

Responsible Conversation:

Parent & Coach Intervention Strategies

■ EMPOWERING YOUR CHILD TO SPEAK

There are several advantages to having your children, rather than you, speak directly to the coach. Many coaches are more open to suggestions from players than from parents. The biggest plus is that this can be an empowering experience for children, even if they don't get the change they want.

Mustering the courage to talk to the coach can be a great life lesson. Your children may gain important experiences about dealing with people above them in the power structure, at school or in future jobs, by talking with the coach on their own.

■ WHEN YOU NEED TO INTERVENE

You would only have your children take up an issue with their coaches if you believe the coaches are basically well-meaning people trying to do the right thing. The sad truth is that some coaches do not always put their players' interests first.

If the coach is abusive to players, you must intervene. Youth sports has no place for a coach who verbally or physically intimidates athletes. You would never allow a teacher to bully or humiliate a student, and you must not allow it from a coach, even one who often gets a pass due to scoreboard success.

Unless your children are too young to understand what is going on, talk with them before acting to intervene. If a child is against the idea, but you believe the situation demands that you intervene, say, "I understand that you don't want me to talk with your coach, but I believe that this is so important that I have to do it."

■ APPROACHING THE COACH

If you are angry about the situation, gain control of yourself and know exactly what you want to say. Pick a time and place where only the coach can hear you—not during a game or practice, and not where you might be overheard, which could make the coach more defensive.

You may need to write and even rehearse what you want to say until it sounds the way you want. Be prepared to support your assertions with specific examples. Then listen carefully to what the coach says in reply.

If the results are unsatisfactory, you may need to go higher up in the organization, and you should be open with the coach that this is your next step. Again, be clear about what you want to say when you meet the athletic director, principal, coaching director or league president.

Even though intervening feels uncomfortable, remember you are not just standing up for your child, but also for all of the other children that play on the team, or who might play for this coach in future seasons.



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