



Coaching the Parents

A Position Paper from the National Association for Sport and Physical Education

Introduction

Parents are a vital part of youth sports. Without the parents, youth sport programs would find it difficult to exist. Parents are the volunteer work force that accomplishes essential tasks in support of youth sports programs. And, most importantly, they attend and support the performances and efforts of all children who play sports.

Unfortunately, recent cases of parents behaving badly at youth sports events have received the attention of the national media. Although these specific incidents are rare (e.g., the fatal fight between fathers after a youth hockey game), general problems with parents are not. Coaches and league administrators are seeking effective strategies to refocus the energies of parents. Inappropriate behavior by parents is detracting significantly from youth sport programs that exist to provide opportunities for children to play sports, have fun, develop skills, and enjoy the thrill of competition in a positive, non-threatening environment.

Local organizations have tried strategies such as Silent Sundays (where parents have their mouths symbolically taped shut or are given lollipops to suck on), restricting parents from competition facilities, providing mandatory parent education, and handing out cards at the entrances with the codes of conduct printed on them. Some national sport and professional groups are also initiating programs and strategies to encourage and reinforce positive parent behavior. This paper provides recommendations from the Youth Sport Coalition and Coaches Council on how to encourage appropriate parent behavior.

Coach's Role

Although the primary role of the coach is to develop athletes, coaches must also accept the responsibility for educating the parents of athletes. Parents should learn how best to support their children's sport participation and the importance of appropriate behavior in the youth sport environment. Before the first practice of the season, coaches should hold a formal meeting with the coaching staff, athletes, and involved parents. There are many topics that could be discussed in this meeting. In addition to the topics listed below, the parents and athletes should be familiar with the Bill of Rights for Young Athletes (see position paper resources). The Bill of Rights for Young Athletes provides an excellent focus for this preseason meeting. One consideration before setting the agenda is to include the parent(s) as well as the athletes in the meeting. This communication sets the standards for and the expectations of all parties concerning coaching style, team rules, practice goals, etc. The agenda should include:

- coaching philosophy
- coaching style
- general goals for the team

- typical practice session routines
- expectations for the athletes (e.g., athlete rights and responsibilities)
- expectations for the parents (e.g., parent rights and responsibilities)
- explanation of equipment requirements and needs
- discussion of the risks involved in the sport including a discussion of emergency medical procedures and guidelines
- season practice schedule and game schedule
- question and answer period for parents and athletes
- transportation issues
- communication procedures
- safety
- officiating
- sportsmanship

Depending on the sport you are coaching, there may be other topics that should be addressed. These include travel plans and bad weather contingency plans. In your discussion of your coaching style, you might want to include things such as how decisions are made (i.e., leadership style), the role of assistant coaches if you have any, how you teach, whether or not you use physical contact with the athletes when you coach, how parents can help their child with outside practice and conditioning, and/or information sharing with the coach. The key is to cover anything that might come up during the season. Be thorough. This reduces problems later in the year and gives the athletes and parents a feeling of confidence in you by demonstrating that you know what is needed to ensure the best possible experience for the athletes on your team.

Other strategies coaches should consider:

- Parent and child session/practice/scrimmage.
- Hosting a preseason social activity such as a barbecue for the team members and their parents.
- Develop or adapt written contracts (e.g., codes of conduct) regarding appropriate behaviors for coaches, athletes, and parents and have these signed at the beginning of the season.

Codes of Conduct for Parents:

