

A Coaches Guide For Helping Parents Create An Environment Of Excellence For Their Child In Soccer

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We need to determine what makes an environment of excellence:

- for coaches
- for parents

How can we as coaches work with parents to ensure they get their part right?

What makes a great environment for kids in sports?

“Environment” means any physical or social setting where the players are learning or developing. The environment is created by the coaches, teammates and parents. Everyone’s role is different.

The coaches role in creating an environment of excellence is first to create opportunities for learning and development. An environment of excellence is made up of three things:

- Setting and ensuring standards and expectations
- Developing and nurturing motivation and confidence
- Create thinking players

So what is the parents role in the environment?

A great parental environment is one that helps kids thrive in their sports experience. Parents must:

- Ensure **MOTIVATION**
- Enhance **PERSISTENCE**
- Build **CONFIDENCE**
- **COMMUNICATE** effectively

These same constructs are used by coaches to improve player performance but when used (differently) by a parent **nurture** potential as opposed to **teach** it.

The purpose here is to:

- Educate parents and give them the “what to do” and as a result ...
- ... Enable the coach to do his / her job of developing players

For each construct (motivation, persistence, confidence, communication):

- Explain it
- Discuss the coaches role in building it
- Discuss how coaches can help parents do it

MOTIVATION

There are two types of motivation:

- Extrinsic motivation - the performance of an activity in order to attain some benefit as a result of participation.
- Intrinsic motivation - the performance of an activity for the sake of the activity itself. This type of motivation is better for persistence, especially when failures are involved.

Intrinsic motivation is made up of:

- Competence - making the child feel that he / she is good at the skill.
- Autonomy - how much choice the child feels he or she has in regards to the task.
- Relatedness - does the child feel he / she is a part of the group (team)?

The Coaches Role With Regard To Motivation

- Extrinsic
 - Based on self referenced improvement
 - Lots of praise (augmented feedback)
 - Let them know they have earned playing time
- Intrinsic
 - Competence - relative to self
 - Autonomy - be sure the children have choices when doing something
 - Relatedness - being part of the group

Parents Role With Regard To Motivation

- Best to just provide intrinsic motivation. They should NEVER offer money for scoring.
- When / where should they reward concretely?
 - For Effort
 - For Attitude
 - For Personal accomplishments
 - Do this with praise

Competence

- Have parents ask their children how they feel they did
- Have parents build up their esteem
- Have parents get in their ears at the key times (i.e., the car ride home after practices)
- Do not let the parents critique their child after games.
- Coaches need to keep parents apprised of progress throughout the year. Don't "NOT communicate." It is important to **regularly** communicate with parents.

Autonomy

- Instruct parents to provide opportunities for breaks during the year (down time for the players)
- Provide opportunities for more work and harder work
- Instruct parents to ensure that they are making their child feel a part of the team.
- Keep parents posted on things that may not be going well.
- Instruct them to be there ... not coach or offer advice to the child ... just be there.

PERSISTENCE

When someone is described as persistent, there is usually an immediate thought about how hard that person is working, or has worked, to obtain what they were going after. To persist means to "continue steadfastly or firmly in some state, purpose, course of action, especially in spite of opposition. Persistence = competitive.

Children judge success in one of two ways:

- Process Oriented: their focus is on improving and learning. They judge their success relative to their own improvement.
- Product Oriented: They are focused on winning and beating others. They consider themselves to be successful when they beat others. Conversely, they feel like a failure if they lose.

The best athletes in the world are both process oriented and product oriented.

If kids are too much product oriented and not enough process oriented, then when the going gets tough, they quit as they get anxious and have no coping skills or desire to improve or to learn what it takes to win. In other words, they do not persist.

Parents and coaches create climates that reward success during competition in one of two ways:

- Some parents (and coaches) create a **product environment** and stress winning and beating others above all else.
- Other parents (and coaches) create a **process environment** where they stress working hard and trying their best and where success is measured relative to themselves and not to others.

The important thing here is that the parents that constantly stress the product environment to a product child are saying “yes, winning is the most important thing.” That is fine as long as the child keeps winning, but they won’t also be winning. And when they don’t keep winning, they enjoy it less and won’t persist. Instead, they quit.

Coaching For Parents - Remind the parents that we need to create an environment of persistence in the face of adversity or competition. Remind them that often times kids will be wound up immediately after a game. This is a very bad time for parents to dissect the game for their child. The children do not want to hear about what the parents thought went well or bad during the game.

