



Father-Son Guide

Beyond The Game

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As fathers, we play profound roles in shaping how our sons learn confidence, identity, and resilience—especially in the world of sports.

Athletics can be a source of pride, opportunity, and connection, but they can also carry pressure, unspoken expectations, and emotional complexity.

This handout is designed to support meaningful conversations, both in groups and at home, using culturally aware mental health principles and real-world examples that reflect our lived experiences

Discussions For Dads

1. How did your own sports upbringing shape how you show up today?
2. What emotions come up for you on the sidelines?
3. Where do you struggle separating “dad” from “coach”?
4. How do expectations—spoken or unspoken—affect your son?
5. What helps you stay supportive instead of controlling?
6. How do you respond when another coach becomes influential?
7. What fears do you carry about your son’s sports journey?
8. How do you support your son through setbacks?
9. How do you want your son to describe your support in five years?
10. How do you ensure sports strengthen—rather than strain—your relationship?

Stories From The Locker Room

A father realized he yelled instructions from the stands not because his son needed them, but because he feared being judged by other parents. His son later shared he felt anxiety when his dad watched. Their breakthrough came when the father said, “I want to enjoy the game with you—not control it.” This shift allowed both to breathe again.

A coach became a mentor to another man’s teenage son, commencing to a feeling of jealousy. The father felt replaced. After a hard conversation, the man told his son: “I’m glad you have more than one man who believes in you. I’m still your father first.” The shift strengthened—not weakened—their bond.

After a shoulder injury, a young man wanted to quit football. His father, who once dreamed of playing college ball, felt devastated. But instead of pushing him back onto the field, he asked, “What do you need from me right now?” This moment salvaged the relationship for future years of connection.



Pause and Think

Maybe this isn’t your story, but think about where this might hit home for you and your son. How could this story relate to what you have going on at home?

A Conversation for Dad's and Sons

Have the following conversation with your son, mentor, or younger brother.

1. What do you enjoy most and least about playing sports?
2. What type of support do you want from me during games?
3. Do you ever feel pressure from me? When?
4. How do you experience being coached—by me or others?
5. How can I better support you through injuries or discouragement?
6. If you ever wanted to quit or change sports, how should I respond?

Conversations Are Bridges



Best Practices

We asked thousands of dads and found these recommendations based on creating healthy relationships they weren't always connected to, here's what they said:

1. Lead with identity first, athlete second.
2. Adopt a "curious, not controlling" mindset.
3. Set explicit boundaries when you are both dad and coach.
4. Normalize emotions—including disappointment and fear.
5. Celebrate effort, not just results.
6. Share your own sports story honestly—including regrets.
7. Support your son's relationship with other positive male mentors.
8. Check in monthly about his experience.
9. Help him prepare emotionally for transitions, including leaving sports.
10. Remember: the relationship comes before the game.



What would you include?

As fathers, we play profound roles in shaping how our sons see themselves—strong, capable, loved, and supported beyond wins and losses.

When we engage intentionally, with honesty and compassion, sports become not just a game, but a pathway to deeper relationship, emotional growth, and generational healing.

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