



Child Protection in Sport Unit

Poor parental behaviour and its effects on children in sport

Often, complaints and concerns arise about the negative behaviour of some parents and the impact this can have on their own and other children, coaches, officials and the club itself.

The behaviour of some parents can be challenging. They may:

- get carried away on the sidelines – leading to intimidating, aggressive, threatening or abusive behaviour towards their own or other children, coaches, officials or other parents and spectators
- push their child to achieve in sport while neglecting other aspects of their lives
- have a ‘win at all costs’ approach to their child’s participation in sport
- have aspirations for, or expectations of, their child that are not realistic or that differ from those of the club
- are verbally or physically abusive towards their own or other children during or following competitions
- make negative comments about their child or other children’s efforts, or mock and humiliate them
- threaten or fight with coaches, officials or other spectators
- contradict the advice of the coach

John, who has coached a team for the last 8 years, said:

"I've seen parents running onto the pitch and start fights with other parents. I've been to matches where supporters for the other team have been verbally abusing my players and I've had to speak to that team's coach about getting those parents under control."

Other coaches have said:

"His dad was shouting ‘you’re a disgrace to the family’."

"The opposition coach shouted at the referee and one of our parents started shouting at the opposition coach. The official couldn’t control it and the next thing parents were squaring up – all a bit mental and scary."



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Effects of poor parental behaviour

Poor parental behaviour can affect young participants in a variety of ways:

- threatening words or behaviour, regardless of who this is directed at, are frightening and upsetting for children. Behaviour such as this certainly contravenes the parents' (and spectators') code of conduct that many clubs and sports have in place. In extreme cases, it may also constitute criminal actions that result in the involvement of the police
- shouting from the side-lines may disrupt the attention of players on the pitch
- parental 'advice' may distract players or athletes from what the coach is telling them, particularly if they're giving conflicting information
- children can be embarrassed by parents who draw attention to themselves in negative ways
- children may be worried that their parent's behaviour will annoy the coach or affect their selection for the team
- consistently bad parental behaviour can lead to the child's exclusion from their sport
- focus on the sports activities at the expense of other aspects of the child's life can put undue pressure upon the child, impact upon their social and educational development and potentially lead to disappointment if the child does not meet expectations
- negative feedback to a child can undermine their confidence, with the possible result that the child underperforms or withdraws from the sport