

# Emotional Youth Athletes – Reset, Reflect and Refocus

One of the biggest challenges in youth baseball for coaches, parents and players alike is learning to manage emotions. We expect these kids to be emotional — they're kids! — but we also want to help them channel that emotion constructively. Becoming baseball players instead of just kids playing baseball.

*How do you help emotional youth athletes see that how they react impacts their performance, their teammates and their team? How do we help them recover during an emotional moment?*

Most coaches have some sort of mechanism they use after a player makes a big mistake in the field that results in emotion. They'll "brush it off," "flush it," or "clean the slate," for example. In each case, the kids also act this out (like "flushing the toilet") to help them move on.

While we acknowledge this helps, such a response only helps the player clear his mind to move on. It doesn't necessarily help him learn from the experience or refocus.

Therefore, we recommend the "Reset, Reflect and Refocus" approach. Feel free to use whatever bits and pieces you find helpful. You can also use creative and fun ways to implement them (like the "flush it" example) if necessary.

## 1. Reset

The "Reset" is simply an acknowledgement of an emotional event. A mistake was made. Something didn't go my way. I am now emotional, and I need to recover in time for the next play.

After a player drops the ball, allowing runners to reach safely, he lowers his head and his lip starts to quiver. We need to catch it quickly and acknowledge it with a “Reset.”

Ideally, the player will sense this first and tell himself, “**Reset!**”

## 2. Reflect

While we want this player to recover, they also need to learn something from the situation. Otherwise, all we’re doing is have them sweep this event under the rug like it never happened so that they can keep playing.

Once the player acknowledges the emotional event with a reset, he immediately moves on to Reflect.

They have very little time between the mistake and the next pitch, so reserve about 10-15 seconds for reflection.

### **What Happened?**

We don’t want the player dwelling on the mistake, but they need to think back through what happened.

### **Did I Do My Best?**

Sometimes a youth athlete will get emotional when they do everything right, but they simply didn’t get the desired result. If they did their best, they need to acknowledge that.

But sometimes, they weren’t prepared. They weren’t situationally aware, and they didn’t execute their responsibility. If that’s the case, they need to be honest with themselves about that.

## **What Will I Do Differently Next Time?**

The player has now reflected on what happened and whether he did his best. Now it's important to think about what he will do differently to prevent the same result.

This isn't a matter of, "I will catch the ball next time." Did they lose focus? Did they use poor form? What specifically can they do next time to prevent it from happening again?

### **3. Refocus**

The player has acknowledged the emotional event and reflected on what happened and what he'll do differently next time. Now it's time to get ready for the next pitch.

Without refocus, the player is very likely to make another mistake. They are still thinking about the last play and aren't thinking through the current situation and their responsibilities.

#### **Physically Refocus**

This is an important step. Most kids who are going through a mistake, will keep their head down or will look everywhere but where they need to look.

Move your eyes to the pitcher. Look at the batter. Look at the baserunners. Observe what is happening around you.

By physically refocusing, the player is training his brain to move on to the next play.

#### **Mentally Refocus**

Now that the player is physically focused on the next play, he needs to think through his responsibilities. Here are a few examples of things this player (if they are in the field) should be thinking about to refocus and be ready:

1. How many outs are there?
2. Which runners are on base?
3. What is the score?
4. Where might the batter hit the ball?
5. Where should I back up?

## Reinforcement

All of this happens very fast, but we need to be sure there is a teaching moment later.

In between innings, pull this player and walk through what happened again. Did he reset? What were his thoughts on what happened? How did he refocus?

Reinforcement is necessary to help make this process natural for them and to incrementally improve recovery going forward.