



## 6 Ways Parents Can Help Their Athlete Resolve a Coach-Athlete Conflict

When a young athlete has a conflict with their coach, it's often hard for parents to know exactly how to handle it. It's tempting to immediately [interfere](#) and email the coach on behalf of your child, but that's not always the best solution for your growing athlete.

Helping your athlete advocate for themselves and deal with conflict head-on, rather than relying on you to have the hard conversations, is going to be better for your child in the long-term. Nadia Kyba, MSW, TrueSport Expert and President of Now What Facilitation, shared these tips for smooth [coach-parent communication](#) when it comes to conflict.

### **Open lines of communication early**

Ideally, a coach will have a [meeting with parents](#) of players earlier in the season, but if the coach doesn't organize one, consider asking to set one up. Kyba explains that this early discussion of what the season looks like, how the coach approaches [conflict](#), and the best ways to communicate with him or her can avoid conflict entirely or provide a script for how to deal with it when it does happen.

"Having that meeting at the beginning of the season can let you and the coach discuss expectations about how to manage conflicts, as well as setting [boundaries](#) around certain communication methods and meeting times." She adds that a good rule is to avoid meeting or communicating with a coach within 24 hours of a competition or race to allow time for all parties to cool off from any conflicts.

### **Coaches are people too**

Remember, [coaches have a lot of demands on their time](#), and at the school sport level, likely aren't getting paid much to lead the team. There is a lot of pressure on them, and parents often forget this when they feel their athletes are being ignored or under-appreciated.

"Sometimes, it's a full-time job just managing the parents," Kyba notes. "I've seen many coaches who are so generous with their time, they're so committed and passionate, and they just want to coach – but actually what they're doing is getting bombarded by emails from parents."

Before you send an annoyed email, bear in mind that your child may be dealing with a conflict, but the coach is likely inundated with other issues as well.

### **Watch your temper**

This applies to both how you approach a coach and how you speak to your athlete about the coach, says Kyba. It's likely that you're inclined to side with your child in a conflict situation but remember that insulting the coach in front of your athlete encourages them to lose respect for the coach as well.

"We all have people we don't really like, but we still need to respect or get along with them, and that's an important lesson for kids to learn from you," says Kyba. Additionally, [yelling at a coach](#) is likely going to embarrass your child more than it helps them.

### **Encourage your athlete to communicate directly with the coach**

Taking matters into your own hands rather than letting the athlete handle coach communication is common for parents, says Kyba. But unfortunately, it's rarely effective: Coaches are less likely to want to help an athlete whose parent is always speaking for them, and are much more likely to be impressed by an athlete who [communicates](#) directly.

"When your child is empowered to manage the conflict, it's better for them in the long-term," says Kyba. You can [help your athlete](#) practice the hard [conversations](#), but let your child learn to handle conflict.

### **Write it out**

Teach your child to understand what his conflict or complaint actually is, and what resolution he would like to see.

"The script I use is simple: You describe the issue. Then, you name what you're feeling about it. Then, you talk about your need. And finally, what is your request?" Kyba explains. Sometimes, the final request will show that the conflict isn't with the coach at all but is about the athlete needing to do something differently. Gaining clarity before asking for a meeting will help avoid making the conflict bigger.

### **Know when to go to the administration**

It's important to remember that there are personality-based conflicts, such as disagreement over which player is starting in a game or a problem with a certain aspect of practice, that should be worked out between the coach and the athlete. But there are others, where an athlete feels bullied or there's any type of physical or emotional harassment, that should be addressed to the proper authorities immediately. When personal safety and mental health are at risk, as a parent, you need to seek outside help and shouldn't feel conflicted about doing so.

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Try and look at the big picture before asking for a meeting with the coach – or sending an angry email in the heat of the moment.

Kyba recommends pressing pause and waiting a full 24 hours to cool down before taking the next step. Often, that distance will allow you and your athlete to [tame](#) feelings of anger and have a more rational discussion. You might even find that the entire conflict will seem a lot less serious the next day.



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