

GlenEd Soccer - Coaching Concepts

Topic 2: Effective Communication

We volunteer as a soccer coach not because we have too much free time on our hands but because we care about our children and we want to be involved in their lives to help them experience the game. It may be that we love the game and played the sport competitively in a youth program, high school or even at the college level. Regardless of the reason, because we have decided to coach a team in GlenEd, there are some guidelines that might help you: better teach the game to the players; better educate parents; and providing proper expectations to ensure a productive and fun experience for all involved. It isn't just what we say but when we say it and the circumstances surrounding the message. Here are a few things to consider.

Summary: brief, on topic, often enough to avoid misunderstandings, age appropriate, focus on positive

HOW we say what we say

- Have I introduced myself to everyone and provided multiple ways to be reached (cell, text, email)?
- Am I approachable? Plan for sometime every practice/game to connect with the families on your team or be available if they want to ask a question, seek advice, etc. Let parents know when you have time to talk (after practices or games, online, texting)
- Create a good working relationship with you manager. Keep that person well informed and let them know what you expect of them.
- Have you provided advanced notice of practices, games, tournaments, club volunteer hours?
- When possible remove sun glasses to make eye contact.
- You face the sun, not players or parents
- Physically get on the level of the person you are talking with. If players are sitting on the ground or on the bench.. you get to that level, don't pace or stand over them.
- Use a tone that lets them know you are supportive of them, keep your negative emotions in check.

WHAT we say

- Package criticism with praise, try not to be overly negative regardless of the situation
- Let players know it's ok to mess up. Practice makes perfect. Risk mistakes in practice.
- Let parents know your expectations of their behavior on the sidelines. That you are ultimately responsible for their actions, the players, and your assistants. Respect the club by limiting comments to praise or encouragement. No comments about refs, other teams players, coaches.
- Keep in mind the age of the players. Younger players have shorter attention spans and will only listen to a little instruction.

- Remember our goal is “player development” and that winning will result by developing individual skills and a good understanding of the game. Avoid showing disappointment with a loss. Players know if they didn’t play well. Don’t focus on the problem, offer suggestions on how to improve. It’s easy to point out a mistake, the trick is to provide better ways to avoid them in the future.

WHERE we have conversations

- Praise in public, criticize in private (avoid too much focus on criticism)
- If you are addressing a player issue - don’t do it close to other parents, suggest a private location (cell phone, text, email, or meeting away from the field)
- Limit outside distractions. Meet in a place that provides adequate backdrop based on conversation.

WHEN we have conversations

- Avoid conversations when either person is emotional (24 hr rule... reflect and calm down prior to addressing issue)
- Preseason - lay out the year, discuss nights best for practice, advise locations for league games, options for tournaments, conflicts for the families (other sports, vacations, trips, or special circumstances that will provide opportunities for others to assist carpooling, etc)
- Pregame - make sure the players know who is starting, what positions they are playing, goals for the half, captains, etc. Discuss the field conditions, weather, people issues (shoes tied, everyone healthy, bathroom breaks needed, etc)
- Halftime - find 2 or 3 things to discuss based on first half. Quick hits... could be good or bad.. but keep them limited to 3 or less. Give the players time to talk. Ask them for ideas (depending on the age) or even ask if everyone is having fun... just the idea of communicating brings players closer together and forms bonds that will help when playing.
- Postgame - include the parents if possible... summary of game 2 or 3 items... could reflect on same items from halftime and say how you noticed a change or not. See if anyone is hurt or has anything to say about the game. Tell them when the next practice is and who will be able to attend.
- Postseason - it is always good to have a party or gathering at the end of the season to wrap it all up. Talk about your focus for the season and how the players improved. Highlight the fun memories and give parents and players a chance to share their stories as well. Again, this bonding will help solidify your team and create an atmosphere that they will want to protect. Parents and players will take pride in your team and work harder for success as they realize they are playing for each other.

- If there are issues - don't be defensive... we have 2 ears to listen twice as much as we talk. Give the parents a forum to speak and really listen to their concerns before defending your actions. There may be areas to improve and might be valid feelings shared by others on the team - dismissing them will create a ripple effect among the others and likely drive a wedge between you and those parents.
- Don't avoid conflict it will fester on the sideline like a cancer. Find out the cause and respectfully address it as best as possible. Many issues are caused by unaddressed misunderstandings.