

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

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One of the most frequent excuses we hear from coaches is that other parents aren't willing to help – that it is impossible to run effective practices or coach effectively when flying solo. We feel that many times that it is a simple issue of communication. A meeting with the team's parents before the season and an open line of communication during the season can eliminate this problem.

Before the season begins the coach should hold a meeting with all of the team's parents. In this meeting the coach should discuss what he or she hopes to accomplish with the team during the season. This should be in line with the age-appropriate goals we have discussed in another article. However, it is important for the coach to stress that in order to run efficient, fun and effective practices and to make the experience as enjoyable as possible for the kids, parental assistance will be needed.

Most times a coach will ask for one or two volunteers to serve as "assistant coaches." Trying to find one or two more people with the free time to be at every practice can be quite a challenge. What generally happens is that the assistants volunteer and have good intentions, but because they are not head coaches, they find it easier to miss a practice when another commitment arises in their lives.

A more effective way to enlist support and ensure proper staffing of all practices would be to explain that to run great practices and make the experience as fun as possible for the kids a certain level of support is needed. Explain the elements of a good practice – small groups or stations, a variety of activities, organization – and how those practices will benefit their kids. If the coach has a plan and is organized, most parents will see the value and try to figure out how to help.

At this point the coach should feel comfortable asking each parent to serve as a volunteer assistant for one or two weeks during the season while encouraging parents to come out and assist whenever they have free time. Or, perhaps, a coach can ask for two different parents to help at every practice and game. In many youth leagues there will be no more than one practice and two games per week, so that is really not much to ask. The more organized the coach is and the more effectively he or she communicates in this meeting, the more easy it will be to get additional help.

Developing an email list and sending out a short practice plan to all players and parents or sending out the batting order for the next game the night before also makes parents aware that the coach is organized and concerned. By keeping people informed the chances of enlisting their support on the field increases. Coaches should always be accessible to parents who have questions, and questions should be answered in a timely and polite manner no matter the circumstances.

This system may not be appropriate for older age groups or "Travel teams." Generally as players get older or more advanced a group of coaches emerges that will guide the team from year to year. Of course, at the high school level, head and assistant coaches are designated by the school. However, opening the lines of communication with the parents before and during the season is essential for all coaches. For coaches of older and more advanced teams, good communication will help parents understand and appreciate the time commitment made by the coach and will eliminate some of the questioning that often goes on during a season and can be demoralizing and frustrating to a coach.