

# Winning the Youth Sports Parenting Game:

Strategies for a Healthier Approach

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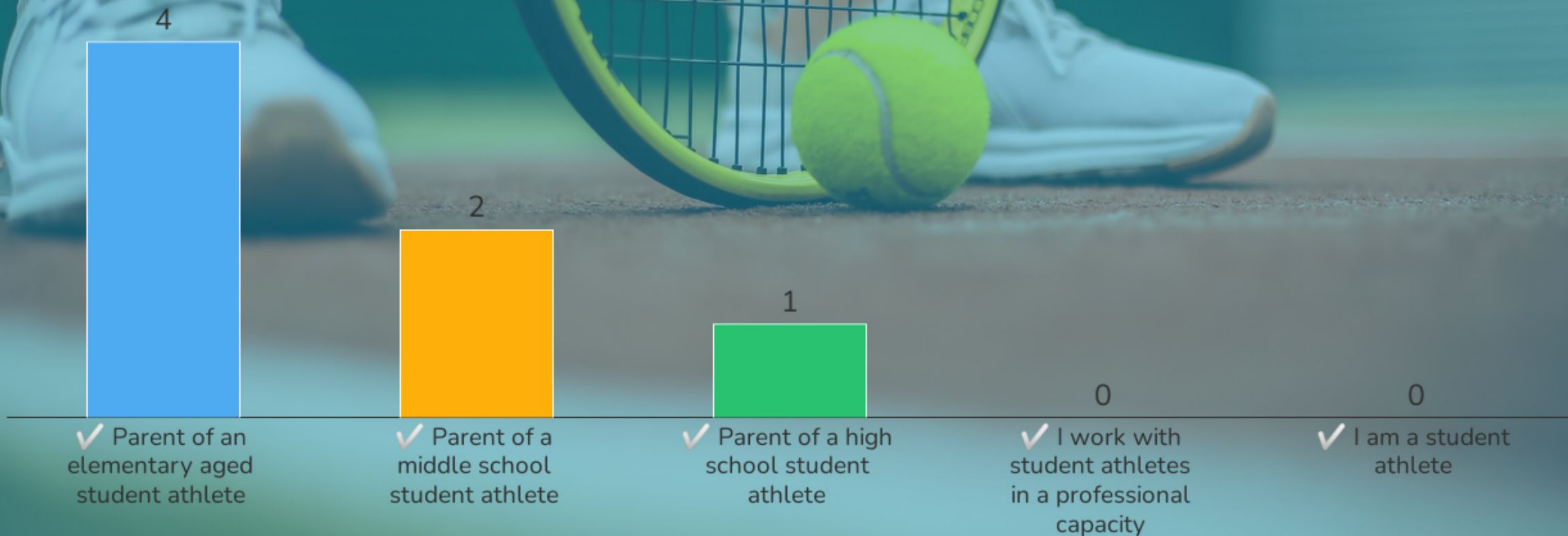
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# Are you raising a student athlete?





# What word comes to mind when you think about raising a student athlete in 2023?





# Supporting your child through youth sports can be challenging!

Children are participating in organized sport earlier than in years past. Youth sports have bigger commitments of time for both parents and athletes and are also more expensive. (Registration fees, travel fees, coaching, volunteering, etc.) Long gone are the days that kids can join teams at any level to gain exposure, have fun, or try something new. Parents are also asked to coach, volunteer, and manage for teams.

## HS Basketball Tryouts in 2023

The pressure kids face to join select, travel, or club teams is tremendous and we as parents often succumb to the stress of trying to navigate it all.



# Elementary Age Students

Active free play and physical activity are integral to healthy development

Being the member of a team is important - social development and inclusion

Growth spurts may occur during the later part of this stage

A great deal of change occurs in the prefrontal cortex (attention, working memory, self-regulation, reasoning, etc)



# Middle School Students

Puberty is occurring which has both external and internal implications

Those who experience early puberty are more likely to participate in harmful behaviors

Abstract thinking develops and hypotheticals are considered

Many adolescents begin the process of detaching from parents and attaching to peers

