



Supporting parents and helping them be an effective part in the sporting child's development.

If you ask any coach, they will likely have had some conflict with at least one so called 'pushy' parent in their time as a coach. The parental role in children's sport is often misunderstood and not used as effectively as it could be by the coach(es). This stems from the classic sideline parent stereotype who is screaming on the side-lines, shouting at the coach, and telling their child that they need to do better.

Whilst I'm sure this does occur in triathlon, it really hasn't been the case in my experience. Parents have a massive influence on a young athlete's life. They are their biggest supporter and fan, their taxi driver, financial provider and above all else, their love and support network. As a coach, my motivation is to help athlete's to enjoy triathlon, have a positive experience in the sport and work towards achieving their goals as triathletes and as people. Put simply, parents and coaches want the same thing for the athlete; they want what is best for them and to see them succeed. For this reason, it is extremely important for the coaches to actively include and work with the parents. The following points are what I believe to be the most important aspects of embracing parents and helping them play an effective part in the sporting development of a child:

Set clear expectations.

Be upfront with the parents as to what you expect from them. This could be something as simple as asking them to wait until the end of a session to talk to you rather than whilst you are trying to coach. A basic example we use within the Welsh Triathlon Development Academy is that we ask athletes to have their own email address to receive information and contact the coaching staff. The parents are always copied in so they are aware of what is happening but it allows the athletes to begin to take some ownership for their sport rather than relying on their parents.



- **Appreciate the sacrifices parents make.**

Parents give up an awful lot of their time, money and energy to facilitate an athlete's sporting dreams. As coaches, I think we should make it clear we appreciate this! If parents weren't willing to bring their child to training, we wouldn't have anyone to coach! Organising and communicating in good time can be a big help to parents if they are trying to balance a number of commitments.

- **Maintain involvement.**

In my opinion, the worst thing you can do as coach is make a parent feel excluded from matters regarding their child. Keep them in the loop as to how their child is progressing and they can work with you to help the athlete achieve their goals and enjoy the sport. Ensure the athlete is at the centre of discussions where possible and work as a team.

- **Increase understanding.**

Share your knowledge with the parents and take the time to explain your reasoning. You don't have to go into great detail on why you have planned every session in the way that you have but if something is unclear, then take the time to explain. As an example, if you change a selection policy or process, make the effort to ensure the parents and athletes understand it and are able to buy into it.

- **Develop a professional relationship.**

Be friendly and approachable and interact with the parents where possible. Approach the relationship with a parent the same way you would an athlete to build trust and respect.

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