

# A Guide for Those Coaching or Thinking of Coaching Their Own Children

**Gordon MacLelland of Working with Parents in Sport (WWPIS) shares his thoughts and reflections on the challenging role of wearing two hats**

**A large number of parents become their child's sports coach at some point in time, some through choice and some who simply 'fall' into the role.**

We champion the sports parent coach, and rightly so, as without their hard work and enthusiasm many sports teams, clubs, programmes and pathways would not exist.

Coaching provides a wonderful opportunity for parent and child to bond further; a chance for the parent to be actively involved in their child's life and, most importantly, a chance to create great memories together that you can share for the years to come.

I remember fondly the time my own father spent coaching me 'mini rugby' when I was between the ages of six and eight. I can still picture him now kitted out in his tracksuit, smiling and encouraging all who wanted to participate in the game of rugby.

**However, in making the decision to coach your own children there are a number of things that need to be considered.**

Here are a few helpful tips derived from my personal experience of wearing two hats to ensure that your own experience will be a positive one for the child, coach and the rest of the family.

**Before you volunteer have a discussion with your children.**

Ask how they feel about you potentially being their coach; and discuss with your wider family network, to see how they feel about you taking on the role. Very often it's an earlier start and longer day for all members of the family when a coach lives under their roof.

If you decide that the coaching role may not be right for you and your family at this point in time, you can revisit your conversation at a later date and offer to help in other ways. These can be just as fulfilling, and while not quite as obvious, will enable you to support your child, club/team and sport when you volunteer your time.

**Ensure there is a difference between you being the parent and the coach.**

In other words, are you able to separate the 'Two Hats?'

**Your child and you need to remember that when you are the coach you need to treat all players equally and provide equal time for all.**

As soon as you switch the hat and become the parent again you need to make sure your child knows that you care about them the most. Work hard not to 'blur the line' between the roles and have agreed approaches in place. This may be as simple as agreeing how your family manage an injury during a competition or the 'title' you have at the sessions before returning to mum or dad.

**Try to strike the right balance on praising and penalising your child.**

I found this very tough as a coach and was probably too tough on my own child and did not give out enough praise for the right things and when they improved. Many coaches that we have spoken to find this extremely demanding and worry about how they are perceived by other parents and players; as well as their own children and family. Whether it is 'game time', feedback, selection and roles within the group; all your decisions are being viewed by your parents.

**Think about your conversations with your own child.**

Try not to discuss other parents and players with your child, particularly in a moment of frustration. A negative comment can easily be misconstrued out of context. It's easy to avoid, yet a simple trap to fall into.

It makes things difficult for a child who is likely to be good friends with other athletes and know the parents you may be commenting upon. Your child needs to make their own decisions and choices about the other people, and you should not be looking to influence them.

Remember, they are not your assistant and our children will often take their lead from what we say and what we do. Lead by example.

### **Work hard to be the ultimate role model – you are in a privileged role!**

We can't expect to be perfect all the time but remember that we are in such a privileged position when coaching young people and our children.

In a position of power, we need to act in a way that would make your son or daughter proud of you as a parent and a coach. Your actions and behaviours influence how your participants act.

Particularly during competition when you may feel under the most pressure, remember that your child is not the only one that's performing.

**You have chosen to coach and need to support all the participants, and how you act, react and manage your emotions will set the tone for those all around you with your behaviour.**

## **Don't let the coaching role take over the rest of your life.**

Try not to spend the rest of the week practising further at home and talking about last week's competition the whole time or the so called 'big one' that is coming up. It is too much overload for your child and for the rest of the family. Consider agreeing that when travelling to and from practice you talk with your child about the sport, away from this you leave it until the next session, or they begin the conversation. You may be keen to talk through your latest thinking and tactics but use the other coaches rather than your child.

Do other things as a family away from the sport. That way everyone stays fresh and does not resent the huge commitment that you have taken on.

**My opinion is you shouldn't coach your own child forever. Experiencing working with other coaches in other environments is so important for all children's development.**

This becomes more important if you started coaching your child at the younger age groups. Whilst they may be positive about you taking on the role initially, their views may change as they get older.

Keep checking in with them and keep the conversation lines open to discuss if it is working for everyone. Ideally you should be able to devote some of your time to just being dad or mum (supporting from the side-lines) and if it's time to let go (as the coach), let them go and step aside.

**When they get to a certain stage and they are keen to progress, hand them over to a qualified coach and let them do their job without interference. Support from afar!"**

**– David Leadbetter, World Leading Golf Coach**

Finally, enjoy the experience. Without parent coaches like you we would have little or no sport and most clubs and teams wouldn't even exist.