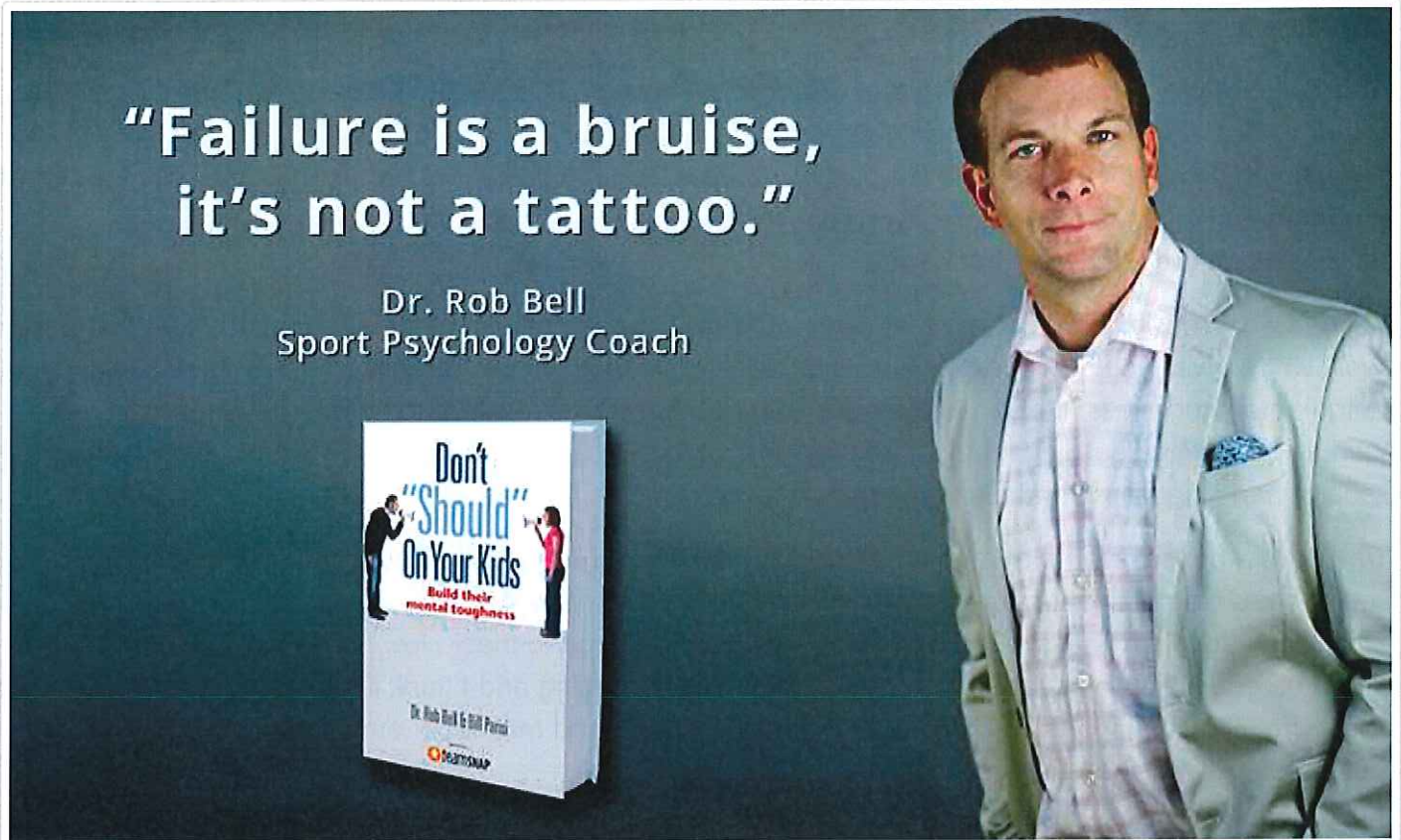


For Parents



Confidence crusher: Rethinking the car ride home conversation

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By Greg Bach

Youth sports parents usually have a lot on their mind following games, and they're understandably anxious to dissect all the action with their young athletes.

But it's usually best to refrain from unloading everything the moment the car door shuts for the trip home.

"I think what has happened is the car ride home has ruined more relationships between parents and their kids because the lines get so blurred," says Dr. Rob Bell, a sport psychology coach. "The kids are riding home with their parents – they're in a metal coffin – and they can't escape and they can't breathe and the only thing they hear from their parents is they are just getting grilled about why did they make that play, or what were they thinking or they should have done this. The conversations rarely go well and it really just hurts the kid's confidence and the way they evaluate everything."

So, instead of scrutinizing miscues from behind the steering wheel, or serving up analysis before they've even pulled out of the parking lot, parents should consider taking a more laid back approach. This helps ensure that their words will land on more receptive ears and increase the likelihood of a more productive exchange.

"The best time to talk about the game or the practice nowadays is not on the car ride home," says Bell, author of **Don't "Should" On Your Kids**. (<http://www.amazon.com/Dr-Rob-Bell/e/B003Q84BTE>) "Talk about anything but the game. And the parents have to communicate that part to their kids that they'll talk at home at a designated time when everybody is cool, calm and collected. That's when the conversations are a lot more beneficial."

Bell has worked with everyone from athletes at Notre Dame to national tennis champions and this latest book, written with youth performance training expert Bill Parisi, helps parents empower their kids to build their mental toughness. It also tackles a number of other topics relevant to parenting young athletes, such as confidence building, dealing with injuries, communication strategies and the ultra-challenging issue of handling failure and disappointment.

"Failure is a bruise, it's not a tattoo," Bell says. "That feeling dissipates, but it's what we learn from it. Sports should be that laboratory, that training ground, of when we do experience setbacks and we do experience adversity that's when we learn how do we respond to that? How do we cope with it? Do we blame others or do we accept responsibility? Effort is everything and I think if we really emphasize all the awesome skills that sports can provide like communication and teamwork and leadership and just that mental toughness, that's where I think we get better."

WHO'S DOING THE DRIVING?

Bell has seen far too many young athletes fizzle out, due to all the pushing, prodding and pressure from their parents.

He says kids need space to enjoy the process and if they truly love the sport they'll develop a passion for it, as well as their own mental toughness.

"It's hard to be driven when you're being driven and I see it all the time," he says. "The kiss of death is kids are good at their sport but they don't love it. But now they are trapped – they are going to go into high school or already at the club level and they're playing really well but they don't love it, so it's a recipe for disaster because it's going to explode at some point. They're just kind of hanging on. It's a lot of pressure and a lot of expectation and if it's driven by the parents it just won't work."

WHAT MESSAGE IS YOUR BODY LANGUAGE SENDING?

"As parents we need to ride the carousel, not the roller coaster," Bell says. "Kids can see when a parent is stressed out. You show me a parent in the stands or on the field that's going to be stressed out pacing, throwing their arms up and down, really just riding that emotional roller coaster and I'm going to show you a kid that is stressed out."

So it's important parents have a plan – and stick to it – especially when games and performances don't go as they had hoped.

"Parents need to really be strategic and have a plan on what they do during a game and how they parent and what's their body language," Bell says. "Kids are always looking for approval from their parents and it's easy when people are winning and it's just really difficult when people start to struggle."