

COACHES AND PARENTS: BUILDING HEALTHY ATHLETES

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RELATIONSHIPS WITH PARENTS CAN BE A MAJOR CHALLENGE FOR YOUTH COACHES. While most experts agree that fun should be the objective of youth sports, a team cannot align with every stakeholder's goals and objectives. Sports affect a vast range of people that can be defined as stakeholders. These individuals include coaches, parents, athletes, community members, and administrative personnel. Dr. Craig Stewart, professor of coaching education and adapted physical education at Montana State University, recalls many conferences with parents who disagree on what their child should be gaining from participation in sport. Dr. Stewart recommends that coaches take time early in the development of relationships with parents to address this problem. Coaches should do the most they can to align team goals with the goals of parents and athletes. Not every stakeholder can have exactly what they are asking. For instance, it is difficult to be a highly competitive team while allowing ample playing time for all athletes. This makes compromise necessary while determining the best possible solution. Dan Cardone, the athletic director of North Hills School District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and a regular contributor to athleticmanagement.com, recommends that coaches ask about the parent and their role in their children's lives. Parents play a large role, and having a gifted athlete on your team can be overshadowed by an over-involved parent. Mr. Cardone also lays out parameters for

relationship management as it pertains to parent involvement, such as rules about when parents can contact the coach and what can be discussed. Issues to be addressed may include: calling a coach at home, appropriate time frames for addressing a concern/issue, and the appropriate place and time to voice concerns. Mr. Cardone also offers pointers on dealing with an angry parent: Establish rules with parents and be willing to uphold them, but also give parents the opportunity to express their concerns and listen genuinely. Dr. Lindsey Blom, an assistant professor of Physical Education at Ball State University and author of "Survival Guide to Coaching Youth Soccer," offers that it is crucial to recognize that parents and coaches all want what is best for the young athlete. It is important to use this common ground as a starting point when building relationships with parents and athletes. Dr. Traci Statler, an associate professor at California State University, Fullerton, stresses that parents need to be informed of their role; at a certain age parents should only be there for unconditional support. The older the athlete gets, the smaller the role of the parent should be. It is essential that coaches relay this effectively in a manner that parents are likely to understand and unlikely to reject. Dealing with parents can be problematic for coaches, but managing these relationships effectively will lead to a better experience for everyone involved, most importantly the young athlete. ●