



A-Z OF SPORTS PERFORMANCE CAREGIVER EDITION

This guide is designed to support you as you walk alongside your teen athlete, not just through wins and game days, but through growth, effort, and everything in between. Each letter highlights a trait, mindset, or habit that impacts performance and emotional development in youth sports. Athletics offer more than just physical training. They are a powerful arena for learning resilience, accountability, communication, and identity. As a caregiver, your support plays a major role in shaping how your teen experiences success, failure, teamwork, and self-worth.

Before you dive in, take a moment to reflect on your child or teen's journey. What strengths do they already show? Where have they struggled or stretched? This guide will help you recognize patterns, respond with intention, and offer steady, skillful support from the sidelines. Your voice matters. Your presence matters. And your relationship with your athlete can be one of the most grounding forces in their sports journey.

A – ATTITUDE

Attitude is the mental and emotional energy your teen brings into the game, the locker room, and even the ride home. It's about how they respond to pressure, mistakes, coaching, and team dynamics. A strong, flexible attitude helps them grow, take responsibility, and stay connected to the bigger picture of who they want to be as an athlete and person.

How it might show up:

They may act defeated after one bad play, show resistance to coaching, or complain often after practice. Or they may bounce back quickly from setbacks, stay encouraging to others, and own their part in both wins and losses.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They walk off the field with their shoulders slumped after a mistake and won't talk about it.
- They roll their eyes or talk over the coach when being corrected.
- They still cheer on teammates from the bench and show up early for practice without being told.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Praise how they handle tough moments, not just how they perform. Try, "I noticed how you stayed composed even when it got intense."
- Avoid feeding into blame or excuses after a loss. Instead, ask, "What do you think you learned from that?"
- Use the car ride home to reflect, not fix. Try, "What part of today felt hardest? What part felt like a win?"
- Model a growth attitude yourself—talk through how you handle disappointment in your own life.
- Encourage perspective-taking by asking how they think their attitude affects the team or their own goals.

B – BALANCE

Balance is about helping your teen manage the many demands pulling on their time and energy—sports, school, friends, rest, and recovery. A healthy sense of balance prevents burnout, improves emotional regulation, and protects their long-term love of the game. It also builds time management and boundaries—two essential life skills.

How it might show up:

Your teen might push themselves too hard, skipping meals or sleep in the name of “grinding.” They may resist breaks or grow irritable, emotionally distant, or physically drained. They may also lose motivation or dread practices they once loved.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They refuse to take a day off, even when sore, and seem more tired than usual.
- They stay up until 1:00 AM to finish homework after a late game, then crash the next day.
- They isolate from family and friends because “there’s just no time” or become moody and unmotivated.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Teach that rest is part of training, not a reward for it. Help them see recovery as a strength.
- Protect their sleep schedule by helping limit late-night screens and supporting morning routines.
- Have regular check-ins on their energy, mood, and schedule—not just their performance.
- Normalize saying no to overcommitment by modeling boundaries in your own life.
- Offer options for active recovery (like stretching, walking, or yoga) to help them stay connected to movement without overtraining.

C – CONFIDENCE

Confidence allows your teen to take risks, believe in their growth, and stay calm under pressure. It's not about thinking they're the best. It's about knowing they can learn, adapt, and rise over time. True confidence doesn't always look loud—it can show up as quiet determination and willingness to try again.

How it might show up:

They may avoid trying new things, hesitate to speak up, or minimize their own achievements. Or, they might carry themselves with poise, recover quickly from mistakes, or take the initiative during team challenges.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They say things like “I suck at this” or refuse to go to tryouts because “I won’t make it anyway.”
- They light up when a coach recognizes their improvement or a teammate follows their lead.
- They practice skills in private but are scared to show them in front of others.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Celebrate progress, not perfection. Try, “You looked more confident handling that pressure than last week.”
- Create space to talk about doubts without rushing to reassure or fix. Listening builds trust.
- Focus on effort-based praise like, “You’ve been putting in the time, and it’s showing.”
- Avoid comparing them to teammates, siblings, or their younger self. Stick to their personal growth.
- Encourage reflection by asking, “What’s something you did today that you’re proud of?” and let them define it.

