

# WEEK 3: THE POST-GAME CAR RIDE

## What to Say (and What NOT to Say)

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### WEEK 3 OVERVIEW

**The Focus:**

Healthy communication after wins AND losses

**The Challenge:**

The 3:1 Rule - For every 1 comment about the game, make 3 positive comments about something else

**Connection Tool:**

Tonight, try the 3:1 rule. Let THEM bring up basketball if they want to.

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### THE PROBLEM: THE POST-GAME CAR RIDE

You know that moment - the game just ended, emotions are high (yours AND theirs), and you're both getting in the car.

What happens in the next 10-15 minutes can either strengthen your connection or create distance.

**Here's what research shows:**

When asked what they want MOST from parents after games, kids consistently say: **"I just want you to let me process it on my own timeline."**

But sometimes we - replay the game - coach from the passenger seat - critique what went wrong - try to fix their feelings - make it about performance instead of connection

**The result?** The post-game car ride becomes the #1 source of sports-related family conflict.

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### THE KEY TRUTH

**Kids process games differently than adults.**

What feels like "support" to us often feels like pressure to them.

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## THE 3:1 RULE

For every 1 comment about the game, make 3 positive comments about something else.

This simple rule helps you:

- ✓ Give your child space to process on their own timeline
  - ✓ Keep sports in healthy perspective
  - ✓ Maintain connection even after tough games
  - ✓ Let THEM lead the conversation about the game (if they want to)
  - ✓ Reduce post-game conflict and tension
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## WHAT NOT TO SAY

### Immediate Coaching or Critique

- ✗ “You should have passed to Sarah when you had the chance.”
- ✗ “Why didn’t you take that shot?”
- ✗ “You need to work on your defense.”

**Why this doesn’t work:** Your child just spent 30-60 minutes being coached. They don’t need more coaching - they need support.

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### “Why Didn’t You...?” Questions

- ✗ “Why didn’t you listen to your coach?”
- ✗ “Why did you miss that layup?”
- ✗ “Why weren’t you more aggressive?”

**Why this doesn’t work:** These questions feel like accusations, not curiosity. They put your child on the defensive and create shame around mistakes.

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### Comparisons to Other Players

- ✗ “Did you see how many points Emma scored?”
- ✗ “You need to be more like Jordan out there.”
- ✗ “Why can’t you play like you did last week?”

**Why this doesn’t work:** Comparisons teach kids their worth is relative to others’ performance. It can damage self-esteem and create unhealthy competition.

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## Replaying Every Mistake

- ✗ “Let’s talk about what happened in the second quarter...”
- ✗ “I noticed you made three turnovers...”
- ✗ “That call in the third quarter was terrible, but you also...”

**Why this doesn’t work:** Your child already knows what went wrong. Replaying it doesn’t help them learn - it just makes them feel worse.

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## “You Should Have...” Statements

- ✗ “You should have been more aggressive.”
- ✗ “You should have made that shot.”
- ✗ “You should have tried harder.”

**Why this doesn’t work:** “Should have” statements communicate disappointment and imply they failed your expectations.

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## WHAT TO SAY INSTEAD

### 1. LET SILENCE BE OKAY

Sometimes the best thing you can say is nothing.

**Try this:** - Turn on music they like - Let them look out the window - Give them space to decompress - Wait for them to speak first

**Remember:** Silence isn’t rejection. It’s respect for their process.

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### 2. ONE POSITIVE COMMENT ABOUT THE GAME

Keep it simple, genuine, and focused on effort or enjoyment - not outcome.

**Examples:**

- ✓ “I loved watching you play tonight.”
- ✓ “You worked really hard out there.”
- ✓ “I could tell you were having fun.”
- ✓ “I’m proud of how you kept trying even when things got tough.”
- ✓ “Your energy was great tonight.”

**Then STOP.** Don’t add “but...” or follow it with coaching.

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### 3. THREE COMMENTS ABOUT SOMETHING ELSE

Shift the conversation to literally anything other than basketball.

**Examples:**

- ✓ “What do you want for dinner?”
- ✓ “Did you finish that project for school?”
- ✓ “What are you most looking forward to this week?”
- ✓ “Want to listen to your playlist?”

**The message:** You are more than your performance. I care about YOU, not just the game.

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### 4. IF THEY WANT TO TALK, FOLLOW THEIR LEAD

If your child brings up the game, let them guide the conversation.

**Ask open-ended questions:**

- ✓ “What did you think about tonight?”
- ✓ “How are you feeling about the game?”
- ✓ “What was your favorite moment?”
- ✓ “Is there anything you want to talk about?”

**Then LISTEN.** Don’t fix, don’t coach, don’t problem-solve unless they ask.

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### 5. VALIDATE THEIR FEELINGS

Whether they won or lost, their feelings are real and valid.

**After a tough loss:**

- ✓ “That was a hard game. It’s okay to feel disappointed.”
- ✓ “I can see you’re frustrated. That makes sense.”
- ✓ “Losing is tough. I’m here if you want to talk.”

