



NICA - family & athlete questions

"The key to any successful parent-child relationship is good communication. Strong communication skills are a fundamental component of raising high-performing [emotionally and socially fulfilled] athletes and an essential part of keeping them in sports throughout their childhood and making them an athlete for life" - John O'Sullivan

Parents are integral to a student-athlete's experience in sports and the athlete's enjoyment and progression in sports. As parents, we have the opportunity to either positively or negatively impact their experience. A parent's voice is often the loudest in the athlete's head. You can help your child pursue their best self through sports and strengthen your relationship with them through positive and constructive communication.

The questions below offer an opportunity for you to gain a fuller understanding of your student-athlete's NICA experience, deepen your relationship with them, and ensure your own positive NICA team experience.

The value is in the exchange, not necessarily in the answer - there are no right or wrong answers. Keep it conversational. Ask the questions you are comfortable asking. If it doesn't feel natural don't force it. This is a playbook, not a script.

Questions for before practice

1. Goals - What's your goal for today's practice?
2. Progress - What is a skill you have worked on since last practice?
3. Learning - What have you learned about teamwork?
4. Challenge - What challenge have you set for yourself today?
5. Performance/Success/Results - What would make today's practice a success for you?
6. Fun - Which coach are you excited to see at practice? Who do you like riding with?
7. Pride - What skill are you looking forward to doing with your friends?

Questions for after practice

1. Goals - What was a goal you had for practice and how did it go?
2. Progress - What went better today than it did last practice/earlier this season?
3. Learning - What were three things you learned in practice today? What did you work on in practice today?
4. Challenge - What was the most challenging part of practice today?
5. Performance/Success/Results - What do you feel was your biggest success at practice today?
6. Fun - What was the most fun part of practice today?
7. Pride - What did you or anyone on the team do for the first time today? Who were you most proud of at practice today? Why?
8. Reflection - How did this practice compare to the last 3? Why?

Questions for before an event/race

1. Goals - What are two controllable goals you have for this race? (time & place are not controllable; eating well during the race, passing, smooth descending, pacing, and staying positive are controllable)
2. Progress - What is something you hope to do better than you have in the past?
3. Learning - What have you learned in practice that will help you at this event? What piece of advice have you been given that you will use in this event?
4. Challenge - How will you pace yourself today? How will you handle this weather? What will be the hardest part of the course?
5. Performance/Success/Results - What will make this race a success for you?
6. Fun - What are the parts of the event that you think will make you smile the biggest?
7. Pride - How will you cheer on your teammates today?
8. Reflection - What part of the day are you thinking about the most? And Why?

Questions for after an event/race

1. Goals and Progress - What were your goals today, and how did they go? Did you meet them?
2. Learning - What did you learn from the race? How will you use what you learned in the future?
3. Challenge - What was the most challenging part of the event?
4. Performance/Success/Results - What do you feel was your biggest success at the event?
5. Fun - What was the most fun at the event? Who was part of the funniest moment of the day?
6. Pride - Who were you most proud of at the event?
7. Reflection - What would you do differently?

Action steps for improved communication with your children

1. Take advantage of the opportunity NICA gives you to spend time with your student-athlete.
2. Be an active listener.
3. In conversation, try to paraphrase their main points so they know you are listening.
4. Respect and understand your student-athlete's emotions.
5. Use "I" instead of "you" statements to avoid putting your student-athlete on the defensive.
6. Control your emotions, and know when to step away from a conversation.
7. Model positive, unemotional communication with other family members.
8. Be consistent in your behavioral expectations.

Preseason questions to ask yourself and then discuss with your student-athlete and coaches

1. What is at least one reasonable, measurable goal you have for your student-athlete and your team this season?
2. What do you want your student-athlete's experience to be like if they can't accomplish any of the goals you wrote for them or for the team?
3. What do you want your experience to be like as a parent?
4. What can you do to help create that experience for other parents?
5. What can the coaches do to help facilitate that experience?

Questions to help you and your student-athlete communicate honestly about sports

(These can be personal reflection questions or conversation starters for you and your student-athlete)

1. When we talk do I respect your emotions? Do you think I am listening?
2. Do I always act the way that I ask you to behave? If not, what are some examples?
3. Am I consistent in my reactions to certain situations?
4. How can we work together to ensure that you and I are on the same page when it comes to sports?
5. Do you feel like you can talk to me about sports?

O'Sullivan, John. Changing the Game: the Parent's Guide to Raising Happy, High-Performing Athletes and Giving Youth Sports Back to Our Kids. Morgan James Publishing, 2014.

O'Sullivan, John. Every Moment Matters: How the World's Best Coaches Inspire Their Athletes and Build Championship Teams. Changing the Game Project, 2019.
