

A Parent's Guide to Effective Coaching



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Throughout this resource, the pronouns he, she, him, her and so on are interchangeable and intended to be inclusive of both males and females.

The term parent includes carers, guardians and other next of kin categories.

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1 Introduction

When children express an interest in taking up a sport or joining a club, how do you decide what the best option is for them? What type of club and what kind of coach would be best for your child? If you are a parent who has some background knowledge and experience in sport, you may already have a good understanding of the type of sporting environment in which your child will flourish. If, however, you feel you need more information on the key aspects of effective coaching, this guide should help you understand more about:

- how a good club should be structured
- what factors you should consider when choosing a club
- what you should be looking for in the coaches who work with your child
- how to recognise effective coaching
- what to do if you have any issues with the club or the coaching
- what you may be able to do to support your child and help the coach during sessions.

Being able to recognise effective coaching will help you appreciate and relate to the activities and learning your child is experiencing. Also, by increasing your awareness of what you might be able to do to support your child and the coach, you could become more involved in this aspect of your child's development.

Think: What kind of club would be best for your child?



- How confident is your child? Will your child be OK going to a club where he or she doesn't know anyone?
- Has your child tried this sport before, at school, perhaps; or will this be an entirely new experience?
- Is your child more interested in individual or team sports?
- What does your child want from joining a sports club?

It is friendly, sociable and encouraging. I already knew the instructor from another club, and when he formed a new club, we followed.

I made sure I went along and asked questions and understood what they offered.

2 How a Good Club is Set Up

Clubmark

If you have no direct experience or knowledge of the club, one of the key indicators of a good club is whether it has the Clubmark award. This award was set up by Sport England as the only national accreditation scheme across sports for clubs with junior sections. Sport England set up this award in recognition of how valuable it is for sports clubs to make a strong commitment to develop high quality, welcoming environments for children. The website – www.clubmark.org.uk – provides clubs with relevant, up-to-date information.

The award is built around a set of important criteria to ensure the clubs that have achieved accreditation operate to a consistent set of standards. These clubs are listed on the online Clubmark database. Each club is reassessed after three or four years on all areas of the award. In addition, each year, clubs are also asked to complete an annual 'health check' to ensure that no major changes have taken place.

Criteria for a good club

If the club you are interested in does not have the Clubmark award, you could use the Clubmark criteria to assess how well developed and organised the club is before deciding whether it's the best one for your child. The key criteria that must be satisfied to achieve the award cover the aspects listed below.

- The **playing programme** relates to the coaching, training and competition schedule that the club offers in order to support your child and fulfil his or her potential. All sports should be planning for the **long-term development** of children and not be concerned simply with winning or success in the short term. Take the time to find out about:
 - club coaching sessions, including the ratio of coaches to young participants and the minimum number of sessions
 - competitive structures: the club has to provide suitable competition within the club and against other clubs according to the sport's governing body guidelines
 - coaches: clubs should invest in training for all their coaches; all coaching activities should reflect best practice in the long-term development of children and young people in sport
 - club venue: clubs must ensure that the venue and equipment are safe and appropriate for the age groups and ability levels of the participants.
- **Duty of care** focuses on a key issue in children's sport. Everybody involved in supporting children needs to be aware of **safeguarding and child protection** issues, and this aspect of Clubmark covers the following points:
 - Clubs are required to give serious consideration to how activities are conducted so that all involved, particularly children, are safe and enjoy the sport.
 - It is recommended that coaches and other club volunteers attend training, including the three-hour 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' workshop, developed in conjunction with the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and run by sports coach UK. Further details can be found on the sports coach UK website: www.sportscoachuk.org
- **Knowing your club and the community** is about **equity in sport** and suggests ways of promoting the right atmosphere in sports clubs. It identifies the importance of policies, practices and values that encourage all members to adopt an inclusive approach to sport. Take the time to find out about:
 - how equitable and inclusive the club is
 - how accessible it is for disabled people
 - the club's constitution and its codes of practice.