Establishing friendships is vital to a sense of identity and belonging



# High School Students

Self identity and peer pressure come to the forefront

Self-esteem can be low when adolescents do not have a specific in-group

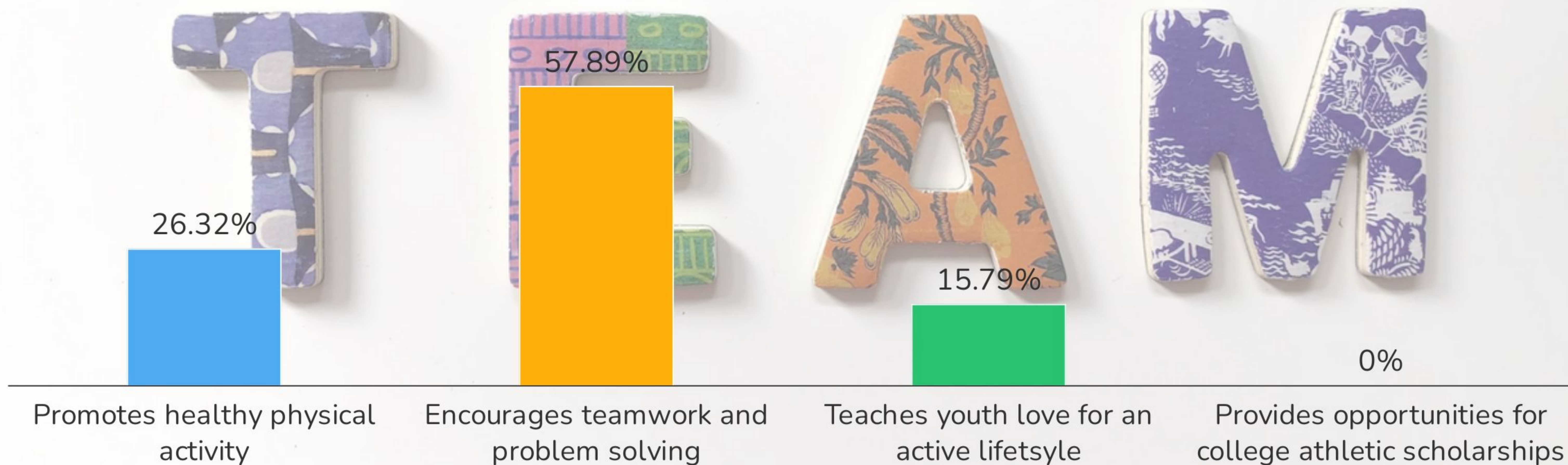
Some adolescents begin to experiment with risk taking behavior

Home risk factors of increased risk taking behavior are lack of familial communication, low SES, peer pressure, and lack of familial support

Adolescents with positive adult role models in their lives are less likely to use alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs



# What do you believe is most important about youth sport participation?





# Youth Athletes and Motivation

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) & 3 Basic Psychological Needs:  
Competence, Relatedness, and Autonomy

Intrinsic motivation is a bigger driver of success vs. more external pressure

Try not to undermine intrinsic motivation by over incentivizing performance

Don't rationalize poor parental behavior by using rare and extreme developmental pathways that have been displayed in the media

Do offer encouragement, choice, optimal challenge, and positive feedback

\*Horn & Smith (2018)



# Values and Perfectionism

Helping athletes identify their core values and "why" for sports participation is beneficial to longevity.

