here. The goal is to create a shift in their thinking. A shift that will open the door to her thinking about ideas and things bigger than herself. This kind of thinking changes the way the mind operates and makes their dreams a reality. It fuels motivation to succeed beyond what they think they are capable of. It’s the stuff of champions...

Everyone who goes through my programs and processes gets this kind of guidance and teaching from me. I would love to see you and your young athlete join me on my [Website](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) and [Youtube](#) for more big thinking.

We offer a new kind of online training that will help boost your child’s athletic performance, skyrocket their confidence, eliminate their fears and frustrations and give them powerful life skills!

To learn more, go to:
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Craig Sigl
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