- **Club management** relates to **how well managed** the club is overall and on a day-to-day basis. The key principle is that a well-managed club plans for the future and is prepared in the event of emergencies. The Clubmark scheme would monitor the following aspects of how a club is run:
 - people management; with regard to coaches, members and other volunteers
 - financial management
 - how the club communicates with all involved
 - partnerships with other clubs and organisations
 - how the club deals with incidents and emergencies.

Think: How well does your child's current or prospective club match up in relation to all of these aspects?



If you don't have enough knowledge of the club to answer this, there are ways of finding out more about it.

Talk to:

- other parents of children at the club
- the people who help run it (eg coaches, managers and the members of the club board or association).



3 How to Identify a Good Club for Your Child

The following table contains a list of qualities you should be looking for in a good club. You may find that some of the points are not relevant to you, but hopefully this short exercise will help you gather your thoughts and recognise what makes a good club for your child.

Does your child's club:	✓ or X
currently hold, or is it working towards, the Clubmark award or equivalent governing body 'best practice' award	
have an acceptable ratio of coaches to participants	
provide competition within the club or against other clubs that is appropriate to your child's needs and requirements	
invest time and training in coaches and volunteers	
ensure the coaches are trained appropriately to support the needs of the participants	
ensure the venue and equipment are safe and appropriate for the age group using them	
have well-run management that communicates effectively with its volunteers, parents and members	
have a welfare officer or designated person to deal with emergencies and incidents appropriately	
have a good reputation within the community	
have a good, solid ethos that meets your own views and needs (eg on equity, competition, selection of players etc)	
provide the opportunity for your child and family to socialise with other members	
provide fun and enthusiastic sessions for the children and young people participating	
have participants that your child knows or provide a welcoming environment to new members?	

Club ethos

Find out how the club is structured, who runs it and what type of ethos it promotes; is it fun and inclusive or more competitive and performance-oriented?

Here are some more examples of specific factors to consider:



- Does the club have a policy on equity and disability; if so, what does it say?
- Does the club welcome both girls and boys equally?
- Does the club have a selection procedure relating to talent?
- What squads or teams does the club have for each age group?
- How are the teams banded and chosen; is it purely by age or other criteria? Is there a mix of abilities or some sort of rotational system that allows all children the chance to play?

If your child is particularly interested in the competitive aspect of sport, you should look at the club's past and current success in terms of producing successful individual performers or teams. If your child has a disability or special needs, you should consider to what extent this club would welcome, encourage and support him or her. A useful source of information and advice is the national disability sport organisations or the Home Country Sports councils. All relevant contacts can be found within the 'Become a Coach' section of the sports coach UK website: www.sportscoachuk.org

Social aspects

Ask about, or have a look at, the facilities the club offers and how much it will cost to join and remain a member. Find out how welcoming the club is and what type of social life it offers to young members. Ask your child if he or she has any friends at the club and work out how easy it would be to travel to the club from your home. Visit the club before joining and talk to other parents and members. When you visit, ask yourself:

- Do the young players look happy?
- Is there a good relationship among the children and between the youth and adult members, such as coaches and other volunteers?



4 How to Identify an Effective Coach for Your Child

Coach: child ratio

How many coaches does the club have? How experienced are the coaches? To which level are the coaches qualified? There is no single ratio of coaches to children that can be identified as standard due to the variety of sport. The appropriate ratio will be set by each sport's governing body, depending on your child's age and ability. Generally, the more willing, able and qualified coaches a club has, the better. This will also be a reflection of how well managed the club is. Investing in the training of volunteers and paid staff is a key aspect of a well-managed club.

If you do observe the coaches at work, you should look at whether they are coaching in what you consider to be an appropriate way.

For example:

- Do the coaches always show up?
- Are they always on time?
- Are they dressed appropriately?
- Do they make the time to speak to parents and other coaches?
- How well do they get on with parents?
- How well do they relate to the children; do they communicate well, using appropriate language to encourage and motivate the children?