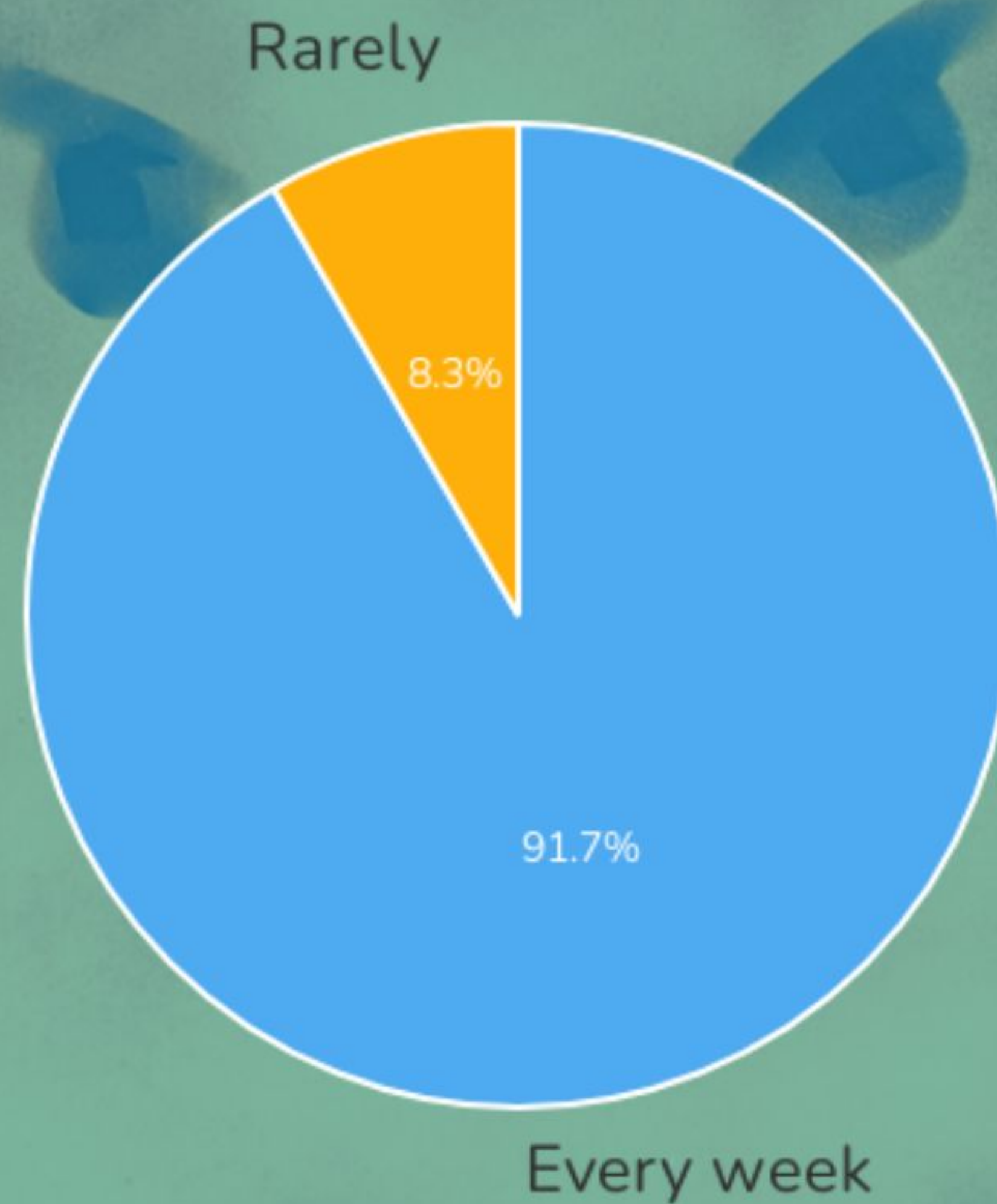
Dual nature of perfectionism: difference between perfectionistic strivings and perfectionistic concerns.

Actively encourage a growth mindset where striving can be emphasized

Self-critical forms of perfectionism contribute to increasing levels of athlete burnout. Perfectionists are susceptible to experiencing burnout when perceived self-worth is brought into question.

