

How To Handle Difficult Softball Parents

Being a softball coach is not always easy...especially when you run into "difficult softball parents" or DSP's as I like to call them (<http://www.softballspot.com>). You know the parents I'm referring to: overbearing, overly competitive, and overly engaged in your decisions as a coach.

No matter how knowledgeable, fair, or kind you are to your team, you can probably expect an irate parent or two to crop up during the season. Here are a few tips I find helpful when dealing with these situations.

- 1. Don't discuss the issue at the game** - The first thing the coach should avoid is discussing the problem with the parent on the field, especially if he/she is visibly upset.
- 2. Schedule a separate time/venue to have the discussion** - Rather than discuss the problem then and there, the coach should agree to meet or telephone the parent at a mutually convenient time to discuss the complaint. By doing this, you avoid giving the parent an audience, allow him/her to 'cool off', and give yourself time to prepare an appropriate response to the complaint.
- 3. Be an active listener** - When you eventually talk to the parent, one of the most important things you can do is be an active listener. Doing things like taking notes, maintaining eye contact and nodding to acknowledge you have heard what the parent is saying are crucial.
- 4. Don't interrupt** - Even if parents raise their voices or their stories have are not fact-based, the coach should avoid interrupting. By interrupting a parent, you risk inflaming the situation.
- 5. Don't get defensive** - The coach should avoid defending or justifying their action. Such behavior at this point will only make the situation worse.
- 6. Show empathy** - Respond to their concerns with statements like "I'm sorry that you feel your child has been treated unfairly". This will help the parent to understand his/her problem is being taken seriously. They are likely to be calmer and more willing to find a solution.
- 7. Clarify the problem** - This can be achieved by asking probing questions. This helps both parties to focus on the problem (not personalities), stick to the facts, and avoid being caught up in extraneous issues.
- 8. Offer a range of solutions** - A lot of times, parents just want their feelings to be heard and understood. If they want more, try to offer a range of solutions. This demonstrates a willingness to work together to solve the problem. It's important to avoid making promises that you can't keep. Explain to them what you can and cannot do.
- 9. Get closure** - Ideally, you will given the parent a number of options and agreed on a mutual course of action. At this point, it's appropriate to end the meeting. It should conclude with three things:

* Leave the parent with a closing action statement (e.g.. 'I'll get on to that now').

- * Thank the parent for their interest (no matter how unpleasant the meeting).
- * If follow-up is required, tell them when you will contact them ('I'll call you tomorrow').

This will leave the parent feeling as though their complaint has been heard, and the parent-coach relationship will be strengthened.

10. Leave the door open - There will be cases, however after this whole process where you will not be able to give the parent the response they are looking for. It is important in these circumstances that the coach leave the door open for the parent, e.g.. 'If there is ever anything else, please come to me'.

By doing this the parent will at least feel that his/her complaint has been taken seriously, and the coach-parent relationship, however strained, will remain intact.

Not doing this could allow the problem to fester... and the parent could damage your reputation through word-of-mouth.