

# How Well-Meaning Sports Parents Unintentionally Pressure Youth Athletes

Mistakes Even Seasoned Sports Parents Make



## Are Over-Pressuring Your Athlete?

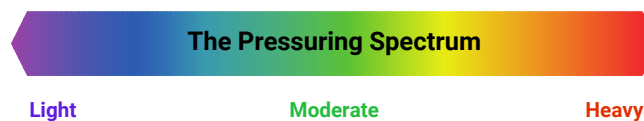
As a parent, you want to see your child succeed. And you want to help them reach their full potential – without pushing too hard or straining your relationship. But in today's competitive youth sports world, it can be tough to find the right balance.

**70% of kids in the US quit sports by age 13.  
The #1 reason? They're not having fun anymore.**

Imagine your child walking away from the sport they once loved, not because they lost interest, but because the pressure quietly replaced the joy.

**This checklist is designed to help you spot everyday actions that can unintentionally take the fun out of sports – so you can create an environment where your athlete thrives.**

### The Pressuring Spectrum:



Not all pressure is loud or obvious. Even quiet, well-intended comments can create pressure – especially if they make your child feel like they must meet expectations or they'll let you down.

That's because pressure isn't just about your tone or intent. It's about how your message is received.

Pressuring behaviors fall on a spectrum, ranging from light to moderate to heavy. **Recognizing where your words and actions land is the first step in creating a low-pressure, high-support environment where your athlete can thrive.**



# Light Pressure Behaviors

Light

**Every child experiences light-pressure behaviors differently.** Some athletes aren't bothered at all, while others quietly feel the weight of expectations. **If you do any of these, talk with your athlete about how they make them feel.** The goal isn't judgment – it's awareness.

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## Do you...

**1. Talk about your athlete's sports constantly at the dinner table?**

- *It can cause them to tie their identity to their performance.*

**2. Tell your anxious athlete before the game, "Don't be nervous"?**

- *It's normal to be nervous, but it makes them feel like it's wrong, which increases their anxiety.*

**3. Post your athlete's accomplishments frequently on social media?**

- *It can make them feel their value comes from achievements, so they always have to perform.*

**4. Watch almost all of your athlete's practices?**

- *It can make them feel they're constantly being evaluated & reduce their sense of independence.*

**5. Give your athlete pre-game pep talks, tips, or reminders?**

- *It can make them feel that you don't trust their ability and cause them to overthink.*

**6. Regularly praise your athlete's achievements, like hitting .300, averaging 12 points per game, or scoring 10 goals a season?**

- *It puts the focus on outcomes, which your athlete can't fully control, so it causes pressure.*

**7. Track or frequently calculate your athlete's stats?**

- *It can put the focus on outcomes, which can add pressure and reduce their enjoyment.*

**8. Register your athlete for training, camps, or clinics w/o talking to them first?**

- *It can make them feel they have little say in their sports journey, which often leads to burnout.*

**9. Spend significant amounts of money on youth sports?**

- *It can make them feel pressure to perform to give you a return on your financial investment.*

**10. Miss important family events because of your kid's sports?**

- *It can make them feel like they need to "make it worth it" to miss a family event.*
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# Moderate Pressure Behaviors



Experts recommend avoiding moderate pressure behaviors to protect your child's love for the game and your relationship.

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## Do you...

**1. Set performance goals for your athlete to meet each season?**

- *It can cause them to focus to goals that aren't truly their own and they don't fully control.*

**2. Reward your athlete based on how well they perform? (ie. money or ice cream)**

- *It can shift their motivation to extrinsic rewards which can extinguish their intrinsic drive.*

**3. Shout instructions to your athlete from the sidelines or stands?**

- *It distracts them and takes away chances to read the situation and make their own decisions.*

**4. Show visible frustration when your athlete makes a mistake during the game?**

- *It can make them afraid to make mistakes, leading them to play cautiously and without freedom.*

**5. Change your body language or tone of voice based on your athlete's performance?**

- *It can make them feel valued for results instead of who they are – a form of conditional love.*

**6. Yell at the officials or question calls from the stands?**

- *It often embarrasses them, models poor self-control, and teaches them disrespect is acceptable.*

**7. Push your athlete to train or practice, when they want a break?**

- *It can cause them to lose a sense of ownership over the sport and reduce their intrinsic motivation.*

**8. Emphasize the importance of making a particular team to your athlete?**

- *It can make them feel like their success or self-worth depends on making that team.*

**9. Criticize your athlete's effort or dedication before asking how they're feeling?**

- *It can make them feel like they're never quite good enough.*

**10. Care more about your athlete's success than they do?**

- *It can make them feel like they have little autonomy, which is a factor in burnout. .*

# Heavy Pressure Behaviors



It's essential to make a change for your child's well-being if you check 'yes' to any of these heavy pressure behaviors.

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## Do you...

- 1. Give your athlete unwanted coaching on the car ride home?
  - 2. Push your athlete to put in extra practice sessions when they don't want to?
  - 3. Yell at your athlete about their performance?
  - 4. Often argue with your athlete about their sport?
  - 5. Punish your athlete for losing games or making mistakes?
  - 6. Compare your athlete to others when talking with them?
  - 7. Hide your athlete's injuries from the coach or team?
  - 8. Remind your athlete about how much time or money you've invested in their sports?
  - 9. Expect your athlete to earn a college scholarship as a return on your investment?
  - 10. Force your child to keep playing when they've explicitly said they want to quit?
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## Self-Assessment:

If you answered “yes” to several questions, you’re not alone. It doesn’t make you a bad parent – it makes you human. It simply means there’s an opportunity to pause, reflect, and make adjustments to better support your athlete.

**Small changes in how you show up can have a tremendous impact on your child’s *entire* youth sports experience.**

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## To Get The Most Out of This Checklist:

- 1 Invite your spouse or co-parent to complete the assessment.
- 2 If your child is old enough, encourage them to participate by marking "M" for Mom, "D" for Dad, or "B" for both.
- 3 Use this as a chance to come together as a family for an open, honest discussion.