What training should coaches have?

Many sports in the UK run coaching qualifications that have **UK Coaching Certificate (UKCC)** endorsement. The UKCC is a national initiative developed by sports coach UK, in partnership with governing bodies of sport, to endorse coach education programmes across sports against agreed criteria (for more information, visit www.sportscoachuk.org and follow the links to the UKCC).

For parents, this means that if coaches have a UKCC-endorsed qualification, they are properly

prepared to provide effective coaching to an appropriate level.

A series of national standards have been established at **four levels**, as follows:

Level 1: Coaches are qualified to **assist a more qualified coach** in delivering aspects of a session, under supervision. Coaches at this level are not required to plan whole sessions.

Level 2: Coaches are qualified to plan, prepare, deliver and review coaching sessions **on their own**. There are many more coaches qualified at Levels 1 and 2 than there are at Levels 3 and 4, so you may find that a Level 2 coach is given the additional responsibility of being the overall club coach.

Level 3: Coaches are qualified to plan, deliver and evaluate an **annual programme** of coaching. Coaches at this level will be well placed to act as the overall club coach, but because there are relatively few Level 3 coaches at present, it is more likely that a Level 2 coach will be fulfilling this role.

Level 4: This level is currently evolving, but once it is fully developed, it will qualify coaches to the highest level, so they will be qualified to plan, coach and review **longer-term programmes**. The aim is to produce innovative coaches who demonstrate revolutionary coaching methods.

Ongoing coach development

A useful indicator of how motivated and committed coaches are lies in the amount of time they devote to their own development within coaching. Governing bodies of sport set up ongoing 'coach development' courses in addition to actual qualification programmes, and some will even make attendance a requirement for maintaining a coaching licence. Initiatives like this should give parents confidence that their children's coaches are not only appropriately qualified, but also continually updating their knowledge and skills.

In addition, sports coach UK is also working in partnership with governing bodies of sport and other organisations to set out minimum standards for coaches in terms of the different groups of people they coach.

In order to learn more about your child's coaches, it would be useful to find out:



- how long they have been with the club
- how long they have been coaching
- what coaching award or qualification level they have
- whether they have always coached children; and if so, which age groups and for how long
- whether they have coached at other clubs and if so, how many
- how successful their individual performers and teams have been. This would be useful if your child has ambitions to become a competitive performer; and it may also give you an insight into the coach's priorities and approaches, which may or may not be appropriate for your child.

[I chose my child's club because of a] recommendation and also the ethos of the club in allowing all children to participate in tournaments and encouraging them to do their best. No pressure put on kids.

Think: From the information provided, are you able to make a more informed judgement about the type of coach that would be right for your child?



Most parents will be looking for a coach who:

- demonstrates the skills and qualities needed to work with children (ie relates well to children and builds healthy relationships with them by being a good communicator; well organised, enthusiastic and positive)
- is appropriately experienced, trained and qualified
- delivers sessions that engage the children, are safe, fun, progressive and varied.

The club has [been established for] over 20 years and has produced very talented athletes. It has Clubmark and one Level 4 coach.



5 How to Recognise Effective Coaching

As a parent, what should you be looking for to help you decide how appropriate and effective the coaching is? What would a good-quality session or an effective coaching programme for children look like?

Although there are no simple answers to these questions, the following information should steer you in the right direction.

Overall

Coaching varies between different types of sport, according to the age and stage of development of the participants and what the participants want from sport, whether it is having fun, socialising, getting fit or competing.

Coaches working with children at grass-roots level should ensure children experience **fun** sessions that enthuse them in sport, whereas talented young people who are motivated to attain the highest possible levels in sport may require sessions that are more challenging as they work to improve performance.

