

“You’re-the-Kind-of-Person Who” Statements

by Jim Thompson



Children aren't born with a complete sense of self. They develop a sense of the kind of person they are through their experiences and how they interpret their handling of those experiences. How they think of themselves has a lot to do with how capable they are when dealing with life's adversities.

As coaches and parents, we can help our children begin to think of themselves as capable individuals through the use of “You’re-the-kind-of-person-who” statements.

For example, when a child demonstrates a lot of effort in practice, you can say, “One of the things I like about having you on my team is that you are the kind of person who gives it all you’ve got.”

When a child fails to make the play in a crucial situation in a game, you can say, “I can imagine you must be disappointed, but I know you are the kind of person who bounces back from setbacks with renewed determination.”

If you want to reinforce your child's love of reading, look for a chance to catch him or her reading and say, “I noticed you reading that book. It's great that you are the kind of person who likes to read for pleasure.”

Use “You’re-the-kind-of-person-who” statements to set the stage for the kind of behavior you'd like to see. For example, before a big game against a team that plays rough, you might say, “I'm looking forward to this game because I know you are the kind of players that have enough self-respect that you won't lose your cool even if the other team gets rough.” Or after a game in which your child or player made a great effort, you can say, “That ground ball you picked up at the end of the game demonstrated great drive. I'm proud that you're the kind of player who doesn't give up easily.”

You can also use “You’re-the-kind-of-person-who” statements to help transform a player's negative self-talk. Whenever you hear athletes say negative things about themselves, use this tool to help them transform it. If they often say, “I can't do this” remind them they are “the kind of person who never gives up.” Influential adults in a young athlete's life – coaches, parents, and teachers – plant the seeds for these positive thoughts. Young children rarely come up with them on their own – they repeat what they hear from people they admire. Our job as adults is to fill in the blanks for them.

It's important to be prepared. Know your players (or your child) and plant the appropriate seed for each individual – you're the kind of person who “has great field-vision,” “loves to compete,” “thinks things through,” “rises to the challenge,” etc. If they hear you use the same “You’re-the-kind-of-person-who” statements with everyone, it will lose its effectiveness.

Top competitors are extremely disciplined in what they think and say and are able to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. They've come to know what “kind of person” they are as an athlete. It is important to teach our players to control that little voice in their head and to teach them to talk to themselves the way a good coach or teacher would. Ultimately, they will be better able to solve their own problems and lift themselves up in tough situations without relying on the help of a coach or parent.

We have great power to shape the way our children think about themselves. Through the thoughtful use of “You’re-the-kind-of-person-who” statements, we can help them begin to think of themselves as capable people with positive character traits.

Jim Thompson is the Founder and Executive Director of Positive Coaching Alliance.

For more from Positive Coaching Alliance, visit www.positivecoach.org.