1. Let the coaches do the coaching for all team members.

2. Support the program: Volunteer to assist the team outside of coaching.
3. Be your child's best fan: Positively support your child unconditionally.
4. Acknowledge his or her effort, support of team members, following instruction from coaches, etc.
5. Support and root for all team members: Foster teamwork.
6. Do not bribe or offer incentives. Orient them to the enjoyment of participating and responsibility to the team.
7. Encourage your child to talk with the coaches: If your child is having difficulties in practice or games or can't make a practice, encourage him or her to speak directly to the coaches.
8. Understand and display appropriate game behavior (e.g., watch; make positive remarks; do not berate players, officials, or coaches): Remember, your child's self-esteem and game performance is at stake. Be supportive.
9. Monitor your child's stress level at home: Keep an eye on the player to make sure you are helping your child effectively handle the stress from the various activities in life.
10. Monitor eating and sleeping habits: Be sure your child is eating the proper foods and getting adequate rest.
11. Help your child keep his or her priorities straight: Help your child maintain a balance among schoolwork, family responsibilities, chores, and free time.
12. Keep sport in its proper perspective: Sport should be fun for you and your child. Highly skilled children and their parents must be especially careful to maintain a balanced view.
13. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, maintain a calm demeanor. Your relationship with your child remains long after competitive sport days are over. Keep your goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
14. Reality test: If your child has come off the field when their team has lost, but has played their best, help them to see this as a "win." Remind your child to focus on "process" and not only "results." Fun and satisfaction should be derived from "striving to win" and playing well and hard.
15. Have fun.

Resources

Books:

American Sport Education Program. (1994). *Sportparent*. Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics.

Stankovich, C. E., & Kays, T. M. (2002). *Parent's playbook*. Columbus, OH: Champion Athletic Consulting.

Women's Sports Foundation. (1999). Sports in the lives of urban girls: A resource manual for girls' sports in urban centers. East Meadow, NY: Author.

Position Papers:

NASPE Coaches Code of Conduct

http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/pos_papers/coaches.pdf

NASPE Bill of Rights for Young Athletes

http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/billofrightsforyoungathletes.pdf

Web Sites:

Coaching Youth Sports

<http://courseware.vt.edu/users/rstratto/CYS>

Moms Team.com: The Place for Moms with Children in Youth Sports

<http://www.momsteam.com>

Do's and Don'ts for Sport Parents by Amy Wheeler (USA Gymnastics Online: Athlete Wellness)

<http://www.usa-gymnastics.org>

Positive Coaching Alliance

<http://www.positivecoach.org/>

Character Counts: From the Josephson Institute of Ethics

<http://www.charactercounts.org>

Y-Coaching Youth Coaching Information

<http://www.y-coach.com/>

Children in Sport - A Poem for Parents

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/coachsci/vol61/fitzsim1.htm>

Getting the Most Out of Sports for Kids: Tips for Parents and Coaches

<http://ed-web3.educ.msu.edu/ysi/SpotlightSum96/most.html>

What Every Parents Should Remember About Sport

<http://www-rohan.sdsu.edu/dept/coachsci/vol61/fitzsim2.htm>

Just Having Catch with Your Kids is Often All It Takes to Make Them Happy. Kids Told Us That, and a Lot More

<http://www.sikids.com/sportparents2/kidssay/qualitytime.html>

When Push Comes to Shove Encouraging Your Child is Fine, But Don't Overdo It

<http://www.sikids.com/sportparents2/psychology/encourage.html>

Parents: You Are Part of the Team Too!

<http://courseware.vt.edu/users/rstratto/CYSarchive/ParentsMay99.html>

Nightmare Parents

<http://www.sikids.com/sportsparents/psychology/nightmare.html>

Ten Things Parents Don't Get About Kids and Sports

<http://www.sikids.com/sportsparents2/kidssay/topten.html>

Top Ten List of the Most Embarrassing Things Not to Do at One of Your Child's Games!

<http://www.sikids.com/sportsparents2/kidssay/embarrassing.html>

Here Are 10 Rules to Remember When You're on the Sidelines at Your Kid's Game

<http://www.sikids.com/sportsparents/psychology/rules.html>

Parents' Code of Ethics

<http://www.decatursports.com/articles/NYSCA.htm>

Parents & Sportsmanship

<http://www.tutornuway.com/topics/feb98-09.html>

Attitude in Youth Sports: Parents Set the Tone (Hey Mom & Dad, Your Attitude is Showing)

<http://www.tutornuway.com/topics/121198-4.html>

Ten Commandments of Parental Behavior

<http://www.ct-starters.org/tencommd.htm>

National Association for Sport and Physical Education (NASPE)

1900 Association Drive

Reston, VA 20191

(p) 703-476-3410

(f) 703-476-8316

<http://www.naspeinfo.org/>

Suggested Citation:

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2003). *Coaching the parents* [Position paper]. Reston, VA: Author.