Planning and goal setting

Sessions should be planned in advance and fit into an overall yearly coaching plan. Coaches are encouraged to involve their participants in thinking about and contributing to planning and setting goals. You might think that this is only really appropriate for coaches working with adults, but this is not the case.

Even when working with younger children, coaches should be asking simple questions to involve children in their own learning and development, like:

- Which activities would you like to do more of and why?
- Are there activities you don't like doing?
- What would you like to be able to do by the end of the session/season?
- How do you think you might get better at doing that?

The answers to these questions will help the coach identify goals and an activity programme that is relevant to what the children want and need. It will also show the children that the coach is interested in them and values their opinions. With this approach, even at this very early stage of development, children will begin to realise they have a role to play in their own development. Eventually, as they mature, they should come to take more responsibility for their own development rather than think only the coach can help them improve.

The coaching session and organisation

Good coaching sessions should contain activities that relate directly to the goals or aims of the annual programme. Good sessions will demonstrate a **logical progression** and use a **balanced variety** of activities.

Generally, sessions will proceed as follows:

- Start with a warm-up or introductory activity that will prepare the children for the rest of the session. At the start of the session, coaches are encouraged to:
 - begin on time
 - give a **brief** review of what has been covered and learned at the last session(s), or ask the children what they can remember and what they have learned
 - explain the goals for the session.
- Children might then do some activities or drills to improve techniques, with structured opportunities to put these techniques into a more realistic situation. For example, small-sided games might be played, using competition or time pressure, as appropriate, in order to develop children's skills.
- At the end of the session, the children should have some sort of cool- or 'calm-down' activity, depending on how vigorous and exciting the session has been.
- Also, the coach should take some time at the end to question the children about what they have learnt from the session and reinforce the key points.

Some coaches may choose to adopt slightly different approaches based on their reading of the situation and what they believe will be most beneficial for the children's development. For example, you may see the coach starting off with a game of some sort, rather than a more traditional warm-up or introductory activity, then drawing out key aspects that the children will practise before putting the technique that has been practised back into a more applied or challenging activity.

However the session runs, it should be well planned. When watching sessions, here are some positive points to look out for:

- ✓ The children should be busy and 'on task' for most of the time.
- ✓ The children should spend hardly any time queuing for their turn or between stopping one activity and starting the next.
- ✓ The coach should be giving clear, concise instructions and explanations; providing key information so that activities can be started safely and quickly.
- ✓ The coach should feed further instructions as and when necessary.
- ✓ The coach should demonstrate a positive, encouraging approach during sessions and display appropriate values.
- ✓ The coach should communicate well by using appropriate language for the children and providing **constructive** feedback. This means focusing on what they should be doing to improve rather than simply pointing out where they are going wrong.
- ✓ The environment should be safe, with appropriate, well-maintained facilities and equipment.
- ✓ There should be enough coaches and adult helpers to ensure the session is safely supervised and that children receive sufficient individual attention where necessary.

If you watch a series of sessions, it should be obvious that the coach has planned and structured activities to ensure the children have fun, enhance their skills and are motivated to achieve. As the programme progresses, a good coach will monitor the children's achievement, reflect on his own coaching, and make changes to the original plan and specific sessions as necessary. Good coaches will pick up on the children's individual needs and differences within the group and make sure they plan and coach with these in mind.

Review

After the session, the coach should ask for feedback on how the session was received by the children (eg what they liked, what they can remember, what they think they have learned). Some coaches take time to ask for feedback from other coaches, adult helpers or parents who have been watching the sessions. This information will help the coach evaluate the session, judge how effective it was and decide what potentially needs to be done next time to make the session better and further progress the children.

Think: Do you have a better idea about what a good coaching session should look like now?



Does your child's session contain some or most of the positive points shown above?

Remember that coaches will use a variety of approaches and **there is no single right way** of structuring a coaching session – just the best way for those children at that time.

If the coach is in tune with the children he or she coaches, the sessions should be geared specifically to the needs of the children in the group.

