

Getting Parents to Work With You, Not Against You

by Dr. Alan Goldberg

INTRODUCTION

Believe it or not, 99% of all parents out there are sane and workable. If you want to be a successful coach you have to deliberately make an effort to train them. The following is a list of strategies and ideas that will help you in this endeavor.

ONE

Most parents who push, do so because they don't know how to be helpful and do not understand the effects that this has on you and their child.

TWO

You are in a position as a coach to give parents the 2 things that they want the most and that frequently causes them to say and do unhelpful things. They want their child to feel happy. They want their child to be successful.

THREE

Help parents redefine what it means to be a winner. Winning is not about coming in 1st. It's about pushing your own limits and constantly striving to do better than your best. You're a winner if you drop time off a previous best, play your best, or improve a weakness. The actual outcome is much less important.

FOUR

Help parents redefine competition. It is not appropriate to distract an athlete with thoughts of beating someone else. Help parents understand that a focus on the competition usually results in subpar performances and performance problems. The competition is your partner and your real obstacle lies within. Train them to encourage their children to compete against themselves.

FIVE

Help refocus parents. All too often parents get their children to be concerned with the uncontrollables (UC's) in a competition, i.e. the crowd, the weather conditions, how important the contest is and how good your opponents are. Teach parents that a focus on the UC's will only get the child into performance trouble. Instead the athlete should be encouraged to focus on what they can control (i.e., themselves and their reaction to all the UC's).

SIX

Don't use a crisis intervention model with parents. Don't wait for problems and emotions to arise before you are forced to deal with them. Use a preventive, teaching model and commit yourself to training parents from day 1 in your program. Actively educate them with verbal and written material.

SEVEN

In writing, state clearly your coaching philosophy, coaching style, club policies and view about competition. Don't leave any of this material to their imagination. They have a right to know and you have a responsibility to clarify these for them.

EIGHT

Clearly define the roles of the athlete, coach and parent so they know what is expected of them and how they can best help the team. For parents specifically state that coaching is something you do and they don't. Define what it means to coach so that they won't have any confusion about the matter.

NINE

Define appropriate meet/practice behavior, the do's and don'ts for both athletes and parents and explain why this is so. Spell out clearly the consequences for violating appropriate behavior so when you intervene it doesn't come as a surprise.

TEN

Establish yourself as an expert. You know the sport, (even if you're inexperienced) and it's your job to see that things are run the way you see fit. Although parents may challenge you on this, act as if you are the expert in a non-defensive way. If you feel unsure of yourself consult regularly with other more experienced coaches.

ELEVEN

Define a common mission for the team and organization. Let parents know where you want to go and how they can help you and their children reach these goals.

TWELVE

Communicate. Keep lines of communication open between you and the parents. Be approachable. Encourage them to bring their problems to you directly. Listen to them and give them the feeling that you hear them and can understand where they are coming from, even if you don't agree with them.

THIRTEEN

Keep professional whenever possible. Do not use your emotions to respond to problem parents. If they push your buttons, keep your emotions out of your interactions with them. If you lose your professional perspective, you can't be effective.

FOURTEEN

Help parents understand the developmental perspective you have in training. Most parents don't understand why their child may not be performing at a certain level and winning everything in sight. Explain to them about the long term process you are involved in with their child and the proper way to measure success with it.

FIFTEEN

Teach parents the principles of peak performance which they can then use as a guideline for what to say and do with their child-athlete.