D – DISCIPLINE

Discipline is the ability to follow through on commitments, even when motivation dips or no one is watching. For teen athletes, it's the invisible effort—stretching after practice, sticking to routines, and honoring rest and nutrition. Discipline isn't about being rigid or robotic. It's about developing consistency, responsibility, and long-term focus.

How it might show up:

Your teen may skip warm-ups, show up late, or cut corners in practice. Or, they may take ownership of their schedule, manage time well, and hold themselves to high personal standards.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They consistently forget gear, miss warm-ups, or need frequent reminders to stay organized.
- They follow a recovery plan without pushback and prep their own meals before practice.
- They complain about workouts but still complete them fully, without shortcuts.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Praise their consistency, not just the outcome. Say, “I see how much you’re putting in, even on the hard days.”
- Support routines with structure—offer reminders without nagging, and check in supportively.
- Allow them to experience natural consequences (e.g., forgetting shoes once) so accountability grows.
- Help them set realistic short-term goals and track progress over time.
- Model discipline in your own routines—share how you stay on track with responsibilities or commitments.

E – EFFORT

Effort is what your teen can control no matter the opponent, the score, or their starting skill level. It fuels progress and keeps motivation from burning out. When teens give full effort, they build confidence, resilience, and self-respect. Sometimes they need help learning that effort matters more than immediate success.

How it might show up:

They may coast during practice when no one's watching, or they may push hard from start to finish regardless of results. Some teens give full effort only when they're in the spotlight or when they feel confident they'll win.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They go through the motions in drills but light up during scrimmage or game time.
- They hustle even when their team is losing or when they're not feeling 100%.
- They surprise themselves with improvement after finally committing to hard work over time.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Talk about what you saw them try, not just what they achieved. For example, "That last sprint looked like you gave everything you had."
- Ask them to rate their effort and help them reflect on what helped or hurt it.
- Support effort in other areas too—academics, chores, relationships—so they see it as a way of being.
- Avoid tying praise only to performance. Instead, celebrate commitment and consistency.
- Share stories (your own or others') of effort leading to long-term growth, not instant wins.

F – FOCUS

Focus is the ability to stay mentally present, tune out distractions, and respond with intention. In sports, focus supports quicker decisions, better body awareness, and emotional regulation under pressure. Teen athletes often struggle with this because their brains are still developing key executive functioning skills.

How it might show up:

Your teen may get easily distracted during games, fixate on one mistake, or lose track of instructions. Or they may stay locked in under pressure, reset quickly, and keep their head in the moment.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They dwell on a missed play and carry it with them through the rest of the game.
- They stay focused in the zone, barely noticing the noise or chaos around them.
- They forget simple steps in a drill because they're thinking about school or a recent conflict.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Help them build pre-game routines to mentally transition from school or home to sport.
- Use grounding tools or language if they're overwhelmed—like “one thing you can see, hear, or feel.”
- Teach reflection after games: What helped you stay focused? What made it harder today?
- Minimize distractions at home before practices or competitions (screens, last-minute tasks, etc.).
- Offer mindfulness or breathwork tools—not just for stress, but for presence and readiness.

G – GRIT

Grit is your teen's ability to keep going when things get hard, boring, frustrating, or slow. It shows up in the decision to show up again after failure, to keep training even when progress feels invisible, and to choose effort over comfort. Grit isn't about pushing through pain at all costs—it's about not giving up on growth.

