

Being a Parent Coach



How does a parent become a coach?

A voluntary decision?

Or

Pushed / fallen into the role because there are no other volunteers!

Going from shooting in the driveway to looking at 10 to 20 eyes waiting for you to tell you what to do can be a bit daunting. But remember even when you are just playing with your child you are coaching so you aren't totally new to this!

Parent coaches make up the majority of coaches at the club Basketball level, roughly 75% in fact. The majority fall into the role, either by pressure or by being in the wrong place at the wrong time! So, all the challenges of coaching are further complicated by the dynamic of one of your own children being in the team.

Getting Started

One of the immediate challenges is asking yourself do you have to temper the expectations you have of your own children and acknowledge what is an aspiration and what is immediately achievable? Have you set the bar too high now you have stepped out of the stands and onto the sideline? Do you communicate with them in a different way you would never communicate with another child?

The most important thing for many parent coaches starting out is finding the balance between being perceived to over favour their own child versus being overly harsh, either to balance it out in your own mind or to avoid the wrong perception. There is no simple answer to how to do this and ultimately it will come down to have a strong sense of self awareness. Remember why as a coach you put your hand up or agreed to take on the role. It was to support your child and improve the journey they had on their Basketball Pathway. If you turn into a dictatorial, harsh figure on the sideline you negate the whole reason you got involved in the first place. The perception of others will be what tips the see saw into overcompensating. If you have no self-awareness and favour your child because in your mind it the right thing to do, be aware it will most likely rub other parents up the wrong way. Although they are not coaching, they are still in their minds committing the same amount of time by being present and supporting their children and want them to have the equal rewards.

This is a process, and you will have ups and downs, find what works for you and your dynamic. First and foremost, you will be a parent so you will always have the unconditional love and wish to support your child emotionally. When you are in coach mode you will have to ease back from this and treat them in the same way with the same emotional boundaries you treat the other players. Be prepared and prepare them for the inevitable times you will have to give them difficult feedback or review a negative portion of their performance.

Some suggestions we have to help make the Parent – Coach Experience easier

1. Using your partner. They have stake in the game too! Ask them to be a set of eyes off the court to keep you in check if you are tilting too far one way or the other. They will also be able to get a sense of what it looks like one level removed from the actual game and they can ask you the questions / raise the issues before another parent brings it up. To maintain the boundaries at home again use your partner to pull you up if you are moving into “coach” mode or talking shop at home, one idea is to have a fines or tasks jar you must put in or take out of any time you slip.
2. If you can, recruit a co-coach or assistant. If you and your child have had an argument about something unrelated to basketball, going to run a training with them for 90 minutes might be both your ideas of hell. Ask your co-coach/assistant to facilitate that drill or group, provide feedback and offer compliments in that instance. They can also function as a sounding board if they think you are being too harsh on your own child, they might also be a parent and you can end up balancing each other out perfectly!
3. Be aware of the line between home and the court. When are you coach and when are you Mum or Dad? Does it start first thing in the morning with the conversations over cereal or not until the car ride to the court? When does it switch back? As soon as you finish the team talk post game or not till you get in the car to travel home or in some cases not till you get home! Everyone will have an experience of debriefing a performance or a situation with their parents in the car, now multiply that if your parent was the coach. How would you manage that with hindsight? Are you asking open questions, are you listening and most importantly what works for your own child and in your context. As a coach immediately after a game you are always high or low on emotion, don't put any nerves or anxieties onto your child due to their proximity as it could have a much more long-term impact on their enjoyment. Talk to you your son/daughter about where you separate from parent to coach and what that means for how you talk to each other and how you interact. This will mean you can do your best to keep certain areas as a parent and certain areas as a coach.

It's important that even though we are outlining all the difficult things that come with being a parent coach, the overwhelming positive is the quality time you get to spend with your child doing an activity that they enjoy. Hopefully, you can create memories and experiences that you will still be talking about when they consider coaching their own child in the future. Parents are our very first coaches, they teach us to walk, talk, eat and everything in between. They know how to motivate us and how to pick us up when we fail. See what we mean from earlier? You might not be an experienced Basketball coach yet, but you have been doing this coaching stuff for a while!

Who are you the coach versus you the parent?

Think of someone you respect, can be in work, personal life or even just someone you have only seen on TV. What is it about them that imprints on you? Is it their words, their actions, or their behavior?

After you read those questions, you would have pictured that person in your head, at their best, the time you respected them the most. When you are coaching, remember you are someone that will be looked at in that way. Impressionable minds will consider what you say, what you do and how you react. As their coach you have a position, they will look up to, how you behave will influence how they behave. Do you ride the results rollercoaster or are you a Zen master on the sidelines? Do you communicate positively or sometimes slip into forceful proclamations? Do you practice the values you preach in your players, be that resilience, adaptability, or creativity?

One pitfall that parents can fall into, either as coaches or sometimes just as well-meaning supporters on the sideline is imprinting their experiences onto their children. Often, it's done subconsciously as you try to protect them from situations you had in the sport, but this can often cause more conflict with your children who have a different perception of not only the world but their ambitions in the sport to you. If you were or are a talented player as well it can be even more challenging, remember the coaches job is to facilitate what the children want to get out of basketball not what you wanted at that age.

As a coach, it is even more difficult than just a parent to take that one step back from analyzing every little action or inaction of your child. Only you can catch yourself to make sure you are watching the "whole" game and not just following your child around the court. Often if you found you have done that it compounds the problem of being overly critical or praising of their performance as that is what you have spent much of the game watching.

Another key conversation to have when you take over or start coaching a team is with any other parents who you are friends with. Similarly, to your discussion with your child about boundaries, have a similar one with them. Acknowledge that you will happily talk to them the same way you would talk to any other parent about concerns or questions they have but emphasize that you value your non sport related friendship and want to avoid any pressure or accusations of bias by keeping real clarity and transparency around when you talk about the team.

One of the things that it is vital for a Parent/Coach to avoid is something everyone has been guilty of when leaving a sporting event, "oh the referee was shacking today, they definitely cost us" or "Did you hear that person shouting out, disgraceful." Once the Blame Game is underway then it can become a deluge and remember what we said early, children are fantastic mimics, they will see the coach doing it and think "oh if they are unhappy with the referees I should be too, it wasn't my fault it was theirs." This means they are not truly reflecting on their own performance and changes their attitude to the game as whole.

It's no surprise that in the professional sporting realm as well that coaches' kids tend to become coaches themselves. That's often because a coach is always one of the first to arrive and the last to leave. As a kid this can be an imposition, less time in bed and more time hanging around after. Take it as an opportunity to make them feel more involved or help them warm up before the game and give them the extra focus that you can't during practice.

Wrapping Up

If you have read to the end of this resource, thank you for volunteering your time to coach. Across all of Australia you are a mighty army of volunteer coaches, and we will continually be looking for ways to provide resources to you to make your journey along the coaching pathway enjoyable and beneficial to both you are personally and your team.

Keeps your eyes peeled on [Basketball Australia Coaching Resource \(www.coach.basketball.net.au\)](http://www.coach.basketball.net.au) for more updates to come.