

Parents play a vital role in determining the outcome of the coaches plan for their children. Coaches should initiate communication with parents in writing and then through an orientation meeting. Through these engagements the coach should inform parents of the coaches philosophy of skill development and competition. A line of communication should be established to inform parents in matters of scheduling, behavior and injury.



## Working with Parents

1. Effective communication with parents is important. Parents can contribute positively to a child's sporting experience so coaches should take time to interact with them and try to ensure they understand the coaching role and responsibilities.
2. A good strategy for working with parents is to provide them with an induction kit that includes the coach's contact details, when and where training will be held, how you will advise them if training is cancelled, what their children should wear for training and games, game schedule, and codes of conduct for children and parents.
3. Parents' attitudes can range from one extreme to the other — from the over-protective, to the aggressive 'demander' — while others take no interest at all. Some can make a coach's task nearly impossible, while others are totally supportive and of great assistance.

**Involving parents;** It is important to get parents onside and involve them from the beginning of the season. This can be achieved by:

- encouraging their help and participation - many will feel they can't spare the time, or have the confidence to take on a major role but will be happy to help out with smaller tasks such as being a linesperson, scorer or helping with transport
- explaining your coaching philosophy and expectations of the participants and parents
- encouraging them to follow your lead of giving positive feedback — discourage destructive criticism of participants, officials, administrators or other teams, offer to help parents who are interested to better understand the game and the philosophy and aims of junior sport
- being prepared to listen when parents have concerns or issues to raise — although the coach has the final say in matters affecting the team, the parent may have a valid point.

**Pre-season meeting** A pre-season meeting is a good way to meet parents and to discuss philosophies and housekeeping matters. Give plenty of notice of the date and time of the meeting through either a short letter, email or a phone call. If parents find they disagree with the coach's approach, they then have the opportunity to look elsewhere for their child's sporting experience.

Hold the meeting at a suitable venue — a single team might meet in the relaxed atmosphere of the coach's home, while a larger venue such as a gym, clubroom or hall might be needed if the meeting involves more than one team. Not all parents will be able to attend so prepare brief notes that cover the main points of the meeting.

A possible agenda for a parent meeting

- I. Introduction and welcome — introduce yourself and any assistants. Briefly outline your coaching experience and qualifications
- II. Aims of junior sport — discuss some of the research findings as to why children play sport. Ask parents to think about why their child wants to play
- III. How important is winning? — briefly explain your philosophy, attitude and coaching style. Explain what it is that you wish to accomplish over the season and how you intend to go about achieving your goals. Talk about your feelings on player rotation, half games and so on
- IV. Cover 'housekeeping' matters — explain things such as training times and venue, how cancellations to training will be communicated, equipment and uniform requirements, registrations and medical forms
- V. Seek assistance with as many jobs as possible — these may include scorer, manager, uniform officer, lines-people, anything that help involve parents more

**Team rules** — give a broad outline of your rules and expectations (participants should have an input into team rules at an early training session). Cover what you expect concerning behavior and how you intend to enforce the rules

- Parents' roles — point out the value of parents taking an active interest in their child's sport, including attending as many games as possible. Discuss how you expect parents and spectators to act at games
- Question time — allow some time for general questions

Below is an example of an invitation to a parents' meeting:

*Dear Parents*

*My name is Heather Brown and I have been appointed coach of Bathurst Tigers under-10 netball team for this season.*

*This letter is to invite you to a parents' meeting and to briefly outline my coaching philosophy. I have coached junior sport teams for several years and I am a Level 1 netball coach. I am really looking forward to meeting you and working with you over the coming months to make your child's participation positive and successful.*

*My coaching program will emphasize skill development, fun and working cooperatively. I want the children to learn all the basic skills of netball and to become as skilful as they can. I also believe that forming friendships, developing a feeling of belonging and learning to share experiences with others are important to children.*

*It is my intention to give all team members equal opportunity to play during the season. They will experience playing in a range of positions as I intend to rotate players as much as possible.*

*I am inviting all parents to a short meeting at my home on Wednesday, April 2 at 7.30pm. At the meeting I will further outline my coaching philosophy and we can also discuss important matters such as training, fees and fundraising and how you might be able to help. I look forward to meeting you.*

*Yours sincerely, Heather Brown*