How it might show up:

Your teen may quit a team after losing playing time or avoid hard things unless they're guaranteed success. Or, they may keep showing up, working steadily, and asking for feedback even when progress is slow or setbacks happen.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They stick with their sport through a losing season, even when it's not fun.
- They finish rehab after an injury without skipping steps, even when it's tedious.
- They fail to hit a skill in competition but continue working on it with focus at home.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Share stories (real or personal) of resilience and slow progress leading to success.
- Praise consistency over perfection—"You keep showing up even when it's hard."
- Normalize frustration and remind them that struggle doesn't mean failure.
- Support goal-setting that focuses on process, not outcome (e.g., "Get 10 reps in" vs. "Score every time").
- Avoid rescuing them from discomfort—let them wrestle with the challenge while reminding them you believe in them.

H – HYDRATION

Hydration is a simple but powerful part of athletic performance. When your teen is even slightly dehydrated, their brain fogs, energy drops, and coordination weakens. It also affects their emotional regulation and recovery. Many teens ignore hydration cues or confuse thirst with hunger or fatigue.

How it might show up:

Your teen may complain of headaches, fatigue, moodiness, or muscle cramps. They might forget their water bottle, avoid drinking during the day, or rely heavily on sugary drinks instead.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They show up to practice without a water bottle and crash halfway through.
- They get irritable or dizzy on hot days but don't connect it to hydration.
- They grab energy drinks instead of water before or after training.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Help them build hydration habits into their morning, school day, and evening routines.
- Provide refillable bottles and keep cold water or electrolyte options easily accessible.
- Encourage pre-hydration before practice—not just drinking during or after.
- Reinforce that hydration is performance fuel, not just a “health thing.”
- Watch for signs of dehydration and gently bring attention to them without scolding.

I – INTEGRITY

Integrity means your teen is acting in alignment with their values, whether someone's watching or not. It's about honesty, accountability, fairness, and owning your part in team culture. In sports, integrity shows up in how they treat others, how they handle rules, and how they lead by example.

How it might show up:

They may cut corners during workouts, badmouth teammates behind their back, or make excuses for mistakes. On the other hand, they may advocate for fairness, admit when they mess up, and take pride in doing things right.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They admit to stepping out of bounds during a game even if no one caught it.
- They help a teammate up after a rough play or support someone left out.
- They hold themselves accountable for poor effort and don't blame others.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Reinforce the idea that character counts more than the scoreboard.
- Talk about ethical choices in sports and why they matter long-term.
- When mistakes happen, guide them to repair and own it without shame.
- Praise their integrity out loud—"That took guts to be honest about."
- Share how integrity plays out in your own life and what it means in your family culture.

J – JOY

Joy is what keeps sports fun and meaningful. It fuels motivation, keeps stress in check, and protects against burnout. When teens play with joy, they're more likely to stay engaged, build stronger social bonds, and bounce back from hard days. Joy doesn't mean every moment is easy—it means your teen remembers why they love the game.

How it might show up:

Your teen may light up during certain plays, stay connected to teammates, or carry a sense of playfulness even during intense moments. Or, they might look drained, moody, or indifferent, showing signs of going through the motions.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They laugh on the sidelines, celebrate others' wins, and look forward to practice.
- They start dreading practices, seem emotionally flat, or say, "It's just not fun anymore."
- They find joy in setting personal goals, even if the team isn't winning.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Ask what they love about the sport—not just what they want to achieve.
- Make space for joy without tying it to performance. Let them talk about fun moments, not just hard ones.
- Encourage breaks or time off if joy is fading and burnout signs are showing.
- Expose them to different roles within the sport—coaching younger kids, volunteering, or exploring other ways to connect.
- Reflect together on how joy and effort can exist at the same time—work doesn't have to erase play.

K – KNOWLEDGE

Knowledge in sports isn't just about knowing rules or stats—it's about understanding the game, their role, and how to keep learning. When teens are curious and informed, they become more confident, adaptable, and mentally sharp. It also helps them take ownership of their own development.

