The Importance of Communication

Today’s note was written by Pete Piscitello, the executive director of the CYO of Johnson & Wyandotte Counties in Kansas, and a longtime Play Like a Champion partner. The CYO also provided all of the pictures for today’s note.

One of the most important skills needed to be a great leader is communication. A youth sports coach is no exception. The way a coach communicates with children, parents, administration, and other coaches will go a long way toward the quality of the experience. Let’s take a quick look at the major areas of communication and how we can be great in each of them.

Communicating with Children
Great coaches know how to communicate with the children on a team. This begins by assuring that the children know how much the coach cares through a positive approach to building relationships and teaching skills. Both verbal and nonverbal cues should reflect a desire to help every child improve, regardless of ability. A coach should also seek to understand how each child learns best; most children learn through trying new things and participating in drills, not by hearing the coach lecture. Consider that if a child isn’t understanding something it may not be their fault, it’s up to the coach to determine how to best communicate.

Communicating with Parents
The Play Like a Champion approach underscores the importance of “Parents as Partners” in the youth sports experience. Without healthy communication between the coach and parents of a team, the experience likely won’t be great for anyone. This means that coaches should communicate their expectations and goals early in the season, ideally by holding a preseason meeting before or after practice. At these meetings, the coach can set boundaries for communication (no 10pm phone calls!) and expectations for fans (positive and encouraging!) while expressing a willingness to have kids and/or parents discuss any concerns during the season (at appropriate times). By communicating well with parents, coaches can avoid problems that often stem from a lack of understanding between the two sides.

Communicating with Administration and Coaches
Coaches should remember that they have support in their league structure and assistant or opposing coaches. Communicating regularly with Athletic Directors or league staff can be helpful when it comes to dealing with issues that arise or simply working to get the best out of your kids. Coaches should also remember that opposing coaches are allies, not enemies. Coaches should all be involved for the same reason: to provide a fun environment for kids to participate and grow in sports. Communicating in a way that brings everyone together in this mission will help make the experience better for all!

Top Tips for Good Communication

• Use your inside voice.
• Remain calm.
• Ask questions rather than tell answers so that your athletes discover the solutions.
• Be empathetic.
• Be clear, and explain why you are doing what you are doing.
• Set boundaries for communicating with parents and players.
  • These boundaries could include:
    • times when you are unavailable
    • avoiding team discussions on social media
    • avoiding discussions when either party is upset

“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

George Bernard Shaw, Playwright