

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. 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. **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.
4. **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 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.
5. **Don't Give Instructions During a Game or Practice:** You are not one of the coaches, so do not give your child instructions about how to play. It can be very confusing for a child to hear someone other than the coach yelling out instructions during a game. As in #4 above, 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.
6. **Fill Your Child's Emotional Tank:** Perhaps the most important thing you can do is to be there for your child. Competitive sports are stressful to players and the last thing they need is a critic at home. Be a cheerleader for your child. Focus on the positive things she is doing and leave the correcting of mistakes to the coach. Let her know you support her without reservation regardless of how well she plays.
7. **Fill the Emotional Tanks of the Entire Team:** Cheer for all of the players on the team. Tell each of them when you see them doing something well.
8. **Encourage Other Parents to Honor the Game:** Don't show disrespect for the other team or the officials. But more than that, encourage other parents to also Honor the Game. If a parent of a player on your team begins to berate the official, gently say to them, "Hey, that's not Honoring the Game. That's not the way we do things here."