



TRANSITIONING OUT OF SPORT: A PARENT'S GUIDE

Every athlete will eventually transition out of high-performance sport. Whether it's due to injury, burnout, changing priorities or other life choices, the decision to step away from competitive sport at a high level can be emotional—for both the athlete and their family. As a parent, how you respond during this time matters. Here are 6 core messages to help guide your support:

1

Understand the “Why”

Start by listening—really listening. Are they feeling burnt out? Struggling with injury or non-selection? Or are they being pulled toward new opportunities like study, work, or travel? **Not all exits are negative**—sometimes it's simply time to pursue something different. Avoid rushing to fix the problem; instead, **explore their reasons** together without judgment.

2

Support the Process, Not Just the Decision

Transition is not a single moment—it's a process. There may be uncertainty and emotional ups and downs. Be patient, supportive and empathise with them as they work through their decision. Be mindful that the decision to retire from sport may be **voluntary** (they make the decision) or **involuntary** (the decision is made for them through deselection from a team or career-ending injury). Involuntary retirement can bring some added challenges, as it often involves a loss of choice and can happen in a more unexpected or unplanned way. Regardless of the situation, the process of moving on from sport can impact an athlete socially, emotionally and physically.

3

Celebrate What Sport Has Given Them

Acknowledge their time in sport, the experiences they have gained and the skills they have developed have contributed to the great human that they are. They have likely gained **personal strengths** like discipline, teamwork, resilience, and **physical strengths** like fitness, agility and core stability. These aren't lost when an athlete transitions out of sport; they are **transferable to life**, to physical health and to future career paths.

4

Ask: What's the Next Step?

Moving on from high-performance sport opens up **time and space**. This is the time to explore what might be important to them, and how they want to spend their time—perhaps study, work, travel, social life, family time (this includes time with you). Remind them that **sport doesn't have to end here**. Sport can still be part of their lives in new and meaningful ways through social sport, health & fitness, coaching, or officiating and other career paths in sport. Some may even be interested in considering a talent transfer opportunity into another sport. Importantly, remind them they don't need to have it all figured out— **start the conversation** and **take small steps**.



5

Redefine the Routine

With more time on their hands, it is easy for them to get lost amidst unstructured days. This is normal at first, but **finding some balance is key**. Re-establishing healthy routines – including sleep, nutrition, and encouraging them to maintain some level of physical activity will support their mental and physical health.

6

Bring in the Right Support

You don't have to be their counselor or a psychologist. If they are struggling emotionally to adjust to such a significant change, **reach out** to a wellbeing manager, psychologist, career counsellor or trusted mentor. If they are struggling to adjust to the physical changes, consider engaging your GP, a sports dietician or a strength & conditioning coach to guide you and your child. Also be mindful that **you** as the parent or guardian **might also need to seek support**. Transition is a shared experience and often everyone needs time and guidance to let go, adjust and redefine the next chapter.