



## **Supporting Your Athlete in preparation for and at the Western Canada Games:**

### **Tips for Parents**

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#### **General Day to Day Tips for Parents**

1. As a parent the best role you can play for encouraging your athlete is a supportive and unconditional one. For example, show an interest in your child's sport with questions like, "Did you have fun today?" or "What was practice like for you for today?" Withhold from giving advice or any "coaching tips". Unless an athlete asks for specific advice leave the coaching to the coach and be the active listener for your athlete.
2. If you are not familiar with your child's sport, become knowledgeable with the language of the sport, and how the developmental progression works for the skills in the sport. The more you understand the sport, the more you can provide positive support and relate to what your child is going through. Read about it, talk to coaches, and show an interest by directly asking your child about the ins and outs of his or her sport.
3. Support achievements as they occur in training and competition. This will reduce pressure to achieve skills that are not quite ready.
4. Praise effort over performance results. Encourage that success is equated with simply doing your best and performance disappointments are not failures, but simply learning opportunities.
5. Find encouragement for all the things your child is doing right rather than to criticize. Athletes often are self-critical enough. Parents can encourage them to find the positives in any situation.
6. Help your child build a strong sense of self-worth and identity that is not dependent on the sport itself or level of achievement through reinforcing the positive values of sport involvement like health, lifestyle, discipline, and friendships.
7. Encourage your athlete's goals in any way you can but be sure to allow them room to take responsibility for them (they are not your goals).
8. Be sure to check in with your athlete often about how you can support them better through communication, visibility at events, logistical help etc. Encourage your athlete to let you know what you could do better, start or stop doing as far as supporting his or her athletic goals.

## Race Day/Competition Tips for Parents

1. Encouragement, excitement and enthusiasm are all important in your support, but too much of it can put extra pressure on the athlete. Know what your “normal” is and maintain it when around your athlete at races and competitions.
2. Manage what you say and when you say it. For example:
  - a. “I hope you win”...while this is what everyone *hopes*...well intentioned statements like that can increase the pressure that athletes are already feeling.
  - b. A note on social media (e.g. Facebook) or a statement to other friends and family like “*looking forward to the podium presentation*” could be a distraction to the athlete. Remember that friends and family should be mindful that they communicate in many ways to the athletes and to other family and friends that support the athlete. Make sure everyone knows to “keep things normal”.
  - c. A last minute phone call or text to the athlete on race morning saying something well intentioned like “we’re so proud” could distract an athlete who is attempting to maintain their normal pre-race routine. The best strategy is to let your athlete know that you are always available, well in advance of the competition, and to let them reach out to you if they need support. Otherwise, friends and family who are present at the Games should expect to connect after the competition/race is over.
3. Friends and family can be most helpful by being calm and “normal”. Treat any major competition like it were any other competition. Be a rock for your athlete by staying calm when others get overly excited. Keep it very simple. Less is more. After the competition you can share what you were feeling and thinking with the athlete. Celebrate together!
4. Athletes often report feeling guilty about not spending enough time with friends and family in general and/or before a major event. They have said that the guilt may become a major distraction. Please expect that your athlete may not be able to see you before their event takes place. Let your athlete know that you are okay with that and that you understand.
5. Ask the athlete(s) you are supporting to say what they want to hear well in advance of the race/event. If the athlete is not sure, or they want very little, then respect that through to the end of competition day...when it is done you can celebrate together.
6. Similarly asking athletes (coaches and staff) “how are you feeling?” all the time can have adverse effects. Sometimes it is hard to know how to respond so avoiding the question is often best.
7. Each athlete will have their pre-race week and race day routine and schedule to follow as they prepare – they do this to keep things normal in what can be a very charged, exciting and somewhat abnormal environment. You being “normal” can be extremely helpful.
8. Being “normal” when you are nervous for your athlete can be difficult. As friends and family we all get nervous! This is a great part of the experience. Nerves, can however, change your behavior and sometimes people say and do strange things which negatively impact the athlete. Be aware of your own nerves. How do you feel when you get nervous? How do you typically respond or act? How should you respond? Take a moment to think before acting in the lead up to and during a competition and take care to look after yourself.

9. If things haven't gone to plan during training or the competition don't be surprised if the athlete doesn't want to talk or communicate; don't be offended; give them space and they will come around.
10. Know that no athletes make it in sports alone. You have and always will be an integral element of an athlete's success. As friends and family...you are the rock!! Solid and dependable. During competitions, athletes need to be focused on themselves.
11. Remember everyone has a role. No different than a coach or manager, family and friends have an important role as part of the athlete's support team. The only way to know what your role is (or is not), is to discuss well ahead of time various scenarios, expectations, and options with your athlete. Try to write these down and keep things simple and clear. If you come up with a plan stick to it. Establish some communication ground rules.

\* Part 2 Adapted from *"Friends and Family Guide for London 2012"* by Kirsten Barnes, PhD, 2012