Coaches need to send out a well timed e-mail before a big game or tournament asking them to express to their child how excited they are to watch their kid play. Encourage parents to reward effort and not results. This is true in both games and training sessions. It is most important during stressful times of the season.

Get the parents to monitor themselves and other parents. What do they see? How do they rate their behavior relative to these statements?

CONFIDENCE

Can confidence be developed or is it innate? Most experts say it is a combination of both. We must build confidence brick by brick. This must be built slowly, over time, by both coaches and parents

Creating success - The number one source of confidence is if kids feel like they have done something before and had success.

Have parents get in their kids’ ears at certain times, in order to build up successes. Before or after a game is a good time to build up their confidence. Also, after a child has gone through a tough period.

Verbal feedback from trusted sources will develop confidence.

Ask the parents to:

- Stress to the players that improving is the goal, not achieving perfection.
- Be there for their child during the good times and the bad times.
- Say encouraging things at the right times (feed them lines).
- Be the calm in the storm.
- Be emotionally and physically ready. Give the child a big hug when things are going bad.
- Point out that it looked like they were thinking ...
- Tell their kids that they looked mentally in the game and it looked like ...

Feelings are very hard for kids to define.

Cultivating an honest self-awareness is very important. It provides them an opportunity to be who they are as opposed to who they are not.

Coaches need to make sure that the kids know what they are good at. Be sure they also know what areas each need improving.

Have parents help their kids revisit things that they are good at. Also, have the parents help their child to make lists and set goals to improve.

Be A Role Model

Remember that confidence is “the belief in ones self or ones abilities” or “full trust or trustworthiness or reliability of a person or thing.” A couple of things in this definition should jump right off the page, namely “belief in self,” “trust” and “reliability.” For a child to really get at these core components in confidence, they will need to start with a quality role model.

If kids see the parents as a person they can “trust,” that they can “rely” on and that “believes in their self” they are setting the tone for them and by the very definition they are building their confidence.

Have the parents be the calm in the storm. They need to be there with a hug with things are going bad.

COMMUNICATION

In order to drive an environment that creates confidence, persistence and motivation, there must be communication. This truly what it all comes down to. Communication means “the imparting or interchange of thoughts, opinions, or information by speech, writing or signs.”

Parents **MUST** listen to (not just hear) their children. This means that they are consciously paying attention to what they are trying to communicate. The science is to listen, but the art is the **timing** of when / how to listen and impart knowledge.

Parents need to give positive feedback to the child. They need to create a positive atmosphere that motivates their child to accept a challenge and risk errors or failure. Positive feedback must be about the person and not about the performance. “I really enjoy watching you play.” This says to the child that no matter what happens in a game, watching you play is a great joy.

Parents need to reward trying - If performance is discussed with the child, the parent’s lead comments regarding their child’s performance should **NOT** be corrective. Instead, it should be what they enjoyed about something that they tried.

When praising a performance that the child did well, be sure to praise effort vs. ability:

- When a child hears the parent say “Wow, you scored a great goal, you are a natural born soccer player,” what they are praising is their ability.
- When a child hears the parents say “Wow you scored a great goal, you really worked hard to get around that defender with that move,” what you are praising is their effort.

When the parent praises the effort, they are telling them that this is what is most important about what you do well. When they hear this, they will persist in the face of all things difficult, because they know that this is what is important (effort). But, when the parent praises the ability by saying he / she is naturally gifted, what you are really saying to the kid is that being great is what is important.

Constructive / corrective feedback: This is feedback that is aimed at providing the child with information that will help them improve their behavior or game. The corrective feedback, if the parent is going to give it, should be about effort, not quality.

Positive nonverbal feedback: Believe it or fake it, but no matter what, do it.

- When they do something for the good, we likely clap, nod our heads up and down with a smile and generally express satisfaction.
- The parent may have built up massive amounts of good will with positive feedback only to have it undone with a poorly timed shake of the head and eye roll that sends the message “I can’t believe you did that.” This will happen, but parents need to work hard to ensure that they minimize how often they show displeasure.

THE ENVIRONMENT IS THE KEY

This starts with the coaches. They must ensure that the parents:

- Ensure **MOTIVATION**
- Enhance **PERSISTENCE**
- Build **CONFIDENCE**
- **COMMUNICATE** Effectively