



# Dealing with Player Meltdowns

*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 coach youth baseball, ages 10-12. How do you handle the emotional meltdowns that can take place on the field after errors or strikeouts?”**

## PCA Response by Mike Farley, PCA Trainer–Milwaukee

To me, this is the most important aspect for learning in sports. As coaches, we can train anyone in certain basic skills – how to catch, how to hit, how to throw -- but what do we teach about overcoming adversity? Life is going to throw each of us our own share of curveballs and many, if not most of us, will fail along the way.

The questions are these: How will I deal with failure? How can I prevent failure? How do I carry on when I’m at a low point?

Isn’t that what life’s all about? What better training for your future than through sport. It intensifies those feelings and stresses into moments of tremendous joy and terrible heartbreak. As coaches, we need to remind our athletes that that’s why we’re here. One way or another, WE will find a way through these challenges and turn them into opportunities for our own greatness.

How will I deal with failure? After the strike out, the errant throw and the dropped fly ball – that’s exactly the time to learn. Excuses and frustration typically only result in more failure. Relaxation and visualization can help. So, too, can coaching that allows for failure. Screaming and cajoling an athlete will most likely produce more fear, instead of motivation. Find the area that encourages an athlete to dust off, and try again.

How can I prevent failure? Preparation, both physically and mentally. Are the athletes coached to prepare for every contingency? Do they know the game situation? Do they understand the risks and rewards of a particular play? We let so many of our kids simply wander out and “play” without giving them the skills in practice to understand. Make a point in practice to put them into the very situations that will cause the most stress. Experience is a great cure for the jitters.

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## Dealing with Player Meltdowns, continued

How do I carry on when I'm down? Quite possibly the hardest thing to do in life... and the most rewarding. Coming back from behind. Making the game winning hit after striking out three times. Amazing how the perception of the entire game can change in a single moment. (Unfortunately, it works in reverse, too.) Again, calling out players who battle through these low points can be great teaching moments. Don't miss the opportunity. Encourage the effort in failed execution when you see that it was only skill that left them short. A batter who fouls off six pitches only to strike out on a seventh, in an age of pitch counts, has done his teammates a service, not put them at a deficit. Quality at-bats, quality plays, quality effort all count toward quality performance and victories.

*PCA Trainer Mike Farley is a former pro football player and longtime youth sports coach.*

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