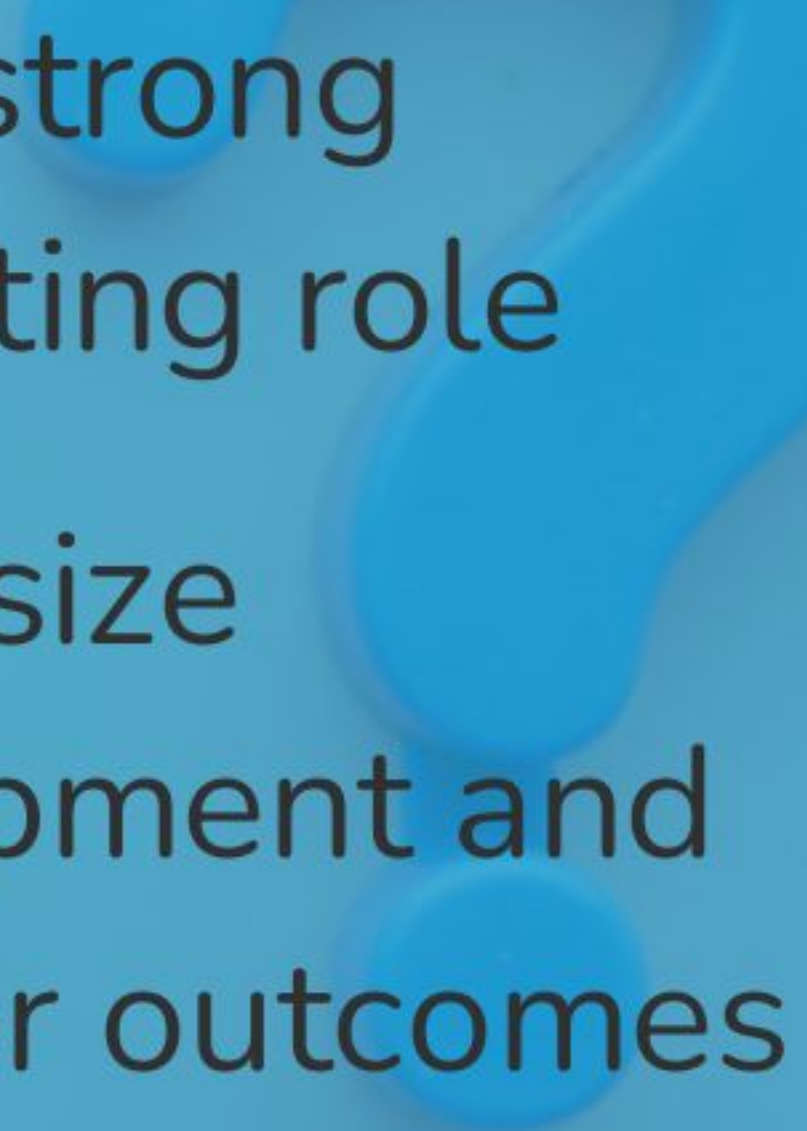


# Have you ever witnessed negative parental behavior at a youth sports event?





# What is the role of a youth sport parent?

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- Advocate for healthy sport environments
  - Initiate sport involvement
  - Adopt a posture of openness and understanding
  - Play a strong supporting role
  - Emphasize development and fun over outcomes
  - Encourage physical activity

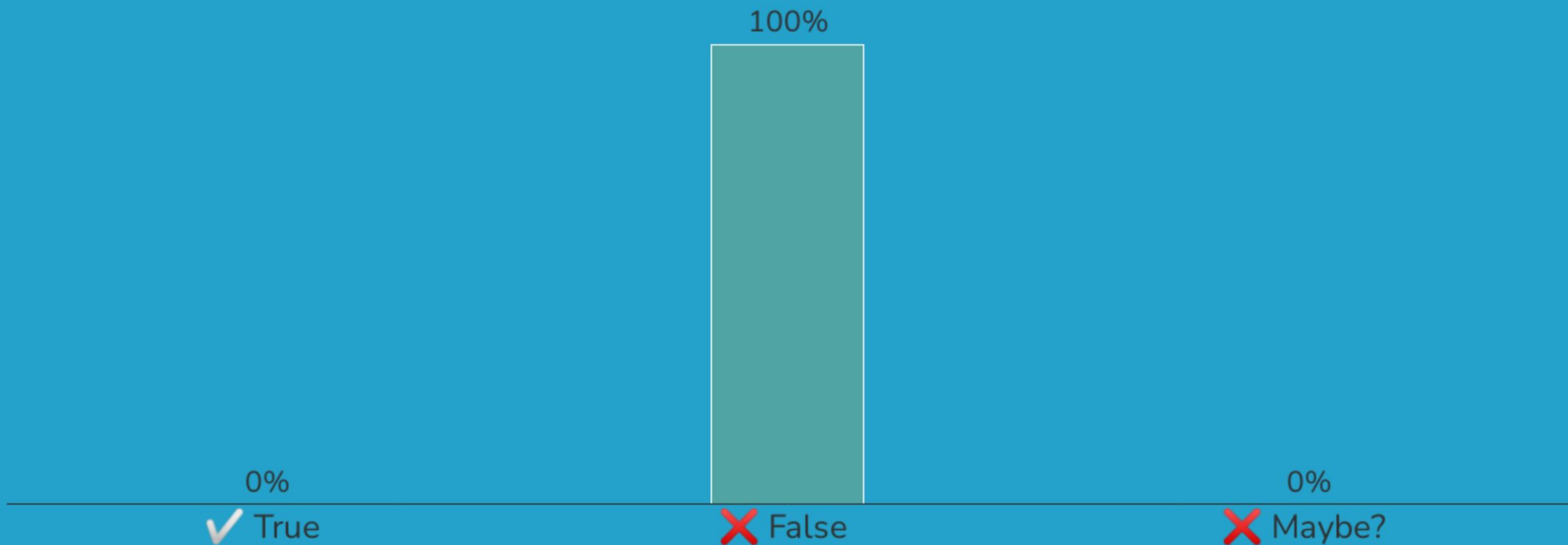


# What doesn't work for youth athletes?

- Excessive parental pressure
- Excessive parental expectations
- High stress sport environments
- Too much focus on outcomes
- Punitive and controlling actions centered around their sport
- Too salient of an athletic identity
- Early specialization to the exclusion of trying new activities/sport
- Excessive sport participation and lack of recovery/downtime



