

CRITIQUAL PERFORMANCE

THE PARENT'S GUIDE

What to do when your child is stuck in the loop. Four real shifts, not more pressure.



FOUR SHIFTS, ONE PAGE EACH

01

Confidence Is a Record, Not a Feeling

Why protecting your child from difficulty keeps the record blank, and what to do instead.

02

Self-Esteem Comes From Evidence, Not Praise

The three questions that build proof in a teenager's own mind, where praise cannot reach.

03

Four Things That Backfire

The well-meaning responses that quietly keep the pattern going.

04

The Anxiety Reframe

Why a racing heart before a big moment is not a warning sign, and the two questions that use it instead.

These four shifts come directly from the same coaching frameworks used in the free Mental Performance Workbook and the questions asked in real sessions, not general parenting advice.

CONFIDENCE IS A RECORD, NOT A FEELING

Confidence is not something your child either has or does not have. It is a record, a running log of what they have been willing to try and what happened when they did. Every attempt at something hard and uncertain makes the record longer. Every avoided attempt keeps it blank. Parents often protect their child from the very experiences that would fill it, and that protection comes from love, but it keeps the record empty.

- Let them sit in the difficult moment longer than feels comfortable to you. Your discomfort watching them struggle is not the same as them being in danger.
- Stop asking "did you win." Ask "what did you try today that you had not tried before."
- Let them land first. Ask what they noticed, before you explain what happened.
- Let small natural consequences happen: forgotten kit, a missed deadline, a low-stakes underperformance. These build something no pep talk can replace.

"YOU CANNOT PROTECT A CHILD INTO CONFIDENCE. YOU CAN ONLY GIVE THEM ENOUGH ROPE TO REACH FOR THINGS."

SELF-ESTEEM COMES FROM EVIDENCE, NOT PRAISE

Most teenagers are not short of praise. They hear "well done" from teachers, "I'm proud of you" from family, "you're so talented" from coaches, and still doubt themselves on the day it matters. That is not a praise problem. It is an evidence problem. What they are short of is proof, in their own mind, that they can handle the next hard thing.

The shift is small but consistent: instead of telling them how you see the situation, ask how they see themselves in it.

"What did you learn from that?"

"How did you handle it?"

"What will you try next?"

"I TRIED SOMETHING HARD. I HANDLED IT. I CAN DO IT AGAIN."

FOUR THINGS THAT BACKFIRE

These come from a good place. They still work against the thing you are trying to build.

- 01 Constant reassurance before every event.** Your child hears the anxiety underneath it, and starts performing for your reassurance instead of for themselves.
- 02 Removing pressure entirely.** A child who has never functioned under any pressure will not suddenly find that skill in a high-stakes moment.
- 03 Comparison to siblings or peers.** "Your brother managed it" is not motivation. It is a reminder that their record is being measured against someone else's.
- 04 Hollow praise.** Telling a child they did brilliantly when they clearly did not teaches them not to trust your assessment, and that outcomes matter more than effort.

THESE COME FROM LOVE. THEY STILL KEEP THE RECORD EMPTY.

THE ANXIETY REFRAME

A racing heart before a big moment is not a warning sign. It is the body getting ready. The physical signal is the same whether your teenager is excited or afraid, the only difference is the story they tell themselves about it. Change the story, and the same racing heart stops being a threat and starts being fuel.

Before: "What is the first thing you are going to do?"

After: "What did you notice in your body when it started? What did you do with that?"

Not "are you ready," which invites self-doubt. Not "you'll be fine," which asks for belief they do not yet have.

"YOUR BODY IS GETTING READY" IS MORE USEFUL THAN "DON'T BE NERVOUS." BECAUSE IT IS ACCURATE.

WHAT COMES NEXT

THESE SHIFTS DO NOT REQUIRE PERFECT PARENTING.

They require noticing before you react. That is uncomfortable, especially if you performed well yourself and remember what it felt like to fail. But it is the only version of support that actually works.

If your child is avoiding consistently, if their self-talk has turned harsh, if the pattern has gone further than a conversation at home can reach, that is not a failure on your part. It means the pressure loop has taken hold and needs a structured approach to unwind.

Critiquel Performance works with teens and young athletes in Johannesburg, and their parents, to build the mental skills that hold up under pressure.

I RESPOND PERSONALLY. ALWAYS.

– RISHAAN