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# Coach, Parent & Youth Communications Handbook

A guide for new coaches and youth leaders with working tools, examples and guidelines. Provided by One Call Now.

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## IT'S GOING TO BE A GREAT SEASON

### Thanks Coach!

Whether this is your first year or your twenty-first, we applaud and thank you for the time and effort you spend guiding the development of young players. Their spirit, enthusiasm, sportsmanship and athletic abilities are in your hands. After participating in a number of coaching education courses over the years, I've noticed that coaches continue to ask, "What's the best way to communicate with parents?" Meanwhile, parents are wondering exactly how they can best relate to and support the coach! Answering these questions is the purpose of this guide. This booklet is targeted at youth sports coaches. Although written from a soccer coach's perspective and for soccer coach Certification Seminars, this booklet is appropriate for all youth sports and activities. We will cover different options, tools and methods coaches can use when communicating with parents and players. Effective coaching means going above and beyond the basics of coaching the game and building players' skills; it means communicating with parents, encouraging players and building a strong sense of team and family for a successful season. We have pulled together several simple things you can do to keep your group in the loop and eliminate the frustrating hassles of communications.

### THE COACH'S JOB

#### Do What You Do Well & Delegate the Rest

Many coaches want to train the players, coach the game and leave the rest to someone else. This may be the ideal, but it is not realistic. Responsibilities for a great season include player selection, parent meetings, scheduling, finding a place to train, securing the game field, locating/scheduling officials, getting results to the proper authority, identifying how the team will play, and more. Certainly, your best bet is to delegate responsibilities whenever appropriate. Coaches must learn that they are not always the best individuals to do all of the tasks. Experienced (and happy) coaches identify what they do not want to do, or are not best at doing, and find someone who can and will perform those tasks.

Later we will show you how to effectively and safely use email, team websites, and the telephone (including automated telephone systems such as the One Call Now message delivery service) to assist in communicating with your team.

## Coaches Philosophy

New coaches need to understand and appreciate the philosophy of their club, league or program. Focusing on the core values of the program in an age specific manner will be the best way to develop players and build a successful season. Generally, it is the new 'Rec' league coaches who need to appreciate that winning games and aggressive playing is not nearly as important as building skills, working on teamwork and instilling sportsmanship. Most coaches possess a love for the game carried over from their childhood, and the wise ones encourage that same enthusiasm in every player. It is important to share your philosophy of coaching with your players and parents as early as possible. The philosophy and goals of the program should be displayed on the club/league/team website or handed out with registration forms. This helps eliminate parental issues during the season.

## THE FIRST MEETINGS WITH PARENTS AND PLAYERS

Once your team is assigned or selected, it is important for you to have two separate meetings, one with the parents and one with your players, at the beginning of the season.

## THE FIRST PLAYER MEETING

Conduct a player meeting before the first practice. This meeting will cover the basics of communications, plus field etiquette and sportsmanship as follows:

### Expectations during training

Coaching is not a democracy. Everyone will get to play, but players must all do as the coach requests. The coach will direct players to improve their skills and techniques, and to help them grow.

### Expectations outside of training

Every player represents the team, the club and the league at all times; smoking, drinking, cursing or bullying are causes for immediate disciplinary action.

## Expectations during games

Fair play, sportsmanship, and enthusiasm for the game and for each other are expected. Cheering for a great play or to spur on our teammates is encouraged. There will be no interference with the game, coach, referee or umpire. Bad decisions are going to happen and are part of the game, so team members should show good sportsmanship by accepting referee decisions without question. Coaches call the plays and send players in and out, and players need to respond quickly and without question. Everyone will get a chance to play and can make suggestions for improvement later.

## Handling questions from players

Simple questions for clarification can be asked whenever the coach is explaining a technique or method. More detailed "Why...?"-type questions should be addressed later.



## THE FIRST PARENT MEETING

In addition to conveying your rules for players, the parent meeting should cover the following:

### Discussion of the coach's philosophy

Will your team just focus on basics and sportsmanship or will it also drive your players competitively?

### Conduct of parents during practices

Arrive on time and be supportive. There can be NO interference with the coach. Discuss ideas or concerns with the coach before or after, never during practice.

### Conduct of parents during games

Arrive on time and be supportive of the entire team, not just your child. There is to be NO interference with the game, coach, referee or umpire. Applaud and cheer great plays for both sides. Bad decisions are frustrating, but they are going to happen and are part of the game. Set a good example by accepting referee/umpire decisions without question. Refrain from admonishing your own child in front of others. Shaming a child rarely results in the outcome you want, and it is always bad for team morale.

