

Coaching Your Own Child



Since youth sports depends on parent-coaches, many parents will end up coaching their own children. Here are some tips for making that shared experience a positive one.

- 1 Ask permission.** Ask your child whether or not they want you to coach their team before you sign up for this role. During this discussion, be sure to explain why you want to coach the team and how you will coach the team (coaching philosophy).
- 2 Recognize that you wear two hats.** One hat is for your role as parent. The other is the coach's hat. Explain this to your child before the season. Tell him that you will need to treat him just like everyone else on the team when you are wearing your coach's hat. Assure him that when you put your parent hat back on, he is the most important person in your life (along with other family members).

You can say to your child, for example after a game or practice, "I'm taking my coach hat off now and putting my dad hat on." Some parent-coaches go so far as to have a special cap that they wear only when they are coaching their child's team, and which they remove after the game.

- 3 Be sensitive to favoring or penalizing your child.** Many coaches give their child advantages (like starting games or playing favored positions) that the child hasn't "earned" by effort or talent. Nothing poisons the well with other parents and players as much as when a coach unfairly favors her own child.

However, many coaches are harder on their own child than they are on other players, expecting them to be perfect. Because of our emotional commitment to our children, it is hard for us to be objective about our own child.

You may find it useful to ask another person (perhaps a trusted assistant coach, not your spouse!) for an objective evaluation of whether he thinks you are treating your own child fairly compared to how you treat other players on your team.

- 4 An old Cat Stevens song goes "I've many fine feathered friends, but their friendliness depends on how you do."** Because Double-Goal Coaches want to win, a coach's child can easily slip into believing that her parent's love is dependent on how she plays. As her parent, emphasize that you love and admire her for who she is, not how she does.

- 5 The PCA tools of Kid-Friendly Criticism** (Asking Permission, If-Then Statements, etc.) enable every child to hear and embrace criticism rather than become defensive. Parent-coaches will find these tools especially helpful for use with their own children.

Historically, young people have gone to work as apprentices in their parents' farm or business. In the modern world there isn't as much chance for parents and children to work together on something that is important to both of them. Coaching your own child can be a wonderful experience in being part of a team with each other. Many parent-coaches and their children look back on the times they spent working together on a sports team as some of the best moments of their lives. It is Positive Coaching Alliance's hope that our tools will make that possible for you and your child.

- 6 Let your child take the lead.** Only take part in after-hours practice (practicing at home) or sport strategy discussions with your child if she/he initiates!
- 7 Remember to resist the temptation to talk with your kids** about the other players' performance, or about what positions they should be playing.