

For Coaches



Double duty

6/11/2015

By Sara Robinson, MA

As a coach of a youth team, you have many responsibilities. As a parent, you also have many responsibilities. So, what happens when you are the coach of a team that your child plays on?

Not only do you take on the responsibilities of each role, but you must also balance those roles, which can be a challenge. Understanding how to approach this situation and preparing ahead of time can help create a smoother situation for you, your child, and the other athletes and parents who are a part of the team.

Apply the ideas below to successfully navigate the challenging dual role of coach and parent this season:

Be up front with open and honest communication: Most often there are parent and athlete meetings at the start of the season. This is the perfect time to acknowledge that you are a parent of a team member. While you may think this is obvious and don't need to mention it, others will likely appreciate that you are speaking about it openly.

In addition to mentioning that you are a parent-coach, think about sharing how you will handle this. For example, if you plan to be fair and consistent, communicate this. If you expect your child to call you "Coach Mark" instead of dad, talk about this openly. Sharing this type of information will help to have everyone on the same page and

be handling the situation.

Prior to this meeting, talk with your child about some of the guidelines you'll have and make sure that your child understands (keep in mind that he or she may not agree), so that nothing comes as a surprise in a group meeting.

Be consistent: At times, parent-coaches are worried about unfairly giving their child too much attention or feedback. In order to avoid this, they end up giving their child less positive attention than they give other athletes. This can create frustration or sadness for your child. Try to pay attention to how much feedback (both positive and constructive) that you give to all members of the team, including your child.

Additionally, pay attention to how you react. For example, do you respond more harshly when your child goofs off as compared to others? Try as best as you can to be consistent with all of your athletes in all types of situations.

Protect your relationship with your child: The above points aim to treat all children equally and fairly, and being open that this is the goal. Depending on the age of your child, this may not be easy for him or her to understand. Take time to discuss how you and your child want to handle potential situations before they come up. Remember that you can't always do things the way your child wants, but if you can talk ahead of time, and process after, you're more likely to both walk away feeling good about situations. Perhaps you and your child can come up with a rule that when you are on the field, you are coach, but as soon as you step off, you become the parent again.

You are helping to teach good life lessons: If you find that you're having a hard time remaining consistent or fair, remind yourself that doing all of this helps your child learn and grow. In life, it's not often we are working for our parents and we generally won't get special treatment in school, work or life. By being in this situation now, you are helping them not only learn and grow on the field, but helping to teach important life-long lessons. And, when you are able to find a good balance between roles, this helps to show your other athletes about professionalism and respect.

Be open to feedback: In sports, coaches give athletes feedback on a regular basis. But coaches don't always get feedback. If another coach, parent or athlete shares something with you about favoritism, unfair treatment, or something else, be open to hearing it. While it's normal to become defensive in a moment like this, remember that we are all human and you're doing your best: the feedback can help you do even better. (NAYS offers its Coach Rating System for volunteers to obtain anonymous feedback in 15 key areas. You can learn more [HERE](http://www.nays.org/start-a-chapter/chapter-benefits/coach-rating-system/) (<http://www.nays.org/start-a-chapter/chapter-benefits/coach-rating-system/>).

Enjoy the situation: Though there may be challenges, the fact is that you are involved in your child's life in a very positive way, and you'll get a unique view of this experience. Take the time to enjoy it and help your child enjoy it too, even if there are some bumps along the way.

While some of these steps may be hard to follow at times, consciously paying attention to how you are handling situations puts you in a good position to navigate these roles and hopefully you and your child will be able to look back years from now very fondly on these experiences.

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