**After a big win:**

- ✓ “You must feel so proud! That was exciting to watch.”
- ✓ “I could see how happy you were out there.”
- ✓ “What a great game! You earned that win.”

**The key:** Acknowledge their emotions without trying to change them.

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## THE 3:1 RULE IN ACTION

### SCENARIO 1: After a Loss

**Instead of:**

“You guys should have won that game. If you had just made those free throws in the fourth quarter, it would have been different. You need to practice free throws more. And you weren’t aggressive enough on defense...”

**Try this (3:1 Rule):**

**1 positive comment:** “You worked really hard tonight. I’m proud of how you kept fighting even when you were down.”

**3 other comments:**

- “Want to stop for ice cream on the way home?”
- “How’s that science project coming along?”
- “Want to listen to music?”

**Then:** Let them bring up the game if they want to. If they don’t, let it go.

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### SCENARIO 2: After a Win

**Instead of:**

“Great game! You scored 12 points! But you could have had 15 if you’d taken that open shot in the third quarter. And you need to work on your defense - that girl got past you twice...”

**Try this (3:1 Rule):**

**1 positive comment:** “That was so fun to watch! You played with great energy tonight.”

**3 other comments:**

- “Are you hungry? What sounds good?”
- “Want to call Grandma and tell her about your game?”
- “What do you want to do when we get home?”

**Then:** Let them enjoy the win without analyzing it.

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### SCENARIO 3: After a Tough Game (Personally)

**Instead of:**

“What happened out there? You didn’t seem like yourself. Were you nervous? You need to be more confident. Let’s talk about what went wrong...”

**Try this (3:1 Rule):**

**1 positive comment:** “I know that was a tough game. I’m proud of you for sticking with it.”

**3 other comments:**

- Silence (let them process)
- “Want to stop and get a drink?”
- “No pressure to talk about it. I’m here if you need me.”

**Then:** Give them space. They’ll talk when they’re ready.

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## WHY THE 3:1 RULE WORKS

**Research shows that athletes who feel they can process games on their own timeline:** - Have lower sports-related anxiety - Enjoy sports more and stay in longer - Have better relationships with parents - Develop healthier coping skills - Perform better under pressure

**The 3:1 Rule teaches your child:** - Their worth isn’t tied to performance - You love them, not just their stats - Sports are part of life, not all of life - It’s safe to have feelings without fixing them - They can trust you to give them space

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## REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

**Before you get in the car after the next game, ask yourself:**

- What do I want my child to feel right now?
  - Am I about to say something to make ME feel better or THEM feel better?
  - Would I want someone to say this to me after a hard day at work?
  - Am I giving them space to process, or am I forcing my timeline on them?
  - What’s more important right now - analyzing the game or connecting with my child?
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## SPECIAL SITUATIONS

**What if THEY want to talk but I’m exhausted?**

**Try this:**

“I want to hear about it, and I want to give you my full attention. Can we talk about it when we get home so I can really listen?”

**Then follow through.** Sit down, put your phone away, and listen.

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What if they're really upset and I don't know what to say?

**Try this:**

"I can see you're really upset. I'm here. You don't have to talk about it if you don't want to, but I'm here if you do."

**Then sit with them.** Sometimes presence is more powerful than words.

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What if I already messed up and said the wrong thing?

**Try this:**

"Hey, I think I said some things in the car that weren't helpful. I'm sorry. I'm working on giving you more space after games. What would be most helpful from me?"

**Model self-awareness and repair.** That's powerful.

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## THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

**Practice the 3:1 Rule after every game this week:**

1. **One positive comment about the game** (effort, attitude, enjoyment - not outcome)
2. **Three comments about something else** (dinner, school, music, friends, anything)
3. **Let THEM lead** the conversation about basketball if they want to

**Notice:** - How does your child respond when you give them space? - How does it feel to NOT analyze the game immediately? - What happens to your relationship when you focus on connection instead of performance?

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## REMEMBER

**The goal isn't perfection. The goal is connection.**

Your child doesn't need you to fix every game, analyze every play, or solve every problem.

They need you to be their safe place to land - win or lose.

**The post-game car ride isn't about the game. It's about your relationship.**

Choose connection.

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## RESOURCES

**Need more support?** Email me directly: [rachel@tideandorchardcounseling.com](mailto:rachel@tideandorchardcounseling.com)

**Want to dive deeper?** Check out these resources: - Positive Coaching Alliance: [www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org) - “The Price of Privilege” by Madeline Levine - “How to Raise an Adult” by Julie Lythcott-Haims

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## NEXT WEEK

### **Week 4: Building Resilience - Teaching Kids to Bounce Back**

We'll wrap up the series by talking about how parents model handling disappointment and setbacks - and how to teach our kids that failure is part of growth.

**Monday, November 24**

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**Your child is watching. Your child is learning. Show them that they are loved - win or lose, good game or bad game, always.**