



National Association for  
Sport and Physical Education

an association of the American Alliance for Health,  
Physical Education, Recreation and Dance

**NASPE Sets the Standard**

**POSITION STATEMENT**

## **A Coach's Guide to Parental Roles and Responsibilities in Sport**

### **Introduction**

Parents play a vital role in youth sports. They not only attend and support the performances and efforts of all children and youths who play sports, they also provide the volunteer workforce that carries out essential tasks in support of youth sports programs.

The national media sometimes highlight stories of parents behaving badly at youth sport events. Although such incidents are rare, inappropriate behavior by parents detracts significantly from the original purpose of youth sport programs. Sports are intended to provide opportunities for children and youths to participate, have fun, develop skills and enjoy the thrill of competition in a positive, non-threatening environment.

Some national sport and professional groups have initiated programs and strategies to encourage and reinforce positive parent behavior. Local organizations have tried strategies from enacting Silent Sundays (providing parents with lollipops to deter negative comments) and distributing parents' codes of conduct at entrances to sporting events, to requiring parent education and restricting parents from competition facilities.

This statement, which revises and replaces the 2003 NASPE Position Statement *Coaching the Parents*, provides recommendations from a task force created by NASPE's Sport Steering Committee about how coaches can foster appropriate parent behavior.

### **Coach's Role**

Although the coach's primary role is to develop athletes, coaches also must accept the responsibility for educating parents. Before the season's first practice, coaches should hold an interactive meeting with the coaching staff, athletes and parents to develop effective lines of communication. The meeting's primary purpose should be to establish agreed-upon expectations for all parties in regard to coaching style, team rules, appropriate athlete behavior, etc. The meeting's secondary purpose should be to help parents understand how best to support their children's sport participation and what constitutes appropriate parent behavior in the youth sport environment.

An excellent way to start that discussion is by distributing a copy of the Bill of Rights for

## A Coach's Guide to Parental Roles and Responsibilities in Sport *(cont.)*

Young Athletes to each parent and athlete so that they can familiarize themselves with the document. The meeting's agenda should include, but not be limited, to the following:

- Coaching philosophy
- Coaching style
- General goals for the team
- Playing time
- Typical practice-session routines
- Expectations for the athletes (e.g., athlete rights and responsibilities)
- Expectations for the parents (e.g., parent rights and responsibilities)
- Explanation of equipment requirements and needs
- Discussion of the risks involved in the sport, including a discussion of emergency medical procedures and guidelines
- Season practice and game schedules
- Question-and-answer period for parents and athletes
- Transportation issues
- Communication procedures
- Safety
- Expenses and fundraising
- Officiating
- Sportsmanship
- Team rules
- Volunteer opportunities for parents
- Contact information

Depending on the sport, coaches should address other topics, including travel plans and bad-weather contingency plans. In discussing your coaching style, you might want to cover:

- How decisions are made.
- The role of assistant coaches, if you have any.
- How you teach.
- Whether or not you use physical contact with the athletes when you coach.

## A Coach's Guide to Parental Roles and Responsibilities in Sport *(cont.)*

- How parents can help their children with outside practice and conditioning.
- How athletes and parents should communicate with you.

The key is covering anything that might come up during the season. Be thorough; that reduces problems later in the year. By providing this type of information, you provide the athletes and parents with a feeling of confidence by showing that you know what's needed to ensure the best possible experience for the athletes on your team.

Other strategies coaches should consider:

- Parent-and-child session/practice/scrimmages.
- Hosting a preseason social activity, such as a barbecue for the team members and their parents.
- Developing or adapting written contracts (e.g., codes of conduct) regarding appropriate behaviors for coaches, athletes and parents, and having them signed at season's beginning.

