

flunking a test, by losing a game, by a rejection for a coveted program or school – they may feel worthless, Fischer said.

Too often, kids have trouble distinguishing their ambitions from those their parents set for them, said panelist Dr. Sarah Feuerbacher, clinic director of the family counseling center at Southern Methodist University. Parents may think they are being supportive by cheering their kids at every game, but that's not always what their child wants.

"I had a teenager coming in, and every week he talked about how he had to go to another football tryout even though he didn't know if that's what he wanted to do," she said. "He said, 'My mom doesn't see who I am.'"

Communication is vital, and parents need to encourage kids to speak up.

"We need to teach our children to say, 'I love you, but I don't love this sport.' It's very important for me to allow my children to have their own voice, to be safe and to be loved no matter what," Feuerbacher said.

When a child struggles

Children also need to be shown respect when they struggle, said panelist Beth Van Duyne. One of the worst things a parent can say to a child who struggles with a particular subject in school or an activity is "try harder," because that suggests that they are not already trying their best, she said.

Consequently, when her daughter, Katie, 13, usually an A student, struggled with algebra, Van Duyne tried to figure out why she was having difficulty. Ultimately, the problem was solved by a tutor who was able to explain the concepts in a way that her daughter could understand.

There will always be some issues parents and kids can't fix.

Attorney Ava Greene Bedden said that her son, Daniel Davenport, now 17, was frustrated because he couldn't wrest the first-chair seat away from an even better saxophone player at his school. The Beddens invested in a better instrument and private instruction from a top teacher at Daniel's request, but nothing bridged the gap.

Daniel eventually learned to accept this without losing his love of music and now he's minoring in music at UNC Chapel Hill this fall.

Dr. Thomas Sanders, who has a doctorate in childhood education, is a program director in Christian education at Dallas Baptist University. He talked about how communication cannot occur in a vacuum. That's why he set aside every Thursday morning for breakfast with his son when he was growing up.

It wasn't important what they talked about or even if they talked at all; they both looked forward to that time together, he said.