

**The *Play Like a Champion*<sup>™</sup> Educational Series**

**MYSA/PACT<sup>™</sup>  
COACH MANUAL**



**PART 5  
Developing Parents as  
Champion Partners**

Parents and Coaches Together

## **Developing a Communication System with Parents**

### ***“Getting on the Same Page”***

Within the *Champion* framework, the common denominator that you share with soccer parents is caring about the athlete. What and how you communicate with athletes and parents will largely determine your success and relationship quality with them throughout the season.

#### **I. STRATEGIES FOR CREATING A SYSTEM OF COMMUNICATION**

- Pre-season meeting with parents
- Pre-season feedback/needs sheet from athletes and parents
- One-on-one pre-season/early season meeting with athletes
- Weekly or bi-weekly one-minute “check-in” evaluations
- Midseason meeting with parents
- Utilize down time outside of practice or games to talk to parents
- Utilize captains and/or team leaders as age-appropriate
- Utilize assistant coaches
- Utilize parent liaison, team manager, *Champion Committee*
- Post-season debriefing meetings
- Post-season evaluations from parents and athletes
- Post-season celebration
- Email distribution list, team website

## II. CONDUCTING THE PRE-SEASON MEETING

- What does *Play Like a Champion™* mean to us?
- Using “we language” when talking about the team, not I/me language  
*Example:* “We are all responsible for making this season a success for the kids. We need to make sure that the kids have the proper equipment.”
- Your expectations of the kids (sportsmanship, commitment, work ethic, attitude)
- Your expectations for parental behavior
  - ⊕ Communication with you
  - ⊕ *Champion* behavior for yourself and for them on sidelines
  - ⊕ Clarify their role to team (schedules/locations, attendance, equipment, transportation, snacks, positive support)
- Clarify how your role is different from theirs in terms of the 3C strategies
- Your philosophy
- Share your personal coaching goals for the season
- Share team goals with parents once you’ve set them with your team
- Outline communication processes and boundaries
- Discuss playing time philosophy and system for playing time
- Share team rules and consequences (e.g., coming late, missing practice, poor sportsmanship, violation of team code) once you’ve set them with your team
- Gather information from parents in survey form (e.g., their concerns/issues, expectations, priorities, goals for child). Short answers.
- Facilitate realistic expectations for their child (e.g., statistics/odds for college, pro participation). See Appendix B.
- Decide together how inappropriate adult behavior on the sidelines will be addressed and consequences.
- Appoint, or ask for volunteers for, a *Champion Committee*.

### III. SETTING BOUNDARIES FOR COMMUNICATION

The following are examples of appropriate/inappropriate times for parents to discuss their child or soccer issues with the coach. You should decide what your boundaries will be. Explain to parents that communication is open except under the following conditions.

For example:

- Not during any time that will take time away from practice, coaching or preparation (before practice, during game or practice)
- Not in front of the children
- Not while either parent or coach is angry
- Not late at night/during coach's family/personal time (lay out specific times with okay/not to call coach at home)
- Not immediately after a critical incident. Take 1–2 days to reflect before you speak or confront the coach or parent
- Not to discuss an issue the athlete hasn't addressed him/herself. If child has a problem, encourage and empower child to address issue directly with coach. Discourage parents from being the "middle man." Address athlete issues with parent only if athlete has first attempted to address issue with coach (developmental issue)
- Stress to parents that you may have to agree to disagree
- Think through how you want to communicate via email. Set boundaries and guidelines.

*Example:* A coach received unsolicited training sessions and line-ups from a parent via email.

**Are there boundary concerns you have when dealing with parents?**

IV. STRATEGIES FOR DEALING WITH AN ANGRY SOCCER PARENT

Note: Be aware of the limitations of e-mail, voicemail and other forms of electronic communication. Face-to-face communication is best. When engaging in face-to-face communication, keep the following in mind.

- Do not react
- Speak in a calm voice
- Make eye contact
- Let the person "vent"
- Agree to disagree if necessary
- Reserve the option of asking the parent to make an appointment and come back or call when the parent and/or coach are in a better emotional state
- Use the Bridge method of communication to handle conflict



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## The Bridge

The following is a proven process for working through conflict.

Johnson and Johnson's

### "The Bridge"

A procedure of conflict resolution adapted for MYSAs coaches and parents.