# True or False? If I yell at my child more will it lead to improved performance and enjoyment of sport?





# What do youth athletes need from their parents in order to be successful in sport?

## Elementary age

- Opportunities for free play, fun, and physical activity
- Supportive parental modeling
- Foster independence

## Middle School

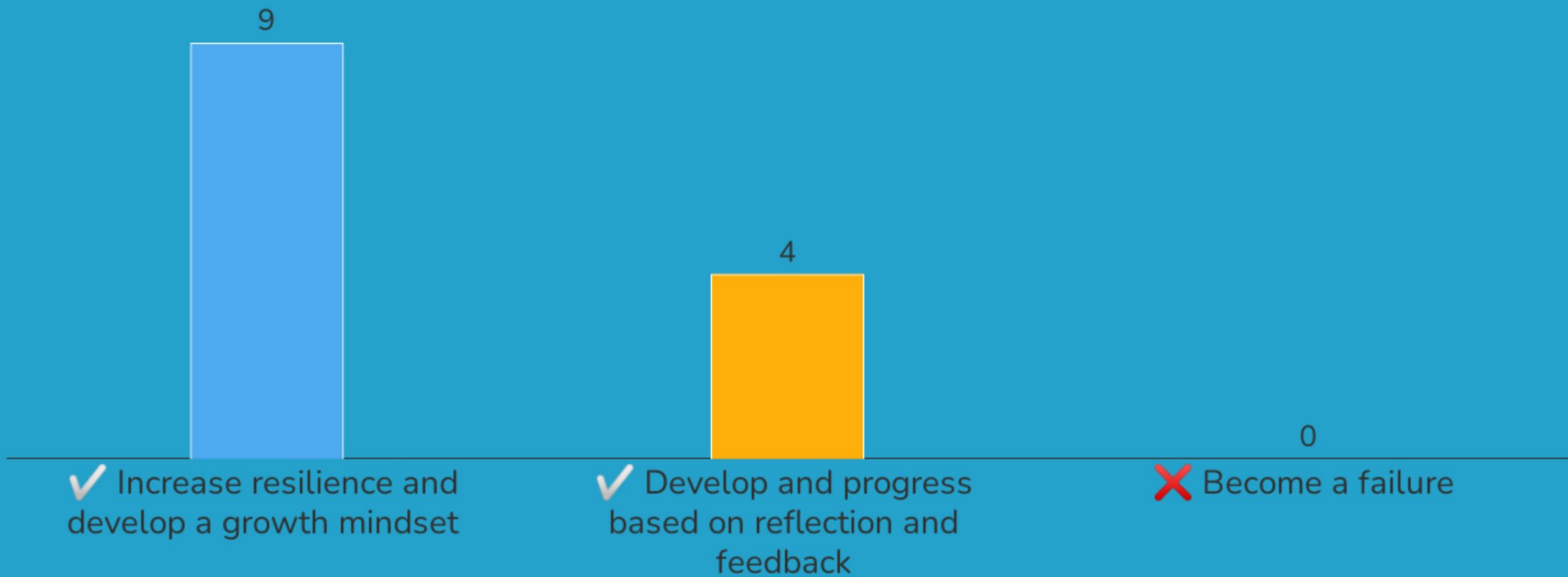
- Create an understanding emotional climate
- Engage in independent learning about their sport.
- Hold them accountable for their behavior

## High School

- Share and communicate goals for sport participation
- Understand that their goals may change over time
- Keep sports in perspective



# Failing provides the opportunity to.....





# Actionable Ways to Help Your Athlete Thrive

- Help them develop a practice of mindfulness or mindful awareness
- Assist them with the creation of a reflective practice based on their developmental stage and individual goals
- Allow them to fail within a sport context without parent intervention
- Teach them that resilience does not equal existing in an unrelenting environment
- Communicate with them about their core values and goals so that you are able to properly support THEIR life vision
- Model positive behavior and demonstrate empathy with challenges they may face
- Ensure opportunities for them to experience autonomy along their sports journey



"I am the expert of my own experience but others are the expert of their own experiences. No one experience is more important than the other."

-Dr. Kensa Gunter, PsyD, CMPC





# QUESTIONS?





# Thank you for joining me today!



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# References

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