

# Interacting with your child's Sport Coach

## How You Can Communicate Your Child's Needs

### OVER THIRTY MILLION CHILDREN PARTICIPATE

in recreational sports activities in the United States, providing them with many benefits such as socialization, increased self-esteem and self-confidence, motor skill development, enhanced mental processing, and physical exercise. Children with ADHD may benefit from recreational youth sports activities in additional ways.

Your child may have experienced failure in school prior to the identification of the condition and may continue to face challenges in academic settings. Recreational youth sports allow him or her to interact with peers and experience opportunities for success without the pressures of school. Having an outlet for physical activity and motor excess is often an additional perceived benefit.

As a parent of a child with ADHD, be aware that your child's needs may affect his or her sport experience. Although recreational youth sports are very different than academic settings, participating in sports still involves learning. Similar instructional principles apply to both situations. You may need to communicate the need for certain accommodations to your child's coach in order for your child to be successful and enjoy the experience. However, before addressing how to communicate with your child's coach, it is important to reflect on how ADHD impacts performance and how to advocate for your child.

#### How ADHD may affect sports participation

To understand how your child's needs may affect his or her participation in recreational youth sports, consider how your child interacts during play or recreational activities at home. How might he or she react to the events and situations presented during sports activities such as practice and games?

One factor to consider is the amount of unstructured and undirected time that occurs during weekly practices or games. With a large adult-to-child ratio, there will be times during practice that athletes will be supervised from a distance and will be expected to complete tasks independently. During games, athletes who are not playing may be expected to wait for their turn to play without any structured tasks to perform. As a parent, consider how your child responds to unstructured and undirected situations such as these and how these situations might be designed in a more structured way.

Recreational youth sports teams may also be comprised of athletes who do not attend your child's school and who may be unfamiliar to him or her. Interacting with a variety of children and meeting new friends is a benefit, but consider how your child responds to unfamiliar situations. Preparation through role-playing social interactions that commonly occur in this setting may be necessary to help your child with initial interactions with strangers.

During practice and game situations, it is likely that the coach will give many directions, and it is likely that these will be verbal directions. How well does your child attend to directions when given verbally, perhaps only given one time? If there are strategies that have been helpful to your child in school settings, these same strategies will be helpful within the sports setting.

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*Margaret M. Flores, PhD, BCBA-D, is an assistant professor in the department of special education, rehabilitation, and counseling at Auburn University. Robbi Beyer, PhD, is associate professor of pedagogy and adapted physical education at California State University, Los Angeles, and Tiffanye M. Vargas, PhD, is associate professor of health and kinesiology at the University of Texas at San Antonio.*





## Takeaway Tips for Talking with a Coach

1. Approach your child's coach in a friendly and helpful manner.
2. Let the coach know that you have learned how to prevent difficulties with your child by using simple strategies.
3. Avoid long lists of needs or language that is demanding or threatening.
4. Discuss accommodations in terms of improving your child's skills and encouraging his or her best performance for the good of the team.
5. Ask if there are skills you and your child could work on outside of practice.
6. Ask the coach if he or she has worked with children or individuals with attention issues before. If so, use this as a springboard for conversations about your child's needs.
7. Use the "sandwich" approach if you need to discuss a coach's negative interaction with your child.
  - › Make a positive statement about the coach's behavior.
  - › State your area of concern.
  - › End with another positive statement and assure the coach of your support for his or her efforts.



In addition to attending to directions, athletes will be expected to learn and execute plays and other complex tasks in game situations. Take into account the ease with which your child acquires and recalls information, as well as generalizes this information across settings (such as executing a play learned in practice during a game situation).

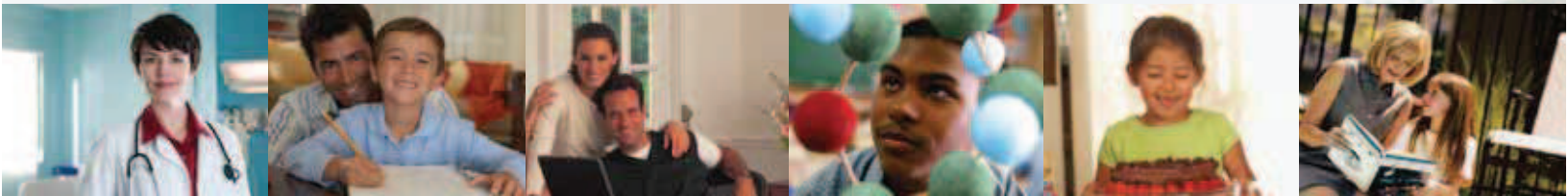
Learning to play a sport or improving skills will involve comprehending and utilizing corrective feedback. Children who experience failure on a regular basis may have great difficulty in their initial reactions to corrective feedback. They may internalize the negative feedback and want to give up. Think about how your child responds to criticism. There may be ways in which corrective feedback can be delivered successfully, or this may be a skill that you and your child's coach can help develop over the course of the season.

