



COACH AND PARENT CONFLICT

Guidance on how coaches should manage conflict with parents.

Parents play a critical role in basketball, and it is extremely important that coaches develop strategies to work with parents. For some coaches, working with parents is one of the most challenging parts of their role and inevitably many coaches will encounter a conflict at some point in their coaching career. Coaches need to be able to deal effectively with any problems to ensure the coach-parent relationship remains positive. This document provides guidance for clubs and coaches on how to prevent issues arising, and how to deal with them when they do.

A key aspect in effectively dealing with parents is good communication. At the start of the season, a Parent Letter and/or Parent Meeting are good methods to outline the club's coaching philosophy, the goals and rules for the team, codes of conduct for players and parents, practice and game schedule information, etc. Parents should be reminded that a positive, encouraging and non-critical approach will increase their child's enjoyment in basketball.

The benefits of positive reinforcement as a coaching technique are well known. Positive, constructive feedback in a helpful manner is extremely important in developing young players and improving their confidence. Coaches also need to ensure that positive parental involvement takes place. Coaches should explain the importance of positive support for the team at games and explain how some actions such as criticising the coach or referees won't set a good example or help their child enjoy the game.

Parents will naturally be ambitious for their child, so may need help to understand where their child fits into the team. This creates one of the most common problems: dealing with parental expectations. Dealing effectively with any issues can stop small problems from escalating and a parent becoming disgruntled. If a conflict does arise, it is essential that the coach and club take this seriously. Some tips to help deal with conflicts include:

- **Don't discuss any problem at a game.** If a parent wants to talk about a problem during or immediately after a game, ask them to wait until a more



convenient and suitable time. It isn't appropriate for children or other parents to witness any argument and the coach needs to focus on the team. This should allow time for one or both parties to cool off and compose themselves.

- **Create a schedule.** Outline times that parents can contact you and times they should not contact you. Allocating set times for meetings can allow parents and coaches to prepare, so all concerns are adequately addressed. It also manages the expectations of parents and helps you to manage your time effectively.
- **The problem.** Where possible, a face-to-face meeting could be the best course of action. Try to avoid an email exchange as people may say things they wouldn't in person and sometimes meaning can be lost.
- **Listen to the parent.** Listen to their opinions even if you do not agree. Try to avoid losing your temper even if they do and remain calm. Don't raise your voice and show empathy with statements such as 'I'm sorry you feel like that'. However, if they are too emotional, it could be best to terminate the meeting until a later date.
- **Clarify the issue.** Make sure you are clear on what the problem is, the possible solutions and next course of action. Take care not to make promises you cannot keep.
- **Reflect.** If the problem is a criticism of your coaching, reflect on the problem and think about whether you need to make changes. If necessary, ask another coach for their opinion.
- **Closure.** Take any necessary actions and make sure you update the parent. Ensure they know they can still talk to you and raise any further issues.
- **Refer.** If you can't resolve the problem, make sure you follow your club's complaints procedure and advise the parent that this is the course of action to be followed.
- **Take note.** Make a note of the relevant events and meetings for your reference.