How it might show up:

Your teen may ask thoughtful questions, study film, or experiment with strategies. Or, they might tune out instruction, repeat the same mistakes, or rely on others to explain things for them.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They rewatch games to study plays and reflect on their performance.
- They ask “why” a drill matters and want to understand its purpose.
- They struggle with game awareness and miss cues because they're unsure how things work.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Encourage them to be curious—ask, “What's something new you learned at practice today?”
- Support access to resources like highlight reels, sports documentaries, or chalk talks.
- Talk through strategy together—let them “teach” you to reinforce what they're learning.
- Praise their efforts to understand the game, not just physical improvements.
- Encourage them to ask coaches for clarification instead of staying confused or guessing.

L – LEADERSHIP

Leadership isn't about being the loudest voice. It's about showing character, consistency, and courage. Teen leaders support teammates, own their mistakes, and model work ethic—even if they aren't captains. Leadership is a skill that grows with practice and often starts with small actions that build trust.

How it might show up:

Your teen might check in on teammates, encourage others during tough moments, or model calm under pressure. Or, they might shy away from responsibility, hesitate to speak up, or rely on others to lead for them.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They support a teammate who's struggling instead of criticizing them.
- They communicate clearly on the field or during practice, even without a title.
- They lead quietly through consistency, showing up early and putting in steady effort.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Reinforce that leadership is about influence, not position. Point out moments when they lead by example.
- Ask reflection questions like, "What kind of teammate do you want to be remembered as?"
- Share stories of quiet leaders or athletes who modeled integrity, grit, or humility.
- Give them space to make team-based decisions and offer guidance when asked.
- Encourage them to practice leadership at home through chores, sibling support, or helping with family routines.

M – MINDSET

Mindset is how your teen interprets challenge, effort, failure, and success. A growth mindset helps them see struggle as part of learning and believe that ability can develop over time. A fixed mindset says, “I’m either good or I’m not.” Supporting your teen’s mindset means helping them build emotional flexibility and a belief in their own growth.

How it might show up:

Your teen might get discouraged after one bad game or believe they’ll never improve. Or, they may bounce back quickly, try again after failure, and take ownership of their progress.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They say things like, “I’m just bad at this” after one rough practice.
- They recover from mistakes by adjusting their strategy instead of spiraling.
- They view setbacks as personal flaws rather than opportunities to learn.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Replace “you’re so talented” with “you worked hard to earn that.”
- Help them reframe failure with phrases like “What’s this trying to teach you?”
- Model growth mindset yourself—talk about something you used to struggle with and how you improved.
- Encourage persistence in small tasks at home so they experience effort-reward cycles.
- Celebrate effort, not just results—“You really stuck with it today, even when it got frustrating.”

N – NUTRITION

Nutrition fuels your teen's body and brain. What they eat affects mood, energy, sleep, focus, and recovery. Many teen athletes underfuel, skip meals, or rely on sugary snacks, especially when managing school and practice. Learning to eat with intention is key for performance and well-being.

How it might show up:

They may be sluggish at practice, struggle to concentrate, or feel drained after workouts. They might skip breakfast or over-rely on quick, processed foods. You may also see mood swings tied to blood sugar crashes or dehydration.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They get lightheaded after workouts or complain of fatigue throughout the day.
- They snack all night after skipping lunch or under-eating earlier.
- They become irritable or unfocused during or after intense training.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Normalize consistent eating throughout the day—even if it's small, simple meals.
- Offer nutrient-rich snacks before or after practices (like smoothies, trail mix, or wraps).
- Talk about food as fuel, not as a reward or punishment.
- Prep easy grab-and-go options so food choices are accessible, not overwhelming.
- Educate gently—ask, “What foods help you feel strongest at practice?” and explore together.

O – OPTIMISM

Optimism is the ability to stay hopeful and forward-looking, especially when things don't go as planned. It helps teens stay problem-solving instead of catastrophizing. Optimism isn't pretending things are always great—it's believing that setbacks are temporary, and growth is possible. It supports emotional resilience and team morale.

