

Is It Too Late to Make it Right with My Child? Three Steps for Getting a Fresh Start

by David Benzel



The dad of a young baseball player approached me recently to ask what he could do to help his son play with more swagger; to play with a confidence level that matched his ability. “He’s so talented” said the dad, “but he doesn’t play like he believes in himself.”

Something told me that there were deeper issues here than what simple sport psychology exercises could address. I waited for it, and then it came. “I know I’m part of the problem” added the dad. “I’ve been pretty hard on him, trying to make him better.” There it was, the painful truth — and he *knew* it was true. He admitted, “All we do is fight now.” Sport psychology alone will never overcome feelings of disappointment, distance, or resentment in a child’s primary relationships at home.

Here’s the inevitable question I hear from parents when they realize they’ve been over-bearing and critical: “Is it too late for me to do this right?” The answer is “No”. It’s never too late, but it does require some humility to make a believer out of your child.

The first step is to approach your child with a sincere apology for over-playing your role as coach and under-playing your role as constant supporter and loyal fan. Ask for forgiveness for being critical of his or her performances. **Secondly**, admit that you are learning new ways to help them reach their dreams that do not include being as harsh as a Russian figure skating judge. **Third**, share your goal of becoming a listener to their trials, a resource for finding answers, and an encourager of their dreams.

Children are amazingly forgiving when confronted with a genuine apology and a heartfelt desire to improve. They know all about screwing up and what it feels like to be given another chance. They’ll do the same for you. Your job is to discipline yourself so as not to fall back into your old ways, and to keep learning about how to respond during the emotional moments when sport performances seem disappointing.

As this concerned dad and I finished our conversation we agreed on an important truth. More than anything else, his son needs to know how much his dad believes in him and cares for him regardless of how he plays.

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