

## Research Brief

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### Should Parents Coach Their Own Children?

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#### Introduction

Many parents coach their own children on youth sports teams, sometimes with good results, sometimes with negative results for both the child and the parent. Some experts have noted the advantages of parents coaching their own children as they best know the strengths and moods of their children (Dure, 2015; Lauer, 2016; Cumming & Ewing, 2002). On the other hand, other experts have argued that parents should not coach their own children due to problems associated with switching roles from parent to coach and children perhaps not feeling as comfortable with having their parent as a coach (LeBolt, 2016; Wrestle Club, 2016). Some authors have offered suggestions for how parents can switch roles effectively from parent to coach (Clarke 2016; NAYS & Bach, 2016; Spiker, 2013). The purpose of this brief is to discuss the advantages/ benefits and disadvantages of parents coaching their own children.

#### Benefits/Advantages of Parental Coaching

Youth sports experts have identified a number of benefits/advantages of parents serving as coaches for their own children (Dure, 2015; Lauer, 2016; Scandiffio, 2015; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). Some of the specific benefits identified include:

- Knowing their children better than anyone else, and being able to do what is necessary to meet their needs.
- Being in a good position to deal with their child's mood swings and reactions to certain situations.
- Being able to spend more time with the child.
- Getting to spend quality time with their child and being able to be a good role model.
- Being able to teach skills and valuable life lessons to their child.
- Being able to have a shared experience and shared memories with their child.
- Having an opportunity to expand their own social network, develop new skills and life lessons, and get an opportunity to work out.

In addition, Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, (1987) stated that "Children's perceptions of parental support and involvement in physical activity have been identified as positive predictors of enjoyment, participation in physical activity, and continued participation in youth sports" (p. 391). Thus, a number of positives seem to emerge when parents coach their own children. However, parents should weigh the benefits with the possible downsides before deciding to become a parent-coach.

#### Disadvantages/Downsides of Parental Coaching

Several disadvantages to parents coaching their own children have also been identified. For example, parents can become over-involved and children can feel that it is the parent, not them making the decision that they should play sports (Vallerand, Deci, & Ryan, 1987). Under these conditions, children may show less interest in sports and lower levels of enjoyment, with a possibility that children will drop out of the activity. While parents may know their child better than anyone else, parental coaching may lead to conflicts during practice, games, and at home (Lauer, 2016). In addition, children may become

frustrated with their parent's coaching tactics or team members may perceive that the coacher's child is receiving preferential treatment, which could be harmful to relationships the child has with teammates. Several other disadvantages for parents coaching their own children have been offered (LeBolt, 2016; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005; Wrestle Club, 2016) and should provide guidance for parents, practitioners and administrators for reviewing current policies and programs relating to youth sports coaching. They include:

- Parent-coaches tend to favor their own child. This may create strained relationships between child and teammates or between the parent and child.
- Parent-coaches tend to be harder on their own kids, e.g., criticism of child for mistakes, which could lead to child having negative emotional responses.
- Parent-coaches may be unaware of how they are behaving with their own kids and show a lack of understanding/empathy.
- Parent-coaches may see themselves as more qualified than they really are.
- Parent interacting with parents of other children on the team may be a problem; may affect previous friendships.
- Children separating parent as parent role from parent as coach.
- A kid never forgets the time you yelled at him in front of 100 people. Parent may be more apt to lose his/her temper with his or her own child.
- The car ride home from a game may be turned into a time for criticism...is the parent the coach or a parent during this time?
- Parent-coaches may set higher expectations for their children, thus creating undue pressure and leading to burnout.
- Child may not want parent as coach.

### **Suggestions for Helping Parents Be Successful as Parent-Coaches**

A variety of suggestions and tips have been presented to help parent become successful parent-coaches (Active.com, 2016; Clarke, 2016; Lauer, 2016; NAYS & Bach, 2016; Spiker, 2013; Weiss & Fretwell, 2005)

- Get children's input first/ know your child's sport's goals before becoming their coach.
- Take off your coach's hat at home...be careful about mixing parent and coach roles.
- Avoid too many extra practices at home (unless wanted by the child).
- Be a supportive parent first, coach second.
- Do not press your own ambitions on your child or create unfair or unwarranted expectations.
- Be careful about overanalyzing game and child's performance on the way home from practices or games.
- Treat all team members fairly by not providing preferential treatment or giving non-child team members less opportunity.
- Keep the experience as fun as possible...do not over coach.
- Be sensitive to generation gap issues...child and parent may view the same issue from a different perspective, i.e., respect your child's individuality.
- Know your coaching limitations and involve other coaches as needed.
- Learn to provide constructive comments and ways to improve; avoid harping on what went wrong or negatives.
- Be delicate with discipline. The louder you are, the less you will be heard.

- Focus on developing skills.
- Take coaching classes/trainings.

Several other suggestions have been made to help parents be successful parent-coaches:

- Don't bring sport issues to dinner table; have one spouse less involved in sports as a means of taking the pressure off and emphasizing other important aspects of family life.
- Initiate communications with other parents before the season to provide a better platform for handling parent problems on a one-on-one basis without involving the kids.
- Conduct an orientation meeting with parents that enables sharing of team and coach experiences; informing parents about the importance of attending parental tutoring/coaching; and providing parents with brochures on team rules/calendars, etc.
- Videotape one's coaching so that coaches can oneself in action and work to identify and implement issues that require changes in attitudes of behavior.

### **Training Opportunities for Parent Coaches**

To equip coaches with critical skills needed for coaching kids, youth sports coaches' training and education programs are available. For example, the National Youth Sports Coaches Association (NYSCA, 2016) within the umbrella of National Alliance for Youth Sports (NAYS) offers several education and training programs for volunteer coaches. The Coaching Youth Sports section covers topics such as working with parents, motivating kids, building confidence, instilling good sportsmanship, safety, and nutrition and hydration, among many other areas. In the Sport-Specific Training section, coaches learn how to teach the basic skills and fundamentals of the particular sport they are coaching, as well as effective drills to use during their practices. Videos are also available to help coaches.

### **Conclusion and Implications**

There are pros and cons regarding coaching one's own child. However, good advice and training is available for parents wishing to coach their own children. Coaching one's own children and others is a daunting task, which requires knowledge, skills, experience, and commitment so that it becomes an equally rewarding experience for the parent, child, and other children. In the end, the answer to the question, "should parents coach their own children", is 'It Depends'. If parents have too many issues regarding how to separate their role as coach and from their role as parent, the answer is probably 'No'. However, if parents can balance between the coach and parent roles and can create more positive cordial rather than contentious sporting experiences, the answer might be 'Yes' (Weiss & Fretwell, 2005). For parents thinking about becoming a coach for their child's team, there is a lot to think about.

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