



Coaching Your Own Kid Offers Lots Of Rewards

To coach, or not to coach your own child's team, that is the ultimate question. Let's consider the pros and cons.

As coach, you can help your kids and their friends enjoy sports. You'll get to know all of them better, and you can spread the good word about sportsmanship and achieving team goals. You can teach how hard work and the mastery of various drills and exercises will improve them athletically and make them feel better about themselves.

Despite these selling points, many Moms and Dads have a catalogue of excuses: I work on Saturday mornings. I don't know the sport. I'm not good with kids. I get too excited during games. I was a lousy athlete as a kid.

Quite honestly, I'm always surprised that more parents don't sign up. It's teaching. It's fun. It's quality time with your kids.

Of course, it does bring some serious responsibilities. And they occasionally upset the delicate balance of being a coach, a neighbor and a parent. So here's a quick tip sheet on how to keep that balance in place:

- Start with the premise that most parents will assume you're going to give your own kid the most playing time and the best positions. So be careful when selecting your lineup. My suggestion? Even though it may be clear to everyone that your child is the most talented athlete on the team, you should treat him or her the same as any other child. This means making sure that everyone plays the most—and least—desirable positions. It means that everyone must take turns coming out of a game in a normal substitution rotation.

It might help to keep a chart or scorebook to record who plays where and how often during each game. And maintain this chart for every game.

- Encourage other parents, who are often your neighbors, to be open with you. It's important you maintain clear lines of communication. Invariably, it's the lack of communication between parents and



MAKE SURE YOUR CHILD UNDERSTANDS YOU WON'T PLAY FAVORITES.

coach that can cause problems—especially if other people believe you are playing favorites, i.e. giving special considerations to your own kid.

Make yourself accessible to other parents. Answer their questions. Understand their concerns. Return phone calls. You'll find that openness will cure a lot of problems.

As an antidote to parents who do become troublesome, ask them to help you out as a volunteer assistant coach. If they say yes, they'll be agreeing to "work" for you on practice and game days. If they decline, they won't be in any position to protest anymore.

- Ask your kids if they like the idea of your being their coach. For the vast majority, it's a dream come true. But not for everyone. Check with them first before you sign up.

Also explain that you must treat them just like everybody else, that they won't get any special privileges. Remind them that there's nothing more democratic in the world than sports, and that policy starts with you, the coach.

Sports psychology expert Rick Wolff is the father of three children and the author of Good Sports (Dell), a parents' guide to youth sports. You can send questions to Mr. Wolff at Parents' Guide, P.O. Box 5574, New York, N.Y. 10185-5574.

Some Friendly Advice...

- ✓ Hey, Moms! Why aren't you coaching? Volunteer to be a head coach—and don't limit yourself to your daughter's teams. Consider coaching your son's teams.
- ✓ If you aren't knowledgeable about a sport, go to the library and read some books. You can learn rules and basic drills for most sports in less than an hour.
- ✓ Most leagues have pre-season coaching clinics or certification seminars. Make the effort to go. It will be well worth your time.