

# Bonus Report

## 4 Strategies For Effective Parent-Coach Relationships

Coaching youth sports is a rewarding job. Watching a child have fun, work hard, and become a better athlete affirms that your coaching methods are successful. Along the way, though, there are sure to be obstacles.

One of these obstacles is the parents. Building and maintaining a positive parent-coach relationship is hard work, but it's necessary to ensure that the parents will play a supportive role in the team dynamic.

In this report we'll discuss 4 strategies you can use to eliminate conflict and help your athletes' parents become a positive influence on the team.

### 1. Have An Initial Meeting with Parents

At the beginning of the season, it's imperative that you hold a meeting with all of the athletes' parents. The meeting should cover the following topics:

- Introduction: Introduce yourself to the parents. What's your background with the sport and with coaching in general?
- Discuss your coaching philosophy. What can the parents expect from you, as a coach?
- Explain what you expect from each player. What is acceptable behavior, and what is not?
- Tell the parents what you need from them.
  - Procedure if an athlete is unable to play or make it to practice.
  - Detail all fees and necessary equipment that the parents/player are responsible for.
- Ask the parents the following questions:
  - Can you give up your child? When a child joins a team, they are entering the coach's arena. Parents must be able to relinquish their authority and take a back seat to the coach's instruction and authority.
  - Can you accept your child's disappointments? You can't expect every athlete to be a superstar during every game. Each athlete will have moments of failure, and it's important that the parents understand this and accept this.
  - Can you be a role model for good sportsmanship? Kids will be kids, but adults should take the upper hand. Rooting for all children—not just your own—as well as the other team is encouraged.
- Ask for a count of those who are interested in volunteering or participating in fundraisers. Pass around a sheet for interested parties to write down their contact information and specific interests.
- Discuss the procedure that occurs if an athlete is injured.
- Discuss how discipline will be handled.

- Hand out a schedule of all games, practices, etc.
- Discuss travel arrangements for away games.
- Hand out a summary of rules, positions, and common terminology. Not all parents understand how the game is played. This way, they can be more involved and understand what it is that their child is doing and striving for.
- Hand out a summary of everything that was covered during the meeting. Both the parents and the player should sign the summary and return it before the first practice occurs.
- Provide the parents with your contact information, as well as times during which you can be reached.

## **2. Create a Parents Code of Conduct**

At your parent coach orientation meeting, have each parent sign a copy of your ‘Parent’s Code of Conduct’.

This should be a short, 1-page document which details your expectations for the way parents should behave during your team’s practices, games, travel, and any other team activities.

Below are some suggested items for you to include:

- Children have the right to choose whether or not to participate in a sport.
- Children should be encouraged to follow the rules; cheating should not be encouraged or condoned in any way.
- This sport is for the child—it is not in any way for the parents.
- The most important aspect of the sport is trying hard and trying to win through playing fairly.
- Children should never be criticized, yelled at, or punished for losing or demonstrating poor skills. The only time that a child should be disciplined with regards to the sport is if cheating or poor sportsmanship are involved.
- Be a role model for your child. Root on the other players and teams.
- Do not argue with the referee or the coach during a game or practice. If you have any conflict or issue with the coach, a private meeting will be scheduled.

Of course, if there are additional insights that you feel should be included in the code of conduct, do so. This, more than anything, is to ensure that the parents realize what to expect during the season and understand what role they are to play.

## **3. Dealing With Common Parent Issues**

No matter how successful your initial meeting with the parents is, you will undoubtedly run into issues with the parents. Here are some common parent “types” and suggestions of how to deal with them:

### **1. The Parents Who Wants to Coach**

Maybe they think you should have used a different strategy, or maybe they simply think you are not giving their child enough game time. Either way, this type of parent can be frustrating and can interfere with your coaching philosophy.

If you have a parent who wants to coach during the games, try giving him/her “busy work” that will get them involved. Ask them to take specific statistic information. Ask them to organize the half-time snacks. Simply include them and give them a role during the practices and games. If this doesn’t work, meet with the parent privately and discuss their role versus your role.

## 2. The Parents Who Disrupt Every Game

You know the type—they’re yelling at the referee, yelling at their child, yelling at the coach. With these parents, you will need to pull them aside and let them know their specific roles and also what behavior is acceptable and what behaviors are not acceptable. Explain to them that they must not yell instructions, as it may confuse the players. Also, they must keep a good attitude and not make any negative comments to the children, coach, or referee.

## 3. The Parent Who Thinks Their Kid is a Superstar

Not every child can be a star athlete—it’s just the way that the world works. However, some parents may have a hard time accepting this fact. Some parents may have a problem with the amount of time their child is allowed to play or with the position that you’ve assigned their child.

