



My son's coach tells him he's talented. Why does he still lack self-confidence?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"I have a 12 yr old boy who plays baseball, who made his middle school ball and summer league team. I am biased as a dad, but I do think he is as good as everyone who made the squad. Here is where the concern comes in. He lacks self-confidence. He will not believe what coaches say about his talent. How can I build that up?"

PCA Response by Joe Terrasi, PCA Lead Trainer

You're already on the right path when you talk about "building his confidence" while his coaches describe his "talent." Positive Coaching Alliance is fortunate to work closely with psychologist Carol Dweck (I would suggest a read of her excellent book, *Mindset*.) She makes the important distinction between "growth" and "fixed" mindsets and shows significant evidence that fostering a growth mindset - one in which we focus on effort and progress - leads to greater self-confidence (and ultimately improvement).

The term "talent" itself implies a fixed mindset - one in which our attributes are set and immovable. Dr. Dweck's research shows that focusing on fixed attributes can slow improvement (and in some cases even cause skills to deteriorate).

How can a great sports parent use this to build self-confidence? One simple thing we can do is make some subtle adjustments to our language. An easy example is to add the word "yet." For example, rather than saying, "you're not a very good fastball hitter," we might say, "you're not hitting a lot of fastballs yet." This implies clearly that we are always in process. Along with this, it's important to attribute success to effort (rather than talent, speed, size, etc.) For example, it can actually be detrimental to say, "you're a really fast baserunner." It will be more helpful to say, "that was a great steal - all that hard running in practice is paying off!"

Fostering a growth mindset helps build self-confidence as it allows athletes to feel a sense of control. This allows parents to see both successes and challenges as essential components to becoming a great player.

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Lack of confidence, continued

Last, a quick suggestion about the difficult times. Maybe your son struck out with runners on base to end a game. As a parent, we have a strong urge to either console our child or to "fix" the problem. We are often better off by connecting non-verbally through activity. A great game of catch with your young ballplayer might just be the "talk" they need most. Without a word it can convey both "I love watching you play," and "this game is fun."

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