

## COACH AND PARENT CONFLICTS

Guidance on how coaches should manage conflict with parents  
(Updated April 2018)



Parents undoubtedly play a vital role for most young people's involvement and enjoyment in basketball. Unfortunately issues will arise between some parents and coaches, and 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. Below is some guidance for clubs and coaches on how to deal with such issues.

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 a good method 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 and 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 and 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.
- **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, show empathy with statements such as 'I'm sorry you feel like that' but 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 but take care not to make promises you cannot keep.
- **Reflect.** If the problem is a criticism of your coaching, reflect on the problem and if you need to change. 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 that you follow your clubs 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.

