LESSON 1 OF 30 · TOPIC 1 · A RELATIONSHIP YOUR CHILD CAN RELY ON

What do you say on the way home after a loss?

You'll let your child know you're there and leave it to them to choose when to talk.

THE SCENE

It's early Saturday evening in the car park by the courts. A ten-year-old girl has just lost her match. She had two match points. She lays her racket, still in its cover, across her knees and looks out of the window. Her dad is still thinking about that easy volley at forty–fifteen. His hand's on the keys, but he hasn't started the car yet.

THE CONVERSATION, LINE BY LINE

DAUGHTER I bet you thought I'd finally win.

DAD *lets go of the keys and turns towards her*
You haven't let me down. I'm glad I'm here with you.

> **WHY IT WORKS**
> She isn't asking about the match. Has losing changed how Dad feels about her? He answers that first and leaves the volley out of it.

DAD **Do you want to talk about it, or shall we put some music on?**

> **WHY IT WORKS**
> It's a real choice. Either answer is fine with Dad. She decides what to talk about and when.

DAUGHTER *after two seconds of silence*
Music.

DAD *puts the music on and starts the car*
All right.

> **WHY IT WORKS**
> He didn't answer for her in those two seconds or add 'just one thing' after 'all right'. If advice follows anyway, it wasn't a real choice.

DAUGHTER *at home after dinner*
I should've got that volley in.

DAD **That volley's still bothering you. Want to hear what I saw, or would you rather talk it through with your coach on Monday?**

> **WHY IT WORKS**
> She brought it up again in her own time. Dad names what's bothering her, then offers to talk it through. He leaves technique to the coach.

DAUGHTER Monday. But was it awful, Dad?

DAD **No, it wasn't. You came to the net on match point. You didn't wait for your opponent to make a mistake. I'll leave the rest till Monday, like you said.**

> **WHY IT WORKS**
> He just answers her question. He says what he saw, gives no advice and sticks to the choice she made.

DAUGHTER *after a moment*
I'll tell my coach myself on Monday.

HOW IT USUALLY GOES

> **'But you had it. All you had to do was get that volley in.'**
> It may be true. But you chose the topic and the moment. With the car doors shut, it's hard to turn down advice nobody asked for. Your child says 'I know' and puts their headphones on.

> **'It's all right. You'll win next time.'**
> It sounds comforting. But your child may hear that a win is expected next time. And no one has answered today's disappointment.

IN PRACTICE

Illustrative examples from junior tennis. The same principle applies in each one.

AGES 6–8

Your seven-year-old son has lost his first tournament match. In the car, he turns towards the window and says nothing.

'Would you like some quiet now, or a song?'

WHY IT WORKS
Two simple choices work even if your child can't yet say how they feel. Picking one is their answer.

AGES 11–13

On the way back from a tournament, your twelve-year-old daughter says, 'Don't say anything about it. I'll talk it through with my coach.'

'All right. I'm here if you want me.'

WHY IT WORKS
You let her talk it through with her coach first and leave the door open. She sees you respect her choice.

AFTER A WIN

Your son won, but in the car he's crying over one shot he missed.

'That shot's still bothering you. Do you want to tell me about it?'

WHY IT WORKS
He's won and he's still disappointed. You leave the score out of it and check what he needs now.

WHEN IT DOESN'T GO TO PLAN

They stay quiet
Silence is an answer too. Start the car and let them have that quiet. At home, just say, 'I'm here if you want to talk.'

They snap back
Don't take it personally. Say 'all right' and leave it there for today. The offer still stands tomorrow.

They start to cry
Don't try to stop the tears with advice or by saying 'it doesn't matter'. Leave the engine off, hand them a tissue and wait. Offer a choice once they've caught their breath.

The research behind it. In group interviews with 42 Canadian juniors who played competitive tennis, players said they also noticed their parents' body language and valued appropriate support (Knight, Boden and Holt, 2010). We've applied those findings to the drive home after a match, a step beyond the study's own conclusions.

The conversation and the examples are illustrations, not transcripts. They show one way to put the principle into practice. Use your own words.