### Code of Conduct for Parents

1. Let the coaches do the coaching for all team members.
2. Support the program by volunteering to assist the team in some way.
3. Be your child's best fan; support him or her unconditionally.
4. Acknowledge your child's effort, as well as his or her support of team members, adherence to player responsibilities, etc.
5. Support and root for all team members. That fosters teamwork.
6. Model good sportsmanship at all times during practices and competition.
7. Don't bribe your child or offer incentives for good performance. Instead, orient him or her to the enjoyment of participating and his or her responsibility to the team.
8. Encourage direct communication. If your child is having difficulties in practice or games or can't make a practice, encourage him or her to speak directly to the coaches.
9. Understand and display appropriate game behaviors (e.g., watch; make positive remarks; don't berate players, officials or coaches). Remember, your child's self esteem and game performance are at stake. Be supportive.
10. Monitor your child's stress level at home. Ask questions to ascertain whether your child is having trouble balancing various activities in his or her life. Ask whether she or he is enjoying the sport experience. Help your child handle any stress effectively.
11. Monitor eating and sleeping habits. Ensure that your child is eating the proper

## A Coach's Guide to Parental Roles and Responsibilities in Sport *(cont.)*

foods and getting adequate rest.

12. Help your child keep his or her priorities straight, maintaining a balance among schoolwork, family responsibilities, chores, free time and organized-sport participation.
13. Keep sport in its proper perspective: Sport should be fun for you and your child. Highly skilled children and their parents must be especially careful to maintain a balanced view.
14. If your child's performance produces strong emotions in you, maintain a calm demeanor. Your relationship with your child remains long after competitive sport days are over. Keep your goals and needs separate from your child's experience.
15. Reality test: If your child's team loses but has played its best, help your child see that as a "win." Remind him or her to focus on "process" and not only "results." Children should derive fun and satisfaction from "striving to win," and playing well and hard.
16. Let other family members and friends who might attend your child's games know what constitutes appropriate and supportive behavior.
17. Acknowledge, learn, and follow the Bill of Rights for Young Athletes (NASPE/AAHPERD, 1977)
18. Have fun.

### Resources

#### Books:

- American Sport Education Program. (1994). *Sportparent*. Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics.
- Coakley, Jay. 1983. Play, games and sports: Developmental implications for young people. In J. C. Harris and R. J. Park, eds. *Play, games and sports in cultural contexts* (pp. 431-450). Champaign, Ill.: Human Kinetics.
- Coakley, Jay. 2006. The good father: Parental expectations and youth sports. *Leisure Studies* 25, 2: 153-164.
- Côté, Jean. 1999. The influence of the family in the development of talent in sport. *The Sport Psychologist* 13: 395-417.
- Côté, Jean. 2004. Education through sport participation: a developmental perspective. Launch of the European Year of Education Through Sport (EYES), Dublin, Ireland.
- Laumann, Silken. 2006. *Child's play: Rediscovering the joy of play in our families*

## A Coach's Guide to Parental Roles and Responsibilities in Sport *(cont.)*

*and our communities.* Toronto: Random House Canada.

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (2006). *Quality coaches, quality sports: National standards for sport coaches (2nd ed.)*. Reston, Va.: Author.

National Association for Sport and Physical Education. (1977). *Bill of rights for young athletes*. Reston, Va.: Author.

Stankovich, C. E., & Kays, T. M. (2002). *Parent's playbook*. Columbus, Ohio: Champion Athletic Consulting.

Women's Sports Foundation. (1999). *Sports in the lives of urban girls: A resource manual for girls' sports in urban centers*. East Meadow, N.Y.: Author.

### Position Papers:

*A Coach's Code of Conduct*

[http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf\\_files/pos\\_papers/coaches.pdf](http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/pos_papers/coaches.pdf)

*NASPE Bill of Rights for Young Athletes*

[http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf\\_files/billofrightsforyoungathletes.pdf](http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/pdf_files/billofrightsforyoungathletes.pdf)

### Web Sites:

Coaching Youth Sports

<http://courseware.vt.edu/users/rstratto/CYS>

Moms Team.com: The Place for Moms With Children in Youth Sports

<http://www.momsteam.com>

Do's and Don'ts for Sport Parents, by Amy Wheeler (USA Gymnastics Online: Athlete Wellness) <http://www.usa-gymnastics.org>

Positive Coaching Alliance

<http://www.positivecoach.org/>

Character Counts: From the Josephson Institute of Ethics

<http://www.charactercounts.org>

Y-Coaching Youth Coaching Information

<http://www.y-coach.com/>

Parents: You Are Part of the Team, Too!

<http://courseware.vt.edu/users/rstratto/CYSarchive/ParentsMay99.html>

Ten Commandments of Parental Behavior

<http://www.ct-starters.org/tencommd.htm>

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