### Handling questions from parents

There are two types of questions usually asked - logistical and philosophical. Logistical questions usually begin with what, how or when. These relate to transportation, snacks, times and places for games and practices, car pools, etc. After each practice or game the coach

can immediately pull the players together to talk about issues or techniques on which they need to work. Only then should parents be involved to gather information about dates, schedules, reminders, car pooling, etc. Philosophical questions occur when parents disagree with your methods, player selection, playing time, or tactics. Insist that parents call or speak with you privately, away from their own children and other players/families. If a parent does interrupt a practice or game with these types of questions, or attempts to bring them up in front of others, you simply need to say (and repeat as necessary): "I appreciate your concern, call me tonight" or "Let's talk after everyone else leaves." If the parent persists, you can say, "I want to address your concerns, so let's wait until everyone else leaves, or you can call me tonight."

## A PARENT'S JOB

Support your child, the coach, and the program. Recreation (or Rec) leagues and teams geared toward younger players are designed to teach the basics in a fun way, to promote sportsmanship and build camaraderie and teamwork. Older 'traveling' or 'select' teams are more competitive in nature, and are designed for players who already have core playing skills and understand the teamwork approach. Typically, this means striving to match a 'Rec child' with a Rec team, and a 'select player' with a select club. Parents can help find the best fit for their child. The younger the player, the more important it is for parents to be involved and to assist in building on the techniques and skills assigned by the coach.

## POSITIVE COMMUNICATION BUILDS BETTER TEAMS

It is always a challenge to get parents to be more positive. One coach decided to send out a weekly notice letting parents know what particular skills their child was working on that week, and to make a big deal out of it at the game when they saw those skills being performed. This was a great tool to learn more about the game, and the encouragement from the parents helped to reinforce the coach's instruction. This particular coach sent his notice via an automated call messaging service (One Call Now) because it was fast, easy, and he knew all the parents would receive the message. You could also print or type the notice or e-mail it, although the impact may not be so immediate. Remember that players may often hear only the negative parts of your message, so you must increase the ratio of positive to negative feedback in order to make an impact. Some experts advocate a 4:1 (positive to negative) ratio, while others suggest it should be as high as 10:1. Make sure your communication focuses on the behavior you'd like to see more of rather than the mistakes you'd like to avoid.

## POST TRAINING/ POST GAME TALK & VOICE BLAST

Another interesting tool used to communicate with parents is the post game/training talk. Encourage parents to come around the team when you are wrapping things up. I once heard a coach say:



**"It was great to see all the parents applauding when there was an exciting play on the field, and not one of you made a big deal out of that close call by the ref at the end of the game. That's what I call good sportsmanship!"**

This coach had a clever way of communicating with the parents. He encouraged them to listen as he spoke with the players and, in essence, he spoke to the parents while talking to the players. Of course, you can also use this time to review when the next training session or activity will take place. Many great (or want-to-be-great) coaches use a voice blast or call messaging service to reiterate their message to make sure every parent (especially those parents not in attendance) hears positive things about a player's good work, and gets the word about upcoming practices and games. Making a call blast to every family from your cell phone after each game to emphasize the positive elements on the field and to remind families of the next practice or game will result in several things: it will reinforce your philosophy and the lessons you are trying to convey; it will ensure that everyone is primed for the next activity; and you will find that team participation is enhanced on many levels.

**"This is Coach Mays of the Bluebirds. Great game today girls. I hope you all got a chance to see Amanda dribbling the ball and make those great passes. That's the way to play! Next game is Tuesday the 14th at 4pm at the south fields."**

Phone blast messages like this are especially important with working or split parent households, where the parent who needs to bring the player to the right field tomorrow may have missed the game today. Encouraging remarks and quick reminders are great to pass on after the game. Coaches need to know how best to communicate critical information. You can be sure that no parent wants to hear, "Mom! Coach told us something very important after practice today, but I forgot what it was...."

## RECOGNIZE CHILD'S ATTENTION SPAN WHEN COMMUNICATING

Children, even teenagers, cannot be depended on to remember dates, times, places, or specifics- especially when they hear it after an exciting game or an active practice. A good rule of thumb is to expect them to remember just one word for every year of age. So you need to choose: should an 8-year-old try to remember "Pass the ball and stay in your position" or "Next practice is at 4 p.m. on the 2nd at field number 3". (Where do YOU think they will show up - and when?)

## GETTING CRITICAL INFORMATION TO PARENTS

Parents want to know what is happening. Split parent families make the job three times as difficult. Working parents are hard to reach. Grandparents or alternative caregivers may want or need to be contacted. Over-eager parents want to chew your ear off about playing time, your strategy or their opinions (sometimes all three!) Angry parents can all but ruin a great afternoon. Changing schedules, forfeited games, black-flagged fields, last minute changes, make-up games, snack assignments, car-pool issues, reminders, directions, rule changes, practice notes... the list goes on and on. These administrative burdens can cause coaches to give up in frustration.