From Johnson, D. W. & Johnson, F. P. *Joining Together: Group Theory And Group Skills 6/e*  
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**Conflict:** Disagreement on playing time

1. **"I want..."** Describe what you want, need and what your goals of the interaction are. Be specific. Describe specific behaviors you have observed which does not include any judgment or evaluation or inferences about the person's motives, personality or attitudes. Avoid personal attacks by making explicit it is the behavior, not the person that is under discussion. Letting others know what you want should not be confused with demanding that they act as you think they should. Use "I" statements. Describe how the behavior is blocking what you want, or team goals.

**What TO say:**

*"I am addressing playing time because I have witnessed some upset parents and children after a few games. I want everyone to understand that I am trying to be as fair as possible when allocating playing time minutes. I'd like to reiterate my policy about playing time. I divide the game minutes equally amongst all players, unless we are in a tight game situation (a must-win game, etc). In that case, the more skilled players will get more playing time. If you or your child has a problem with the playing time they receive, please feel free to come talk to me about it. When parents complain behind my back it creates a negative climate and makes the athletes second guess my coaching. We all need to be on the same page."*

**What NOT to say:**

*"I've noticed a few angry parents and children after our games. For example, last week I overheard Jim and Bob criticizing my subbing decisions in the second half of our game because their kids weren't playing. Parents should not be whining and complaining about playing time, or any other strategy decisions I make. You are not to question my coaching. What I say goes. We play to win, and therefore I will play the best players in order to make that happen. If you don't like my mentality, then you need to have your child play in a recreational league instead."*

2. **"I feel..."** Describe your feelings. Explain how and why you feel the way you do about the situation or the behavior.

**Conflict:** Disagreement on playing time

**What TO say:**

*"It is incredibly difficult to make playing time decisions. It is not easy or fun. I feel awful when I know my decisions may upset the kids and the parents."*

**What NOT to say:**

*"I feel angry when parents question my coaching ability. If the game is close, the best players will play. It is as simple as that. It may not be fair, but we have to do what we must to win."*

3. **"The reason is..."** Exchange reason for why you feel how you feel. Highlight cooperative element that you are working together and developing and maintaining the relationship is important in the process of negotiating the conflict.

*Example: "I think we need to talk about the tension I feel between us."*

**What TO say:**

*"The reason that I am bringing up this issue is because it is important we are all on the same page about playing time. I want to have open communication with parents, so if you have an issue, please talk to me directly. I try to be as fair as possible when it comes to playing time decisions and have put a lot of thought into playing time issues. I hate to see the children upset over playing time. I care about your children individually, as well as the team as a whole. I make decisions based on what I think is the best for the good of the whole team. I want us all to have a fun and successful season."*

**What NOT to say:**

*"The reason I am bringing up this issue is because I'm sick of parents and children complaining because playing time is not fair or equal across players."*

4. **"How do you feel about what I have just said?"** Ask the individual or group what their position is and how they feel. Listen carefully and do not react or interrupt. Also ask the individual to paraphrase what they understand you have just said.

**What TO say:**

*"What do you feel about what I've said? Does my policy sound fair?"*

**What NOT to say:**

*"Does everyone understand the policy, now? If you don't like my policy, find a new team for your child."*



5. ***"My understanding of what you just said is..."*** Paraphrase what you understand the individual just said and how they feel. **This should be self-explanatory.**

6. ***"Maybe we should..."*** or ***"How should we solve this problem?"*** Invent options for mutual gain (win-win) and define the conflict as a mutual problem, which should be solved mutually. Agree on consequences.

**What TO say:**

*"We, coaches and parents, are in this together to do what is best for the athletes, so **how should we solve this problem** of playing time? I need your support and the team needs your support. It is an important issue. **Maybe we should** set a time to discuss various options regarding playing time."*

**What NOT to say:**

*"Now that I've reiterated my playing time policy, I expect the amount of complaining to reduce drastically. There's really no reason to question or complain about my playing time decisions anymore. Please tell your children about my playing time policy."*

7. ***"Let's shake."*** Reach a wise "win-win" agreement. A wise "win-win" agreement is:

- a. viewed as fair by everyone involved
- b. based on principles that can be justified by objective criteria (tie in moral principles here: trust, respect, team/community rules made by democratic process, fair)
- c. strengthens coach and parent's ability to work together cooperatively in the future
- d. strengthens coach and parent's ability to resolve future conflicts constructively