

# PARENT/CAREGIVER TIPS SUPPORTING YOUR HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETE

Through the College Recruiting Process





## A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO HELP YOU STAY SUPPORTIVE, GROUNDED, AND PURPOSEFUL - WITHOUT TAKING OVER - AS YOUR STUDENT-ATHLETE NAVIGATES THE COLLEGE RECRUITING PROCESS.

The college sports recruitment process is an intense time for most families, and particularly for young student-athletes. With **steady effort, clear priorities, and supportive adults who keep the pressure low and consistently reinforce perspective-taking**, young athletes can achieve the best college admission outcomes. While not every parent has the time to be deeply involved in the recruiting process - and that's okay - leaning on other trusted adults in your athlete's life is not just acceptable, it's a real asset.

### WHAT IS YOUR ROLE AS A PARENT OR SUPPORTIVE ADULT IN YOUR ATHLETE'S RECRUITING PROCESS?

Think of yourself, whether you're a parent, grandparent, family friend, or other trusted adult, as a *steady sounding board, a helper with logistics and organization, a coach of values, and a buffer for stress*. Recruiting works best when your athlete owns the process and you provide structure, calm, empathy, and perspective. Here is a simple message you can send to your athlete: *"My job is to help you think clearly, support your decisions, and value your voice—not to push you toward my preferred outcome."*

## 1) HOW TO BE A STEADY SOUNDING BOARD FOR YOUR ATHLETE

Use short, 10-15 minute check-ins a few times a week to talk about how things are going from your athlete's perspective. Suggest a scheduled, longer meeting once a month to help your athlete think through goals, next steps, and priorities. Use a simple formula to keep conversations open and collaborative. This keeps you from accidentally turning a check-in into a lecture:

- **Ask** (*open-ended and neutral questions*): "What's feeling most important to you this week in recruiting?"
- **Reflect** (*summarize what you heard your athlete say*): "So you're excited about School A, but worried about playing time and the distance."
- **Offer** (*ask if your teen wants help with brainstorming options or organizing next steps*): "Want help making a short list of questions for the coach, or do you just need me to listen?"



## 2) HOW TO COACH YOUR ATHLETE TO ESTABLISH THEIR VALUES AND PRIORITIES

Young athletes may need help identifying and articulating what is most important to them in the choice of a college. Help them name priorities with a simple exercise after they have researched or visited some schools, but before the recruitment process is in full swing.

Have your athlete make a list of what is important to them in their college and college sports experiences. Offer some ideas as part of a brainstorm or ask “what about” if they don’t come up with very many priorities.

### SOME SAMPLE IDEAS:

- › Academics/major options
- › Team culture and coaching style
- › Likely role and development (playing time, fit, position/event)
- › Athletic level and training environment
- › Location/distance from home
- › Campus vibe/social life
- › Financial picture (aid, cost, scholarship likelihood)
- › Facilities/support (athletic training, nutrition, tutoring)
- › Health and well-being (stress, time demands, balance)

Suggest some ways that they can evaluate their own top priorities – they might choose the top three or five that they feel they must have, or rank all of their ideas in order. As the process unfolds, remind them to check back in and assess the fit between their top priorities and the offers/options on the table.

### USE OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS TO HELP YOUR ATHLETE CLARIFY WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM:

- › “When you picture yourself thriving somewhere, what’s happening in your day-to-day life?”
- › “What kind of coach brings out your best?”
- › “What team culture helps you feel confident and motivated?”
- › “What’s your definition of a ‘good fit’—academically and athletically?”

## USE THOUGHT-PROVOKING QUESTIONS TO HELP YOUR ATHLETE THINK THROUGH CHOICES:

- “What would you be giving up if you choose School A? What would you gain?”
- “What information do you still need to make a confident choice?”
- “What made you take pause about this school/team as a choice?”
- “What did you learn on the call/at the clinic?”
- “What felt like a good fit?”
- “If you had to decide based on your top 3 priorities, what direction does that point you toward based on what you have learned about your options/offers?”

## 3) HOW TO BE A BUFFER FOR YOUR ATHLETE’S STRESS DURING THIS PROCESS

The recruiting process can dominate family life. Both you and your athlete can feel excited, anxious, overwhelmed, and disappointed – sometimes all at once. *You can and should help buffer the intensity of this time with some simple, but critical strategies:*

### PROVIDE EMOTIONAL SUPPORT AND NORMALIZE MIXED EMOTIONS:

Center your support on empathy - listen to understand their perspective, validate their feelings, and let them know that you are always there for them, for example:

- “It makes sense to feel uncertain about your next steps.”
- “I am proud of you for how hard you are working and not for the school you go to.”
- “Let’s just take it one step at a time.”
- “I trust that you will make the choice that is right for you.”
- “I am here to help.”
- “You don’t have to be 100% sure today.”

### PROVIDE LOGISTICAL SUPPORT WITH A FOCUS ON AUTONOMY:

Confirm what your athlete needs from you instead of telling them what you think they need. For example:

- “What kind of support feels helpful—and what starts to feel like pressure?”
- “How do you want me involved right now—listening, organizing, or practicing calls with you?”
- “Do you want a reminder, or do you want to manage it on your own?”



## OFFER OPTIONS FOR LOGISTICAL HELP; ONLY DO WHAT THEY ASK:

Help them set up calendars, checklists, and notes. Offer to proofread emails or texts. Help them generate question lists for coaches and help them practice coach calls and interviews. Coach them around follow-ups and thank you emails. Help them organize doable next steps each week. Let them assign you work in the background.

## ENCOURAGE RECOVERY AND CONNECTION WITH FRIENDS AND FAMILY:

Good sleep, good nutrition, precious downtime, fun with friends, and space to take perspective are critical.

## AVOID:

- Pressure language: “After all we have invested in sports....”
- Comparison: “Sophie got a spot at Dartmouth already!”
- Catastrophizing: “If you don’t get a spot on the team this year your future in sports is over.”
- Speaking for your athlete on calls or visits.
- Contacting coaches without your athlete’s involvement.
- Turning every meal, ride or walk home, or conversation into a recruiting review and update.
- Over-focusing on status: “You need to go for Division I.” or “That is not a very good school.”

**Remember: *Recruiting is a meaningful chapter—but not the whole story of your athlete’s college experience.***





## The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie

This resource was generated in collaboration with Dr. Suzanne Button, Clinical Psychologist for [the Children's Home of Poughkeepsie](#). The Children's Home of Poughkeepsie is a 179-year-old organization that provides a full range of Community Based and Residential Services, giving hope and healing to at-risk children and families throughout the country.

## Positive Coaching Alliance

PCA's vision is to build a world where youth benefit from a positive sports experience with a coach who inspires them to become the best version of themselves in the game and in life. We train coaches and partner with youth sports organizations, parents, sports leaders, and communities to make youth sports more positive, equitable, and accessible to all kids regardless of social or economic circumstances. **For more information, go to [positivecoach.org](https://positivecoach.org).**