6 What to do if You Have an Issue or a Grievance

Obviously, the steps you take to have an issue or grievance addressed depend upon the nature of the issue or grievance. For example, your child may be having a problem with another child or a small group of children. If it's just a case that they 'don't get along' then a quiet word with the coaches may help to alert them to the problem if they haven't already identified it.

Bullying

The coach will want to know about any allegation of bullying as soon as possible. Many coaches will pick up on bullying and take immediate steps to stamp it out, but some instances may take place outside of the coach's supervision and away from the actual coaching venue. Even if bullying is happening outside of the coaches' direct supervision, but still within the club environment, they need to know about it so they can take steps to address it within the club.

Relevant training

Qualified coaches should have attended a 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children' workshop, which explores aspects like bullying and how to deal with issues relating to safeguarding children within sport. Another key workshop that many coaches attend is 'Equity in your Coaching', which covers key principles and issues of fair and inclusive coaching.

Such workshops should prepare coaches for dealing with any issues or grievances you may have, so don't be afraid to approach them for help or advice if you have any queries.

Other issues or grievances, whether they are against another parent or with the club as an organisation, can also be addressed by having a word with the coaches and either asking them to pass it on to the relevant people or; if you wish to address it yourself, asking them who the right people are to deal with it.

Escalating a grievance

You may have a serious issue with the coach that you feel cannot be addressed with the coach directly, such as a breach of the coaches' code of practice. Depending upon the structure of the club, the head coach, child welfare officer or volunteer coordinator should be your first point of contact. The sports coach UK *Code of Practice for Sports Coaches* can be accessed through the 'Become a Coach' section of the sports coach UK website. If you feel you cannot take it to anyone within the club, the governing body of sport should have a designated welfare officer or coaching coordinator in the area. You should be able to find out who this person is and their contact details either directly through the national governing body's website or through local governing body staff.



7 How to Support Your Child's Coach

To get first-hand experience of the club you should help out with the coaching. You will need to discuss and agree the roles that are most appropriate for you to assist the coach and you should expect to do any of the following tasks:

- **Assist in setting up equipment** with the coach before the session and help to make sure it gets put away safely at the end. As well as doing a job that is simple but necessary, this will also give you a better understanding of why equipment is used as it is. This may also allow you time to talk to the coach and perhaps ask a few questions that may help enhance your understanding of the sport and coaching.
- **Be an additional supervisor:** no one will expect, or should even ask, you to take on a full coaching role without the appropriate training and experience, so it might be that you do no more than keep an eye on a small group while the coach works with other children. Again, this gives you the opportunity to watch how the children are coached.
- **Act as a referee, umpire or scorer:** help decide when the ball is in or out of play or just make sure that children play by the accepted rules and procedures when the coach is working with another group. No one will expect you to be able to officiate in any formal capacity without the appropriate training and experience, so don't worry.
- Simply **stay to observe the activities** and listen to what the coach says. After the coaching session, you could talk to your child and the other children about what they particularly like or dislike about the sessions. This is the starting point for anyone involved in coaching; observation and discussion helps you get to know the children you are working with, which is every bit as important as knowing about the sport.
- **Watch or shadow another volunteer** who is currently doing a similar job, or just talk to him or her about what the job entails. It would be great if you could work alongside someone with more experience who could act as a mentor and guide you as you become more involved.
- **Help the coach to make the session fun and motivating.** Help support the good practice of the coach by being enthusiastic to help the children engage in a fun and productive way. Speak to the coach about how he or she wants you to do this.
- **Listen to the children,** so you can understand their needs and provide some useful feedback about what the children like, dislike, find too easy or too difficult. The coach can only see and hear so much, so additional sources of feedback are always useful.
- **Support individuals or small groups** of children: the coach may have identified that certain children or groups would benefit from closer supervision or frequent encouragement.
- **Reinforce key values and messages:** in short, be a good role model for the children in terms of turning up on time, being appropriately dressed and enthusiastic, and demonstrating a real interest in all the children, not just your own child.