How it might show up:

Your teen might spiral into worst-case thinking after a bad game or dwell on everything that went wrong. Or, they might bounce back, look for silver linings, and encourage others even when things feel heavy.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They say, "That ruined everything," after one mistake or loss.
- They keep their head up and help reset team energy after a tough start.
- They acknowledge disappointment, but also focus on what to do next.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Model realistic optimism—acknowledge the hard while holding hope.
- Teach the "temporary, specific, and changeable" rule: bad moments don't last forever or define everything.
- Ask reflective questions like, "What still went okay today?" or "What might go better next time?"
- Highlight when you see them helping others reframe or recover with positivity.
- Normalize emotional ups and downs while holding space for humor, hope, or perspective.

P – PREPARATION

Preparation is what allows your teen to feel steady and focused when it's time to perform. It includes mental prep, physical routines, emotional regulation, and organization. Athletes who prepare well are less anxious, more confident, and better able to respond under pressure. It's not just about routines—it's about readiness.

How it might show up:

Your teen might forget equipment, arrive rushed or ungrounded, or seem scattered in high-pressure moments. Or, they might have routines that help them feel calm, organized, and mentally clear.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They get flustered before games and realize they forgot something important.
- They settle in with music, stretching, or visualization and show up mentally sharp.
- They seem out of sync during transitions between school and sport.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Support pre-game routines without micromanaging—ask what helps them feel ready.
- Help them build habits that support mental and physical readiness (sleep, gear prep, meals).
- Avoid chaotic or last-minute conversations before events—protect their focus zone.
- Model preparation in your own responsibilities so they see it as a life skill.
- Reflect after games: “Did your prep help today? What might you change next time?”

Q – QUICKNESS

Quickness isn't just speed—it's about reacting fast, adjusting quickly, and staying mentally sharp. It requires both physical agility and mental flexibility. Athletes with quickness can shift gears when things don't go as planned. It's a mix of body awareness, attention, and being in the moment.

How it might show up:

Your teen may hesitate during plays, get stuck after mistakes, or struggle to adapt when things change. Or, they may move fluidly, stay alert, and adjust mid-action without panic.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They freeze during unexpected moments or take longer to reset after a missed opportunity.
- They recover quickly after errors and keep their head in the game.
- They adapt when the coach changes the lineup or strategy last-minute.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Help them practice flexibility in everyday life—problem-solving when plans change or stress rises.
- Talk about mistakes as moments to regroup, not reasons to collapse.
- Support physical training that builds coordination and reaction time.
- Share stories of times they bounced back quickly—you noticed, even if they didn't.
- Encourage play-based movement (tag, agility games) outside of formal sports to keep them adaptable.

R – RESILIENCE

Resilience is your teen's ability to recover emotionally and physically after hard moments. It helps them learn from failure, regulate emotions, and keep trying even after setbacks. Resilience doesn't mean not feeling things—it means feeling them and still returning with intention.

How it might show up:

Your teen might shut down after one bad game, refuse to go to the next practice, or get overwhelmed by criticism. Or, they may take time to regroup, reflect, and come back stronger, using the experience to fuel their growth.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They sit silently after a mistake and isolate instead of problem-solving.
- They cry or vent after a loss but then reset and prepare for the next opportunity.
- They use frustration as fuel to train harder or more intentionally.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Let them feel the emotions without rushing to fix—"It's okay to be upset. I'm here."
- Reflect later on what helped them recover: "What helped you bounce back?"
- Encourage journaling, movement, or breathwork as tools for emotional reset.
- Remind them of past comebacks or moments they overcame hard things.
- Praise their recovery, not just the outcome: "You had a rough start but finished with focus. That takes strength."

S – SELF-TALK

Self-talk is the inner voice your teen uses to interpret success, failure, pressure, and identity. It plays a massive role in performance, confidence, and emotional regulation. Negative self-talk can increase anxiety and shut down motivation. Supportive or neutral self-talk helps teens reset, stay focused, and build resilience under stress.

