

During the session: Talking to parents

During a session there will be times where everything is going well, the coach and participants are actively engaged and there is not much you can contribute.

Rather than standing around doing nothing, this is a great time to assist the coach in another important way – by engaging with parents.

As with anything new, people will have initial thoughts on what the program is. For parents, this may range from a feeling that the presence of a coach developer (CD) means that the coach can't do their job and needs help. On the more positive side, they might view it as the club trying to raise coaching standards and any kind of extra support can only be a good thing for their kids. Either way, engaging the parents is a good idea.

Explaining the role of the CD is a good start. Emphasise that:

- > The CD program is broader than just you, to dispel any impression that their coach is being targeted. It is part of a program to help coaches across the club which is being run with the assistance of the relevant national sporting organisation and the Australian Sports Commission. It is also being run in a range of sports across the country.
- > Your job is to provide support and assistance to the coach, not to assess or mark their performance.
- > You are not there to coach, or 'take over' sessions.

Providing assistance to a coach in the club setting can be very beneficial because the assistance is practical and relates directly to the coach's actual role.

Another important way to support the coach is to help parents understand what the coach is trying to do. Parents are interested in what their kids are involved in, so there should be a willing audience. There will be a differing understanding of the sport and coaching among parents. Some may have little or no knowledge of the sport or coaching in general, so will be an 'open book'. Others will have played and/or coached in the past and have a view on how things should be done, which may not gel with what you and the coach are trying to achieve. Either way, it is good practice to engage parents and explain what is going on in the session and why. A better understanding of what's going on is likely to lead to improved parental support.

Talking with parents in this way is also a good opportunity to explain the 'club philosophy' including program aims and why sessions are planned and delivered in the way they are.

Finally, encourage parents to be involved, as appropriate, and engage them in conversation is a good start. Research shows that one of the most important drivers for people to volunteer is simply that they are asked. This may mean collecting balls that have gone out of bounds, running water or helping out in administrative matters such as entry forms, registrations and so on.