

The Only Six Words Parents Need to Say to Their Kids About Sports—Or Any Performance

By [Brad M. Griffin](#)



Photo by [greg westfall](#).

Mainly I get concerned about the ways our culture obsesses about kids' performance. **All kinds of parental anxiety and dysfunction plays out on the sidelines and in the bleachers, and you only need walk to your local park to catch a glimpse for yourself.** Sports have such potential to build character, perseverance, and skill. Sometimes they succeed, and other times coaches, parents, and mobs of hot-or-cold fans burn out or puff up kids in quite damaging ways.

I stumbled across [this great article by student leadership development expert Tim Elmore](#). In it he discusses **research on what parents can say both before and after the game to encourage their kids**, without making everything about performance (either positively or negatively).

Elmore suggests:

Based on psychological research, the three healthiest statements moms and dads can make as [kids] perform are:

Before the Competition:

Have fun.

Play hard.

I love you.

After the competition:

Did you have fun?

I'm proud of you.

I love you.

It gets even better. Researchers Bruce Brown and Rob Miller asked college athletes what their parents said that made them feel great and brought them joy when they played sports. Want to know the six words they most want to hear their parents say?

"I love to watch you play."

That's it. Nothing aggrandizing like "you're an all-star," and nothing discouraging like "here are a couple of things I noticed that you can work on." Just "I love to watch you play."

As I gear up for T-ball, band concerts, gymnastics practice, and everything else I'll be watching my three kids do this year, I'm internalizing these six words. I'm sure I'll say other things, some that are helpful and some that aren't.
