

Guidelines for a Coach/Parent Partnership



Research is clear that when parents and teachers work together a child tends to do better in school. There is no reason to think that it is any different in youth sports. The following are some guidelines for how parents can contribute to a Coach/Parent Partnership that can help the athlete have the best possible experience.

- 1 Recognize the Commitment the Coach Has Made:** For whatever reason, you have chosen not to help coach the team. The coach has made a commitment that involves many, many hours of preparation beyond the hours spent at practices and games. He has earned the right to make decisions (including playing time) with his commitment. Recognize his commitment and the fact that he is not doing it because of the pay! Try to remember this whenever something goes awry during the season.
- 2 Make Early, Positive Contact with the Coach:** As soon as you know who your child's coach is going to be, contact her to introduce yourself, and let her know you want to help your child have the best experience she can have this season. To the extent that you can do so, ask if there is any way you can help. By getting to know the coach early and establishing a positive relationship, it will be much easier to talk with her later if a problem arises.
- 3 Let the Coach coach:** You are not one of the coaches, so avoid giving your child instructions during the game. It can be confusing for a child to hear someone other than the coach yelling out instructions during a game. As in #4 below, if you have an idea for a tactic, go to the coach and offer it to him. Then let him decide whether he is going to use it or not. If he decides not to use it, let it be. Getting to decide those things is one of the privileges he has earned by making the commitment to coach.

The best way you can help your child is to be a "Second-Goal Parent," so focus on helping your child learn life lessons and let the Coach coach.

- 4 Fill the Coach's Emotional Tank:** When the coach is doing something you like, let him know about it. Coaching is a difficult job, and most coaches only hear from parents when they want to complain about something. This will help fill the coach's Emotional Tank and contribute to his doing a better job. It also makes it easier to raise problems later when you have shown support for the good things he is doing. And just about every coach does a lot of things well. Take the time to look for them.
- 5 Don't Put the Player in the Middle:** Imagine a situation around the dinner table, in which a child's parents complain in front of her about how poorly her math teacher is teaching fractions. How would this impact this student's motivation to work hard to learn fractions? How would it affect her love of mathematics?

While this may seem farfetched, when we move away from school to youth sports, it is all too common for parents to share their disapproval of a coach with their children. This puts a young

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athlete in a bind. Divided loyalties do not make it easy for a child to do her best. Conversely, when parents support a coach, it is that much easier for the child to put her wholehearted effort into learning to play well.

If you think your child's coach is not handling a situation well, do not tell that to the player. Rather, seek a meeting with the coach in which you can talk with her about it.

- 6** **Observe "Cooling Off" Period:** Wait to talk to the coach about something you are upset about for at least 24 hours after a game. Emotions, both yours and the coach's, are often so high after a contest that it's much more productive if you discipline yourself to wait until a day goes by before contacting the coach about a problem. This will also give you time to think about what your goals are and what you want to say.

Note: there are exceptions to the 24-hour cooling off period. If the coach's behavior puts your child's safety at risk, appears unethical or exemplifies poor sportsmanship, speak to them right away.

You can also refer them to the PCA web site (www.positivecoach.org), which has more information that can help parents help their child have a great season!

When an Intervention is Needed

When you feel an intervention with the coach is needed, the first question to ask yourself is, "Is this something that my child should do for herself?" Consider empowering your child to speak with the coach. If you feel the parent is the appropriate person to intervene, PCA recommends talking with your child first, unless she is too young to understand what is going on. If your child does not want you to intervene, you need to decide whether the situation is so bad that you need to do so anyway. As a parent, you always have the ultimate control of any situation in which your child is at risk.

For more information, see "When Parents Need to Intervene" on page **A9**.