Finally, the most obvious situations experienced within team sports are winning and losing games. Consider your child's reaction to success and failure. This might be another skill that can be facilitated and reinforced by the coach and yourself. However, before you communicate your child's needs to the coach, it is important to understand the coach's point of view.

### Understanding your child's coach

While planning interactions with your child's coach, it is important to understand the coach's point of view and background. Your child's coach is likely a volunteer who is donating his or her time to work with young people. Youth sports organizations have a difficult time recruiting and keeping coaches and may not have the

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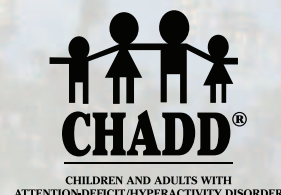


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## Understanding your child's needs and collaborating with his or her coaches by providing tips and strategies can make the experience a successful one. A positive experience will increase the chances that your child will persist in beneficial physical activities.

resources to provide training beyond basic health and safety issues.

Your child's coach is a generous individual from the community who wishes to share his or her love of sports with young people. This individual's knowledge of ADHD is likely minimal and probably informed by various types of news media, which provide superficial descriptions or stereotypical portrayals. Without information from you, this individual is not likely to consider that a child's deficits or challenges are due to a medical condition.

Furthermore, this individual is unlikely to know how to make accommodations for your child without some assistance. Do not assume that the coach's poor interactions are malicious. Your child's coach has the best of intentions in improving your child's athletic performance, but may not know how to provide effective instruction or set up appropriate learning situations.

Your child's coach may be a parent, and even if he or she knows little about learning differences, as a fellow parent, he or she shares your commitment to advocacy for one's own child. Conversely, if the coach is not a parent, be aware that he or she will not have a parent's perspective and thus may not initially understand why you want or need to be involved in your child's sports experience.

Your child's coach may have knowledge about ADHD through experiences with family, friends, or work, and if so, this may promote better understanding of your child's needs. Although there is no one-size-fits-all set of characteristics, past experiences with individuals with ADHD tend to provide a general understanding and will perhaps facilitate communication. When having an initial conversation, ask about the coach's past experience with individuals who have ADHD. Use this experience as a starting point when discussing your child's needs. Education and information will improve the situation, easing the coach's frustration as well as your child's.

### How to communicate your child's needs

Approach your child's coach in a friendly and helpful manner. Let the coach know how much your child enjoys playing on the team and how excited he or she is about learning the sport. Let the coach know that your child has difficulty learning or interacting in certain situations and that you want to help make your child's and the coach's experience a positive one.


Discuss accommodations in terms of improving your child's skills and encouraging his or her best performance for the good of the team. Let the coach know that you have experienced challenges with your child, understand the frustration, and have learned how to prevent those difficulties by using simple strategies. A sample suggestion might be: "I have had trouble with Jake following directions at home and it is frustrating. But he almost always follows directions when I break them into chunks and have him repeat them back to me." Make this a two-way conversation by asking if there are skills that you and your child could work on outside of practice in order to increase opportunities for a successful experience.

When describing your child's needs, choose the most significant or pressing behaviors. It is important that you have the coach's attention when discussing your child. Therefore, avoid providing a long list of needs or using language that is demanding or threatening. This might overwhelm the coach or detract from the focus of your conversation.

Sometimes there is a need to discuss a particular

incident, providing corrective feedback regarding the coach's negative interaction with your child. The "sandwich" approach is suggested as a method for increasing the positive aspects of this communication: First make a positive statement about the coach's behavior. Then state your area of concern. End with another positive statement and assurance that you are supportive of his or her efforts.

The purpose of participation in recreational youth sports is to have fun. In addition, the activities can provide your child with new learning experiences, more social interactions, and an opportunity for success.

It is important to remember that the difficulties your child might have experienced in school might manifest themselves in the sports arena as well. Understanding your child's needs and collaborating with his or her coaches by providing tips and strategies can make the experience a successful one. A positive experience will increase the chances that your child will persist in beneficial physical activities. 

## Sample Conversations

Here are a few examples you can use to prepare to speak with your child's coach.

- ▶ Coach \_\_\_\_\_, I like your enthusiasm for the game and your passion appears to inspire the team to work hard. During the last practice, my son ran extra laps when he did not follow directions. He ran so many laps and he was rather frustrated with soccer that night. I am not sure that he fully understands all of the directions when they are given. He usually follows directions when they are repeated and there is a visual cue given at the same time. This might help him follow the plays and reduce unneeded distractions. I really appreciate the time and energy that you put into preparing the team each week; I know that you work very hard.
- ▶ Coach \_\_\_\_\_, My daughter, \_\_\_\_\_, has been looking forward to playing basketball this season. I wanted to let you know that she has ADHD. Have you ever known anyone with ADHD? Just like your \_\_\_\_\_ [cousin, nephew, etc.], my daughter might have a hard time with downtime between activities. Is there a way that she could help out or have an assigned task that would help with the transition from one activity to the next?
- ▶ I want to make sure that he can be an asset to the team, so there are a few things that she might need help with [provide brief list].