What now?

If you are interested in watching sessions, helping out during sessions, or perhaps even trying some coaching yourself, start by talking to the coach and asking about the club's policy and procedures for parents getting involved. The sport's governing body, or even the club, may have a 'Parents' Charter' or code of conduct for parents when watching or helping out at coaching sessions and competitive events.

If you think you'd like to have a go at coaching, follow these top tips from the *How to Become a Coach* Quick Guide:

‘Know a degree about the junior section of club as I help out and act as a first-aider. I have been a supportive parent for five years.’

1 Recognise that sport is a passion to you.

2 Decide what sport you would like to be involved in.

3 Think about what time you can commit.

4 Decide what environment you would like to help out in.

5 Understand what your motivations are to assist a coach.

6 Decide who you want to coach.

7 Recognise what being a good assistant to a coach really means.

8 Speak to some experienced coaches and get their advice.

9 Think about what skills and knowledge you have that would benefit your role.

10 Think about further training you may need.



8 Views on Effective Coaching

We interviewed parents on the subject of their children's coaching; here is a selection of their responses:

Why did you choose [your child's] club?

'Recommendation and also ethos of the club in allowing all children to participate in tournaments and encouraging them to do their best. No pressure put on kids.'

'Good foundation sports skills, social, develops listening and self-control.'

'It is the same club I played for.'

'It is the only club in the town, and it has a Clubmark accreditation and a good reputation.'

'It is friendly, sociable and encouraging. I already knew the instructor from another club, and when he formed a new club, we followed.'

'His sister plays for the girls' team, and it is convenient.'

How much do you know about your club?

'It has been established for 15 years. I know who runs the club. "Soccer tots" to adults.'

'I made sure I went along and asked questions and understood what they offered.'

'I know lots about fund-raising activities, who runs the clubs and what belts the instructors have. Plus Criminal Records Bureau checks take place.'

'The club has [been established for] over 20 years and has produced very talented athletes. It has Clubmark and one Level 4 coach.'

'I know about links to the school and the role of the instructors.'

'Know a degree about the junior section of club as I help out and act as a first-aider. I have been a supportive parent for five years.'

What qualities do you look for in a coach?

'Variety of skills taught to maintain interest in the children during training, enthusiasm, behaviour control, communication skills and encouragement given to all.'

'Making it fun, having good knowledge of the sport and being nice with the children.'

'Caring, firm and consistent. Needs to be open and have good communication. The child has to have respect for them.'

'Good teaching ability, appropriate communication skills, enthusiasm and a good role model.'

'Disciplined, knowledgeable and experienced.'

'Enthusiasm, managing behaviour and committed to children.'

9 Useful Links and Related Information

The 'Become a Coach' section of the sports coach UK website contains information and contact details for the UKCC, governing bodies of sport and your local county sports partnership. Visit www.sportscoachuk.org

You can also access the following resources by clicking the links to 'Related Information':

- *How to Assist at your Child's Coaching Session Top Tips*
- *How to Become a Coach Top Tips*
- *How to Become a Coach Quick Guide.*

Other websites

Clubmark:

www.clubmark.org.uk

Criminal Records Bureau:

www.crb.homeoffice.gov.uk

Disability Sports Northern Ireland:

www.dsni.co.uk

Disability Sport Wales:

www.disabilitysportwales.org

English Federation of Disability Sport:

www.efds.co.uk

Scottish Disability Sport:

www.scottishdisabilitysport.com

Sport England:

www.sportengland.org

sportscotland:

www.sportscotland.org

Sport Northern Ireland:

www.sportni.net

Sport Wales:

www.sportwales.org.uk

Youth Sport Trust:

www.youthsporttrust.org

sports coach UK workshops that may be of interest to you:

- 'Safeguarding and Protecting Children'
- 'Equity in your Coaching'.





For information about sports coach UK, and further support and training available, contact:

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