How it might show up:

Your teen may talk down to themselves after mistakes, struggle to recover mid-game, or overthink instead of trusting their instincts. Or, they might show signs of composure and bounce back with calm, encouraging language.

What it might look like in your teen:

- After a missed shot, they mutter “I’m so bad at this” or “I knew I’d mess that up.”
- You hear them breathe, shake it off, and quietly say “Next play” or “I’ve got this.”
- They go silent or shut down completely, overwhelmed by negative thoughts.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Help them recognize self-talk patterns without judgment: “What were you telling yourself after that play?”
- Model self-compassion out loud when you make mistakes in front of them.
- Practice neutral reframes together: “I’m still learning” or “This doesn’t define me.”
- Encourage short mantras or phrases that they can repeat during stress (“Reset,” “Stay ready,” “Keep breathing”).
- Let them hear you speak kindly to yourself—your voice becomes part of theirs.

T – TEAMWORK

Teamwork is about trust, communication, and shared responsibility. Whether your teen is a leader or a quiet contributor, being a good teammate builds social skills, resilience, and a sense of belonging. Teamwork also strengthens their ability to manage conflict, collaborate under pressure, and regulate emotions in group dynamics.

How it might show up:

Your teen might shut down when others make mistakes, blame teammates, or isolate during practices. Or, they may encourage others, play their role without complaint, and show up with a “we” instead of “me” mindset.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They roll their eyes when a teammate messes up or refuse to pass to certain players.
- They check in with a struggling teammate, offer encouragement, or celebrate others' wins.
- They sacrifice personal stats to support the team's strategy or rotation.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Praise moments when they showed empathy, encouragement, or maturity with peers.
- Reflect on what kind of teammate they want to be remembered as.
- Talk about how every role matters, even when it's behind the scenes.
- Share examples from your own life where collaboration led to better outcomes.
- Normalize healthy conflict and support them in addressing issues with respect and clarity.

U – URGENCY

Urgency is playing with intention, energy, and presence. It's not about panic or rushing—it's about showing that what they're doing matters. Athletes with urgency move with purpose, respond quickly, and give full effort, even in practice. A lack of urgency often leads to passive or inconsistent play.

How it might show up:

Your teen may jog through drills, react slowly in games, or wait for others to take initiative. Or, they may be first to respond, bring energy to transitions, and show up like every rep counts.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They drag their feet during warm-ups and need constant reminders to engage.
- They chase down loose balls, sprint to their spot, or energize the team without being told.
- They seem distracted or disconnected unless something dramatic is happening.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Talk about “showing up like it matters” no matter the context—practice or game, winning or losing.
- Ask them to define what urgency looks and feels like for them.
- Share how urgency builds trust—teammates and coaches notice hustle and responsiveness.
- Avoid shaming when urgency is missing; reflect instead: “What would showing up with more energy look like next time?”
- Support habits that fuel urgency—hydration, sleep, and mental readiness all make a difference.

V – VISUALIZATION

Visualization is the practice of mentally rehearsing movements, plays, or outcomes before they happen. It helps athletes feel prepared, reduce anxiety, and strengthen the mind-body connection. Visualization creates a “mental blueprint” the body can follow under pressure. It’s especially helpful before big moments or transitions.

How it might show up:

Your teen may talk through their plan before a game, close their eyes before a free throw, or review strategies in their mind. Or, they might rush into performance without thinking, act impulsively, or freeze during decision points.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They sit quietly before a game and rehearse their performance in their head.
- They visualize shooting or sprinting before actually doing it, then perform with more confidence.
- They seem scattered before events and say “I don’t know what I’m doing.”

Caregiver support strategies:

- Introduce visualization as a tool, not a test–“Picture how you want to feel or move out there.”
- Encourage quiet time before games or competitions to mentally rehearse.
- Help them script simple routines: breath, cue word, mental picture, and go.
- Reinforce that mental reps matter as much as physical ones.
- Ask after games, “What did you see in your head before you made that play?”