**Yet there are fast and easy ways that take just a few seconds of your time. Here are some ways you can get word out:**

### Paper Handouts

Making printed handouts ahead of time for everyone is a good way for those parents who show up and for children living with one set of parents. However, the logistics of printing, copying and distributing can be frustrating, and in wet and sweaty hands, ink bleeds all over!

### Email Issues and Ideas

Email is a good way to send schedules and detailed instructions, but because less than 25% of Americans check e-mail even twice a week, many messages just don't get there in time. Some high-tech coaches rely on email, yet many parents and families are simply unable to easily or readily check email at work (or even have the time to check it at home.) Making email even more troublesome for parental communications are the various spam blockers that delete even the most innocent messages. (For example, messages with extra!! or lots of words in CAPITAL LETTERS will often be seen as spam and deleted.) Expect 25% of email addresses to change and bounce (get rejected) every season, requiring constant list maintenance. Expect 3-6 days for most people to open it. And we all know that email certainly isn't the ideal way to communicate those last minute changes or notifications.

### Team Website

A special team or league website is another way to post schedules, directions, game results and pictures. Some leagues and clubs have websites set up so that it's easy for the coach to add info about your team. Other on-line firms such as [www.teammania.com](http://www.teammania.com), [www.teammemories.com](http://www.teammemories.com) and [www.eteamz.com](http://www.eteamz.com) offer simple on-line tools so you can create your own website. Unless you are a high tech person, you should delegate web messaging to someone who understands the process, and has the time and focus to update the information consistently.



### Manual Phone Messaging Service

Manual phone messaging (you call two parents, who each call two parents, etc.) is another method of spreading the word. Disciplined parents can generally pass along a very short and clear message to most of the team overnight, but busy or no-answer numbers often mean the message stops halfway, or is garbled in transit. Often the coach ends up calling everyone individually. Some 'select' or older teams have the luxury of a good team manager to handle parent calls, initiate and manage a phone messaging service, post web pages, or send email. Some coaches pass off parental communications to the team manager; but this puts distance between the coach and parent, and can make the players and the team less successful and effective.

## Automated Voice Blast or Call Messaging Service

Since few parents check email or web sites often (many forget website passwords,) and manual phone messaging services are subject to breakdown and dead-ends, important information should be sent immediately and proactively from you to every parent directly. A voice blast using an automated call messaging service such as One Call Now gets messages out immediately to everyone; consistently and clearly in your own voice. By using such a service, not only can you communicate important logistics information instantly, but you can use the opportunity to praise a few players, reinforce lessons and excite the players and their families. A call messaging service allows the coach to call a toll-free number and record a message, and then it delivers your crystal-clear message to every player's home and cell phone numbers at nearly the same time. Everyone gets the same message, so they stay informed no matter where they may be.

## Risk Management - Keep Private Information Private

Although we don't want to think about the possibilities, there are growing risks to children from predators and prying eyes. Coaches need to understand these risks and manage them. For parent/player communications, we will mention these critical ones:

**Websites with team information should be password protected to prevent intruders from seeing personal statistics or information about young players.** Pictures posted on the web should have first names only. Home phone numbers and addresses should NEVER be revealed on an open website (one without password access). Refer to your club, league or state guidelines for additional specifics. If using an automated call service, make sure it uses secure web pages and encrypted data, and has a solid privacy policy to protect your players. The One Call Now service, for example, meets these tough requirements and is approved by schools, the National Guard, US Army and the Air Force to protect confidential data and messages.

## Care and Safety of the Players and the Playing Environment

When deciding whether or not to activate a weather delay or cancellation, consider first and foremost how the players get to and from the field. Communities with players who walk or ride bikes should cancel on less severe weather than ones where players arrive by car. Traveling teams find it imperative to use an automated phone messaging service to keep families informed both at home and by cell phone due to weather conditions, game changes or adverse traffic conditions at remote game locations.



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**More Plans and Choices for any team or club. Call us: 877-698-3262 or visit us online at [www.onecallnow.com](http://www.onecallnow.com).**

Over 500,000 people a day depend on the calls that One Call Now makes. Some of these calls are informational, some are emergencies. Some of these calls are helpful to the recipients, some are critical in preventing injury and saving lives. Whether you need to reach the entire league, a specific team or reach all of your coaches, One Call Now provides the most reliable cost effective voice messaging system for immediate communications.

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