

How to Manage Soccer Parents (Part 1)

Parents are, obviously, necessary. Sometimes they can even be useful! You can, for example, get them to transport children, fetch balls during practice sessions and provide financial support.

There will, however, be occasions when you have difficulty with one or more parents. Some may want their child to play more while others may question your judgment as a coach. You can minimise the number of times you have to deal with an angry or upset parent by following these guidelines:

1. Have a pre-season meeting before the first practice to discuss your plans and expectations for the season. Encourage questions from the parents and let them know that you have given a lot of thought to how you're going to coach their children.
2. Express appreciation for their interest and concern. This will make them more open and at ease with you.
3. Always listen to their ideas and feelings. Remember, they are interested and concerned because it is their children that are involved. Encourage parental involvement.
4. Know what your objectives are and do what you believe to be of value to the team, not to the parents. No coach can please everyone!
5. Know the club and game rules. Be prepared to abide by them and to explain them to parents.
6. Handle any confrontation one-on-one and not in a crowd situation. Try not to be defensive. Let the parent talk while you listen. Often a parent will vent their frustrations just by talking. Listen to their viewpoint, then thank them for it.
7. Resist unfair pressure. It is your responsibility as coach to make the final decision. This doesn't mean that you can't still listen to parents.
8. Don't discuss individual players with other parents. The grapevine will hang you every time. Show the same respect for each player on the team that you want the parents to show toward you.
9. Ask parents not to criticize their children in front of anyone else. Don't let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents.
10. Don't blame the players for their parents' actions.
11. Be consistent! If you change a rule or philosophy during the season, you may be in for trouble. At the very least, inform players and parents of any change as soon as possible.
12. Most importantly, be fair! If you treat all your players fairly and equally you will gain their respect and that of their parents as well.

Remember that your children (and their parents) are not all the same. They will have a wide variety of backgrounds, beliefs and ideals. This diversity is to be valued.

The challenge for you as a coach is to address these differences in a positive manner so that the season will be enjoyable for everyone involved.

How to Manage Soccer Parents (Part 2)

If parents have been acting as your assistants at practices, it is not uncommon for them to want to continue to participate during games. This is something which you need to watch closely, for several reasons.

First, if other parents see a "non-coach" giving instructions to players on the field, they are going to be tempted to start doing this themselves. This will drive the kids crazy, because "too many cooks" really do spoil things.

Secondly, most parents are going to be watching their own child - and giving most of their instructions to their own child. This can be very distracting to the child (even if the instructions are good) because it takes his attention away from the game and keeps him from using his own brain to figure things out for himself.

Furthermore, many children simply want praise, praise and more praise from their parents - so any corrections will be viewed as a public statement of "Boy, you are so stupid, I hate having you as my kid."

Finally, and often most importantly, the instructions being given by these "helpers" often tend to be completely wrong - and exactly opposite from what you have been working on at practice.

What to do? The key is tact - and a pre-season meeting. Explain to the parents that the kids need to be able to use the games as learning experiences - and too much criticism is going to feel to them that the parents view them as failures.

Tell the parents that, on game day, the ONLY thing that you want to hear is some general praise "Nice job, good shot, unlucky, good idea, etc.". Tell your assistants that you really appreciate their help, but you need them to sit in the stands on game day, because you are afraid that other parents will be tempted to start "helping" by shouting instructions - and this will drive the kids nuts!

Then, if you have some parent who starts to give instructions, nip this in the bud early. Each time that the parent does this, smile and say "Remember the Rule, please." Be good humoured about it. Make a sign which proclaims the stands as a NO COACHING ZONE. Bring a gag. But, don't permit this parent to violate your rules.

The same goes for parents who want to yell at opposing players or referees - except that you MUST leap in hard to prevent this. A very firm "George, we don't yell at the Refs" - followed by "Sorry, Ref, it won't happen again" - makes it clear to everyone that you don't like this conduct.

The same goes for yelling at opposing players, but be even more forceful. It is very

scary for smaller players to deal with irate adults – and you need to stop this immediately. If the parent doesn't listen, tell him to go and sit in his car.

Even if this means abandoning the game, or going to get a club official to help, it is your obligation to protect these other children - just as you would want the other coach to protect your little ones. Besides, if you do not move in quickly, the next thing that you know, you will have some irate Dad from the other side coming to see your parent - and all hell could break loose. So, do what you need to do - but don't tolerate this type of behaviour.