

Clarifying Your Expectations

In addition to your Mission Statement and Program Goals and Objectives, it is important to communicate the expectations you have for yourself, your players, and their parents. These “Codes of Conduct,” must be in writing and be part of a packet of information you distribute and explain at the start of every season. They will serve you well as the season unfolds and situations arise.

Coach’s Code of Conduct

Either adopt one of several, or write your own. This is an example of how one might look.

Coach’s Code of Conduct

Winning is a consideration, but not the only one, nor the most important one. I care more about the child than winning the game. I will be generous with praise when it is deserved; consistent, honest, fair and just. I will not criticize players publicly and will not yell at them.

I will adjust to the personal needs and problems of all my players; be a good listener; never verbally or physically abuse a player or official; give all players the opportunity to improve their skills, gain confidence, and develop self-esteem; teach the basic skills of the game.

I will organize practices that are fun and challenging; constantly work to improve my skills; and encourage all to be team players. I will be accessible to all of the players and their parents and will explain my goals and objectives.

Players' Responsibilities

It is important that you express your expectations for your players. You cannot assume that everyone knows what their responsibilities are. What do you want them to know?

Players' Code of Conduct

Play for FUN!

Work to improve your skills.

Be a team player and get along with your teammates.

Learn teamwork, sportsmanship, and personal discipline.

Be on time for practices and games.

Learn the rules, and play by them. Always be a good sport.

Never argue with an official's decision.

Respect your coach, your teammates, your parents, opponents, and officials.

Parent Responsibilities

The parents are the third leg of the three-legged stool. In case you hadn't realized, you and your players are the other two. Parents play an important role not only because of their involvement, but because of the expectations they have of you, their children, and what they hope to "get" from the experience. In order to be successful as a coach at any level K-12, you **MUST** not underestimate the importance of parents and their influence. You may not be able to control what they think or do, but you can let them know what you expect of them, and what they can expect from you.

Parents do not have a right to interfere with coaching decisions regarding playing time, positions, and strategy, but they do have the right to know who you are and what your goals and objectives are in coaching their children. Attempts to avoid, bully, or intimidate parents are sure to shorten your career as a coach, and make your life miserable. Imagine what that atmosphere and strife will do to the children!

List 5-10 responsibilities of parents whose children play organized youth sports for you.

In addition to writing down the parents' responsibilities, write or copy a Parents' Code of Conduct and distribute it to every parent with ample time to explain and discuss.

Parents' Code of Conduct

Parents should not force their child to participate in sports, but support their desires to play their chosen sport. Children are involved in organized sports for their enjoyment. Parents should make it FUN.

Parents should encourage their child to play by the rules. Remember, children learn best by example, so applaud the good play of all, including the opposing team.

Do not embarrass your child by yelling at players, coaches, or officials. Emphasize skill development and practices and how they benefit your child.

Know and study the rules of the game, support the officials on and off the playing field. Any criticism of coaches or officials only hurts the game.

Applaud a good effort in victory and in defeat, and reinforce the positive points of the game. Never yell or physically abuse your child after a game or practice. It is destructive. Work toward removing physical and verbal abuse in youth sports.

Recognize the importance of volunteer coaches. They are very important to the development of your child and the sport. Communicate with them and support them.

If you enjoy the game, learn all you can about it and volunteer.

(Adapted from USA Hockey Coaching Education Program)

Consequences – Discipline

If you are going to make and state rules, responsibilities, and expectations you must also let your players and their parents know that there are consequences for deviations. Be sure to write these down and hand them out to everyone. It is important that you do this at a meeting prior to the season, and it is important that you take the time to explain thoroughly and allow for discussion.

The more time and care you take now and prior to the season with your players and parents, the less time you will have to spend explaining yourself when things go awry during the season.

Do not make the mistake of minimizing a parent's right and responsibility to become involved when their child is being disciplined. Just as the classroom teacher is accountable to keep parents informed about a child's progress and behavior in class, a coach has the very same responsibility whether you want to admit it or not.

Conclusion

The time you spend understanding your role and the expectations of everyone involved will not only help you grow personally and professionally, but will maximize the joy and satisfaction you can derive from being a coach. Your players can learn many things from you. They will know if you are fair, a good teacher, and are knowledgeable about your sport. They will observe whether or not you can control yourself in the heat of the moment and they will notice how you treat others. They will know whether you care more about yourself and winning than you do about them as individuals. In the end, it is up to you whether or not you and your players enjoy the experience and how they will remember you for a lifetime. In the words of Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, "*Teach your children well.*"