In this case, you must make it clear that you are the coach and are evaluating each child’s skill level objectively. You make the final call, and the parent needs to accept that.

## 4. The Parents Who Don’t Care

These parents never show up to practices or games. If you find that this is an issue, you may want to consider implementing a parent attendance policy.

## 5. The Parents Who Criticize Their Children

Most of the time, these parents don’t understand that what they say to their children may come across as critical or downright mean. In this case, approach the parent and say something along the lines of “I heard you say this to your child—is this what you meant to say? Did you mean to say this instead?”

## 6. The Overprotective Parents

They’re terrified of their child getting upset or injured. They follow their kid around and can be disruptive if not dealt with. The best way to deal with these kinds of parents is to have a private meeting where you discuss the risks involved in the sport and address the parent’s fears and concerns. Tell the parent about what you do to ensure a safe practice or game, and explain what you will do if an injury occurs.

#### 4. Conflict Resolution

No matter what preventative measures you take, you may still be approached by an angry, irrational or irate parent. If this occurs, the best course of action you can take is to schedule a conflict resolution meeting.

- Schedule the meeting for the next day or two days down the road. This will give you time to prepare for the meeting. Never discuss the issue in public—privacy is essential.
- Try to determine the parent’s concern prior to the meeting date. This way, you will be able to adequately prepare for the issues and topics that may arise during the meeting.
- Ask someone else such as a principal, assistant principal, or another coach to sit in on the meeting. A third party is essential, ensuring that things will not get out of hand.
- At the meeting, allow the parent to speak first. This is the time for the parent to explain what his/her concern, issue, or grievance is. Let the parent talk for as long as he/she needs to. Do not interrupt the parent. Make mental notes of all that the parent says so that you can reply in an educated and mature manner.
- Now it’s your turn. Be honest and calm. Don’t offer more information than what’s necessary, and don’t go off on a tangent.
- Try to find a common ground and solution to the issue.
- When the meeting is finished, thank the parent for his/her concern and time, and end with “I’ll take that into consideration.” This lets the parent know that you have listened to everything he/she said and that the meeting was not held in vain.

Some tips to keep in mind during your conflict resolution meeting:

- Don’t allow the parent to introduce issues that have nothing to do with what you’re focusing on.
- While the parent is speaking, don’t shake your head or make negative gestures, even if you completely disagree with what he/she is saying. Keep a straight face and listen attentively.
- The only time it’s appropriate to interrupt the parent is if he/she is using profanity, attacking you, or not acting in a civil manner. In this case, ask for the parent to stop acting uncivilly. If the parent does not cease, end the meeting.
- Never compare the parent’s child to any of the other athletes.
- Don’t make any judgmental, accusatory, or moralistic statements about either the parent or the parent’s child.
- If the parent interrupts you, remind him/her that you gave them their time to talk, and now it’s your turn.
- Stay positive! This meeting is being held to resolve conflict, not to be upsetting.
- Be professional and maintain your poise. Even if the parent loses his or her composure, keep the upper hand by maintaining your cool.

- Don't compromise your principles. You will never want to completely restructure your coaching philosophy just to please one parent. The adage is true: you can't please everyone.
- If you and the parent can't reach an agreement, provide the parent with other options. Refer them to the athletic board, conflict management plan, or school official. Sadly, a last option for the parent to consider is removing their child from the team.
- The third party is there for your support. If you feel attacked after the meeting, count on the third party for reassurance and to reaffirm your coaching ability and philosophy.
- Keep a folder with positive notes and comments in it. After conflict resolution meetings (particularly the frustrating ones), pull out this folder to bring your spirits up.

### **Tips for Maintaining a Positive Parent-Coach Relationship**

- Parents are not the "bad guys"! Remembering this will go a long way. If you approach coaching with the thought that you are on one side and the parents are on the other, you are putting up a wall that will take a lot of effort to tear down. The parents are part of your team, just like their children. Treat them as part of your team.
- If a parent calls and leaves a message, return their call as soon as possible. Obviously, there is a reason for their call, and by responding quickly, you are showing that you value their insight and participation in the team.
- If an athlete is injured, be sure to contact the player's home later that same day to check on him/her. Parents will certainly appreciate your taking the time to check on their child.
- Take the time throughout the season to catch up with each of the parents. Every week or two, make contact with each of the parents to discuss the season thus far. This will make the parent feel more like a part of the team.

### **Something to Remember**

Just because you have a negative meeting with a parent doesn't mean that you are failing as a coach. Every coach has bad parent discussions. Don't let this make you think that you are not doing a good job!