

Parents: Communicating with your child's coach

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The ways that parents communicate with their child's coach can be instrumental in promoting a developmentally appropriate experience that assists youngsters in developing positive feelings about the sport experience, sportsmanship, and important lessons for life. Observing how parents and coaches interact can be a great way for children to learn about positive communication, cooperation, and leadership.



However, it is important that parents realize that children closely watch how parents talk and behave towards the coach and will often mimic or copy those behaviors. Therefore, you may want to reconsider saying something to your child's coach that you would not want your child repeating. In cultivating a supportive relationship with the child's coach, parents can help facilitate a fun and positive experience for all involved.

Below are some tips that may be helpful in communicating with your child's coach that will promote a positive youth sport experience:

- **One of the most important things to consider when speaking to your child's coach is the time and place that you have your discussion.** If you have genuine concerns and you would like to discuss them with your child's coach, approach the coach with your concerns in a way that encourages open, positive communication. Choose a time to discuss your concerns that is not immediately before or after a game, and be sure that the child or other children are not present or listening. If you confront the coach in front of the children or other parents, he or she may become defensive and it may be more difficult to resolve the issue. Instead, contact the coach and set aside a time to meet with him/her privately.



- **Encourage a positive attitude with positive verbal and non-verbal communication.**

Parents can show a positive attitude verbally by giving positive comments to the child, coaches, and either team. Think about the possible consequences of your words on the coach, children, and other parents before you say them. Then, keep your comments positive and encouraging while emphasizing what the youngsters and coaches from both teams have done well.

A parent's body language and behavior can communicate a great deal. Parents can show a positive attitude and cooperation by showing a simple smile, offering to help the coach with practice, or helping to provide water for the players.

- **Lend a hand when needed.** Ask the coach if he/she would like assistance in setting up the equipment, providing water for the players, or organizing a "phone tree" for facilitating communication between parents regarding important information like a last-minute changes in practice/game times.



- **Be punctual when picking up your child from practices, meetings, and games.** If you cannot pick up your child at the assigned time, make prior arrangements for another parent to pick your child up or create a carpool between parents. When parents are chronically late in picking up their children from team functions without making prior arrangements with the coach, it may show the coach that you perceive his/her time as being not as valuable as yours. The coach may interpret your behavior as either disrespectful or that your child is not a priority.
 - **Demonstrate through your actions the importance of treating your child, other athletes, parents, coaches, and officials with respect at all times.** Show your child and coach that you care by helping the coach when help is needed, staying positive, limiting criticism, showing enthusiasm, and demonstrating concern. Model appropriate actions and behaviors for others to follow.
- **Let the coach instruct your child.** Commit to allowing games and practices to be a time when the child can fully listen to the coach's instructions. Trust the coach to give instructions during the game. Do not yell instructions to the child during games or practices and "coach from the bleachers." When parents give instructions from the bleachers while the coach is instructing from the sidelines, children become very confused and/or distracted trying to attend to both sources of information. In short, allow the coach to coach. Save any "tips" or "instructions" that you would like to give the child until well after the game, when you are alone with your child, the child has had a chance to rest, and is away from teammates. Saving your comments until after the game will prevent the coach from becoming frustrated because he/she will not be competing for your child's attention during the game and it will also prevent the child from potentially being embarrassed in front of his/her peers and coach.
- **When appropriate, inform the coach of any personal or health issues that your child is experiencing that may affect his/her behavior.** Coaches are very appreciative of information that will allow him/her to coach more effectively and may prevent injuries or dangerous situations. Therefore, it is the parents' responsibility to inform the coach of any health or personal issues that may affect their child while playing or affect the well-being of others.
- **Commit that the focus of the sport experience should be upon the child's youth sport experience, not in the parents reliving past sporting glory or focusing inappropriate attention on the adults through arguing.** When parents argue with coaches or officials from the stands, it sends a powerful message to the children that the game is more about the adults, instead of the children. Children enjoy playing sports with their friends, meeting new people, playing against teams of similar ability, and learning new skills. They often times may become embarrassed or confused when they see parents behaving badly towards their coaches or officials, whom they have learned to respect. Allow the children to play and have fun without the adults inappropriately diverting attention away from their experience
- **Emphasize that enjoying the experience of participating in sport is far more important than the outcome of the game or winning/losing.** The coach will appreciate your support and assistance in modeling the appropriate behaviors and skills that he/she is trying to teach your child through sport. When parents and coaches communicate effectively and cooperate in teaching children important life lessons, the lessons will be clear to the children and all will have a positive, enjoyable sport experience.

