

infosheet

COACHING CHILDREN ③

Communicating with parents

Coaching children can be a very challenging and personally rewarding experience.

The coach plays a critical role in children's sport and can have a significant and long-lasting influence on the player's social and personal development.

Parents too have a vital role to play. The environment in which children learn to play sport is largely determined by adults.

Parental expectations have a significant bearing on the attitudes of children towards participating in sport, on behaviour, levels of performance and enjoyment.

Family back-up is essential if children are to take full part in a wide range of sporting activities, whether it be a school or with community clubs.

The athletic triangle

The coach, the athlete and the parent form a very important athletic triangle. Through a cooperative effort, parents can contribute productively to a child's sporting experience.

The coach can play a role in ensuring that the athletic triangle functions properly.

Establishing communication with parents is important. The time spent on developing effective two-way communications will be time well spent.

Conducting a parent meeting

Planning a parent meeting for your team or your club before the season starts is an excellent idea.

Some important points about the meeting are -

- An informal meeting (maybe at the coach's home) is preferred, as it provides a more relaxed atmosphere. A larger venue such as a school library or club premises is needed for big groups.
- Have the meeting well before the start of the season. If any parents are unhappy with your approach, this gives them time to seek other arrangements.

- Personally invite parents to attend by either phoning or writing a letter. Give them plenty of notice of date and time.
- Not all parents will be able to attend. Some will have other commitments whilst, unfortunately, some won't be interested.
- Prepare brief notes of the things you discussed and give these to the parents who couldn't attend. This will ensure that every parent is informed.

Involving parents

There are many things that can be done to involve parents and to improve the athletic triangle.

The coach should serve as a valuable source of sport information. Offer to help any to better understand the game, especially parents who are new to the sport.

Many won't have played the various modified versions and some might not fully understand the aims of the junior sport so be prepared to 'educate' them.

You could try -

- Answering questions
- Lending resources or referring parents to suitable publications
- Explaining things during matches
- Holding a demonstration early in the season.

Handling difficulties

Establish a routine where parents can feel comfortable to approach you with concerns. They need to know when is best to do so.

If you are having difficulties with a parent, the answer is to tackle the problem as soon as possible. Delaying it will not help.

Talk calmly to the offending parent(s) and point out how they behave is detrimental to the individual or the team.



If the parent wants to tell you how things should be done, listen politely. It's just possible that one or two suggestions might be useful.

However, remember you're the coach and the final decision is yours to make.

Team newsletter

Coaches are busy people and the suggestion that you produce a regular newsletter may seem like the last straw. However, a simple single-page team newsletter can be a valuable communication tool and is certainly worth the effort.

A parent or team player may be happy to take on the role of editor.

Not all parents will be able to get to every match. Some will have other commitments such as watching other children play at a different venue. The newsletter is to always keep them informed of what's going on.

Whether your newsletter is written for the players or for the parents becomes a matter of personal choice. Whatever you decide, encourage both players and parents to read it.

A successful newsletter

Your newsletter could include:

- A match report – don't dwell on the score. Keep it positive, highlighting not just the star performers but also the individual's efforts. If you're going to mention names, try to give every team member at least one mention.
- Information on the next training and game times and venues
- Information on your players
- A 'thank you' for parents who have assisted at training games or those who attend the games regularly
- Basic rules and skills which may help parents. Copy small pieces from coaching manuals. If the sport is modified, highlight a rule each week so that parents can better appreciate what goes on during the game.
- Reinforce codes of behaviour

Parent meeting agenda

A preseason meeting with parents is a great way to start the communication process. Cover these points at your meeting:

Introduction

- Thank parents and outline the agenda
- Introduce yourself, outlining your experience and qualifications

The aim of children's sport

- Discuss why children participate
- Ask parents why they think their child wants to play

How important is winning ?

- Outline your attitude and style
- Explain your aims and how you'll achieve them

Detail your program

- Explain 'housekeeping' matters such as training times, uniforms, registration, medical histories and so on
- Seek assistance on the many jobs associated with the team
- Welcome parents to training sessions and encourage their help

Training rules

- Outline your expectations of player behaviour and training sessions

Parents' roles and responsibilities

- Encourage parents to attend games
- Parents have the responsibility to be informed about their child's sport
- Refer them to 'Kids' Sport' – A very real guide for grown ups' available free from NSW Sport and Recreation

Question Time

- Allow for questions – but don't spend too much time on individual children