

Promoting the Positive

Top Tips for positive sidelines



Parents. On one hand, mothers and fathers can give kids the motivation, sense of achievement and confidence that are crucial to player development. However, all too often parents allow their enthusiasm to boil over into interference, abuse, and on some occasions, violence.

You can harness the influence of parents without allowing them to be detrimental to youth football by following some very specific guidelines.

Hold A Pre-Season Meeting With All Parents

Holding an open meeting for all the parents/carers before the season starts can set the tone for the year. The team coach/manager, club secretary or chairman and the club welfare officer can hold a meeting to provide the opportunity to inform parents of the clubs' expectations – using the code of conduct as a guide and establishing what the consequences of any breaches would mean for them i.e. liable to pay any FA monetary fine, suspended from games, asked to not attend matches, etc. This meeting can also be used as a platform for questions and answers. This would cultivate a culture of togetherness and cooperation from the very beginning.

Adopt An Open Forum For Discussion And Ideas

As well as holding a pre-season meeting, it's also important to give the parents and relatives of the children at your club an opportunity to raise their concerns at various stages during a season. Some parents will be concerned about their child's welfare and happiness, while others will want to discuss the footballing side of their child's experiences. If you don't give parents these vital opportunities to have their say, they might let their frustrations boil over during training sessions or matches – causing friction with children, other parents and officials.

Communicate the club's Code Of Conduct For Parents And Spectators

It is important that parents are subject to the same rules regarding conduct and respect as children are, which is why a written code of conduct is essential. You can use the FA Code of Conduct template but you can also add your own elements to this. You might want to include rules on the additional rules of getting involved in tactical issues during matches. As part of your club's code of conduct, there should be a complete prohibition of parents publicly criticising players including their own child. In short, your club's rules on parent behaviour should have dignity and respect at their core.

Get parents to read the code when their child first shows an interest in joining your club, and have them sign up to it before their child signs on to play each season

Matchday Assistants

Have you thought about a parent or volunteer to act as a matchday assistant. This person representing the home team, someone separate from the coaching staff as they have enough to do, who would approach the referee and welcome them, would welcome the other team parents, etc and set the standard; explain the club's codes of conduct, policies and expectations, explain respect barrier, encourage only positive remarks, respect the referee etc. This will encourage a positive matchday experience for all.

Regular communications

Ensure team officials (coaches, managers, assistants) communicate with you as club officials regularly. Your team coaches are there primarily to coach and develop the football skills of the players. Not all are equipped to deal with the parents and their opinions, attitudes and ideas. Please ensure your coaches have the understanding that they should not be engaging in any disagreements or decision making without your (as club officials) involvement. You may have more training/experience of dealing with certain situations than they have. Please ensure they know you are there as support and can help deal with certain situations with parents if/when they arise.

Never Blame Children For The Behaviour Of Their Parents

It would be easy to allow the actions of a parent to affect the way you/or the team coach interact with their child. However, you/they simply can't hold a child responsible for the actions of an adult, so try to separate the two issues wherever possible. If you need to discuss a parent's behaviour with the individual concerned, do so away from the child. It's also important that you don't let any ill-feeling between coaching staff and parents affect the way children are treated.



24hour rule

All parents/guardians should be welcome to discuss any part of the coaching and the way our club is run – either with a coach or a committee member. However, how about introducing a 24 hour rule? Advise all coaches and parents/carers that they do not need to engage in any feedback and conversations about a match or training session until 24 hours have passed. This cooling off period helps to take the emotion out of a situation. It also enables people to go into a discussion with an even-keel approach, looking to exchange valuable information and find common ground for the benefit of all.

(A tip to provide parents: Whilst the club will always recognise your right to speak with a coach on behalf of your child, the added benefit of the cooling off period is that you may actually decide that your child is the best person to have the conversation with the coach. Life, and sport, will have many ‘red lights’ and ‘roadblocks’. If children don’t experience adversity or get uncomfortable from time to time they will be hindered in their development as a person as well as a player. If young people can learn to communicate for themselves to solve problems, they will be much better for it in the long term. Of course, we recognise you as a parent may have to step in from time to time, but working through conflict with their coach is beneficial for your child’s future in more ways than one.)

Deal With Conflict On A One-To-One Basis

If you need to address a specific incidence of poor behaviour, or a repeat offender’s conduct, you should do it in private with the person involved. Try not to deal with these issues in a public forum, as this could lead to bad feeling and increasingly uncooperative behaviour. Take the time to listen to the concerns of angry parents – even if you don’t agree with them. However, it is important that you let problem parents know that their actions are not acceptable, and that they could lead to a ban from matches and training sessions.

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Show Consistency In Your Approach To Parents

Parents will respond to a firm but fair approach to rules and guidelines. However, it is vitally important that you communicate these issues clearly and as quickly as possible. It’s usually a bad idea to change rules during a season, but if you have to, give parents and children plenty of notice – and the chance to respond. You should also ensure that you and the other coaches in your club treat all parents and children with the same level of respect. It stands to reason that some players will achieve more than others, but you should never let high-achievers get away with actions or behaviours that other players in the team wouldn’t – and the same applies to their parents.

Parents and children in the average local club could hail from a wide range of backgrounds, religions and races, so it’s important to bear this in mind when choosing how and when to engage with parents. But with regular communication, fairness and clear guidelines, you should be able to harness the positive influence that parents can bring for the good of the entire club.

Use Respect Barriers

These are not ensure the players have room enough to play in a safe environment and makes the club look professional. Respect barriers are also a physical barrier to prevent anyone impeding the playing field, or definitely means they have to make more effort to do this. Respect barriers don’t need to be anything flash and expensive. Some rope and stakes are sometimes enough to ensure spectators are stood away from the playing area.

