

## What to Expect from a Volunteer Coach

As with volunteer umpires and referees, volunteer coaches are a critical part of keeping youth teams intact and giving kids the opportunity to play. Unfortunately, because of poor treatment of these volunteers, many end up quitting. In fact, in the U.S. in recent years, whole seasons have been put in jeopardy because of a lack of volunteers.

If your child is on a team that's coached by a volunteer, it's even more important that as a parent or guardian, you support the coach and help them keep the team moving forward. So, how can you help them out? Read on.

### **Do: Set a good example for athletes and other parents**

Behaviors tend to be imitated: If you're expressing irritation at how a coach is handling the batting lineup in the big game, you're likely to be joined by other irate parents. And the same is true in the opposite direction. By celebrating the team, cheering for the players, and telling the coach what a great job they did, you're helping create a positively-charged team environment.

If you see other parents exhibiting negative behaviors on the sidelines, try to gently nudge them towards a more positive mindset (or at least a quiet one). The athletes on the team will also see how you interact with the coach. If they sense that you don't respect the coach, it's likely that they will develop the same mindset.

### **Do NOT: Expect perfection**

It's tempting to equate a coach with an omnipotent, all-powerful being who has all the answers. But the reality is that most volunteer coaches have a lot of enthusiasm, typically some background in the sport, but little coaching experience or related education. Keep that in mind when you're tempted to blame the coach for a poor team performance.

The same will be true of how the volunteer coach interacts with players and parents. They're often busy parents just like you and are simply helping out for the love of the sport, so they may not have the ability to use advanced sports psychology techniques or even to take extra time post-game to have a team meeting.

### **Do: Remember that each coach has his or her unique style**

You may find that a volunteer coach is teaching a certain skill in a way that you may not entirely agree with, but unless there's an actual danger present for your athlete, don't get involved. You may even be pleasantly surprised at the end of the season when it turns out that style of kicking the soccer ball works better for your young athlete. (Don't forget the downsides of over-parenting in sport!)

### **Do NOT: Overlook bad behavior on the coach's part**

Making a bad call on which tactic to use during a game is one thing, but a coach who uses a racial slur or screams at players is a different story. While a volunteer coach isn't expected to be perfect at coaching, they are expected to conduct themselves appropriately in all situations. That means if you see instances of bullying, discrimination, or any kind of physical altercations with

players, it's critical that you report them to the proper authorities (including the sport organization and [SafeSport](#)).

**Do: Remember what really matters in youth sport**

Remember, the overarching goal of youth sports is to develop healthy, well-rounded, good humans. Even if you don't agree with the coach's choice of tactics for a certain game, remember that your child is there to have fun and learn.

**Do NOT: Expect extra time and attention**

A full-time paid coach should be available to your athlete for extra help and advice, but while a volunteer coach may have the best intentions, it's likely they won't be able to dedicate that same amount of time and effort to your athlete. If your athlete is struggling to master a skill, consider offering to pay for an extra session (or seek help from a professional in the sport). A volunteer may not be able to immediately return calls or texts in non-urgent situations either.

**What you can do to help a volunteer coach:**

1. Rather than offering your advice from your chair on the sidelines, get involved by asking how you can help. Maybe you can bring snacks or be on the start line collecting jackets at the cross-country meet. Volunteer coaches generally are working in programs that don't have big budgets for any extras, so any way that you can help the team is great.
2. If you want to help out, don't just coach from the sidelines, offer to volunteer to be an assistant coach! This is especially true if you have experience that you could bring to the team that could help the players (and the volunteer coach). While coaching 'help' is rarely appreciated when it's coming from a parent on the sidelines, it's usually deeply appreciated when you're actually out there helping on a weekly basis at practices as well as competitions.
3. Set a good example for your children and for the other parents around you by remembering to thank volunteers—including the coach. And don't just say thank you when the team has a win, be gracious even when a game doesn't go well.

**Takeaway**

Give some grace to volunteer coaches, who are often doing this job on top of full-time careers and parenting. Show respect, practice gratitude, and try to help rather than pointing out problems or flaws.



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