W – WORK ETHIC

Work ethic is the choice to show up consistently, give effort even when it's inconvenient, and follow through on responsibilities. It's built slowly through repetition and accountability. Teens with a strong work ethic take ownership of their effort, not just their talent.

How it might show up:

Your teen may resist feedback, skip reps, or slack when no one's watching. Or, they might consistently do the little things right, take initiative, and bring full effort regardless of recognition.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They practice a new skill on their own time without being told.
- They prep their gear, finish workouts, and reflect on what they can improve.
- They give less effort in practice but expect big results in games.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Acknowledge hard work when it's not tied to applause: "I saw the effort you put in when no one was watching."
- Help them connect effort to growth—track small wins over time.
- Avoid rescuing when they drop the ball—let natural consequences do the teaching.
- Talk about work ethic as a family value, not just a sports skill.
- Celebrate grit and follow-through more than trophies or stats.

X – EXECUTION

Execution is the ability to perform what you’ve practiced under pressure. It’s about applying knowledge, trusting instincts, and staying composed. Execution matters most when emotions are high. It reveals the quality of preparation and focus.

How it might show up:

Your teen may freeze during competition, second-guess themselves, or forget their role. Or, they may deliver with clarity, adjust quickly, and perform smoothly under stress.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They run the play just as practiced, even when the crowd is loud or the stakes are high.
- They prepare well but struggle to translate it into game-day results.
- They execute well when calm but unravel when nervous or overwhelmed.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Normalize nerves while reinforcing their preparation: “You’ve put in the work. Trust it.”
- Support visualization and grounding strategies to improve performance under stress.
- De-emphasize perfection—focus instead on consistency and learning.
- Praise decision-making and effort, not just outcomes.
- Help them reflect after games: “What worked? What got in the way of executing today?”

Y – YOU VS. YOU

“You vs. You” is about self-comparison instead of focusing on others. This mindset encourages athletes to compete with their past self—to grow, improve, and measure progress against their own goals. It reduces comparison-based pressure and builds internal motivation.

How it might show up:

Your teen might obsess over teammates’ stats, compare their role to others, or feel discouraged by someone else’s success. Or, they may track their own growth, focus on personal bests, and celebrate progress regardless of what others are doing.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They say, “Why do they always get more playing time than me?” or “I’ll never be that good.”
- They show pride when they beat their own record or hit a personal goal.
- They stay focused on their performance and stay steady even when others outperform them.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Shift praise to growth: “You’re ahead of where you were last month.”
- Encourage journaling or tracking goals that are individualized, not comparative.
- Talk about values—being proud of how they show up, not just how they rank.
- Limit conversations that reinforce status or pecking order in sports.
- Support their identity outside of sport—help them see their full value, not just performance.

Z-ZONE

The “zone” is a mental and physical state where your teen feels focused, confident, and in rhythm. Some call it flow –it’s the sweet spot where challenge meets skill. While it can’t be forced, routines, mindset, and preparation can help athletes find their way back into the zone more often.

How it might show up:

Your teen may be calm but alert, performing with ease and connection. Or, they may struggle to lock in, get distracted, or feel overwhelmed by pressure. When in the zone, they often lose awareness of time, fear, or self-consciousness.

What it might look like in your teen:

- They describe the game flying by and can’t fully explain how they made certain moves.
- They hit every cue in their routine and seem grounded and responsive.
- They seem scattered, emotionally reactive, or unable to find their rhythm.

Caregiver support strategies:

- Help them build rituals that create a sense of readiness and calm.
- Encourage them to reflect on moments when they felt “in it”—what helped them get there?
- Reduce distractions before games—protect their mental space.
- Normalize that the zone won’t happen every time—it’s about building conditions that support it.
- Support routines around sleep, hydration, and mental regulation that help the zone happen more consistently.