

# Meet the Parents – The Most Important Hour of the Season

For the most part, hockey parents are committed, enthusiastic, supportive and passionate about the game and about their player(s)' involvement in it. But sometimes, even the most well-meaning parent can go a little overboard. Just a few inappropriate actions or incidents by one or two parents can very easily be the spark to light the fire that becomes out of control, making for a long and not-much-fun season for all.

No matter what age group or level you are coaching, it is an excellent idea to take some time at the beginning of the year to communicate your season plan to the parents. Write a brief letter/outline that they can take with them and go over it in a parent-only meeting at the beginning of the season. Let them know that you and your staff are in control and that you have things under control. Explain the role of the coaching staff, and what you expect of the players and of the parents throughout the year. Outline your philosophy and the goals and objectives that you are looking to achieve. Promise nothing, except that the players will have fun, and if they work hard, hopefully they will be better hockey players at the end of the year than they were at the beginning.

Some items to address include:

## Welcome

Be sure to welcome each family to the team, with a smile. Let them know you will be spending quite a bit of time together over the course of the season and you want to make sure it is fun experience for every player and their family members.

## Coaching Staff Introduction

Introduce each member of the staff and give the parents some background information including previous hockey playing or coaching experience (if any), previous playing or coaching experience of any kind, any type of experience working or interacting with kids, any coaching accreditation, family situation (spouse, kids on the team, other kids) and why you are and want to be involved.

## Philosophy

Be very explicit on what your coaching philosophy is and why. Touch on the different experiences that you think are important for the players, ranging from the obvious like learning and improving hockey skills, developing coordination and physical skills, to having fun, making new friends (players and parents), the spirit that comes from being part of a team effort, developing confidence, the rewards of working hard and feeling a sense of accomplishment for your efforts. Let them know your thoughts on winning, how important (or unimportant) it is, and how you will structure practices and games, and allocate playing time accordingly.

## Areas of Emphasis

Go over what the coaching staff feels are the areas that you want to emphasize with the team over the course of the year to get the most improvement out of them. These This might include improving skating skills (such as outside edges and crossover acceleration), developing scoring skills (improving shooting and teaching skills and concepts around the net).

## Practice and Game Schedules

Distribute them if you have them, or if not, give them the most up-to-date version you have and let them know how and when you can expect the rest of the schedule. Be sure they have or know where to find arena maps if you use multiple arenas.

## Parental Involvement

This can be a tough one, but its better to address it now, before it has a chance to become a problem. Cover all areas including how they can help during games and practices (getting their players to the arena on time, and if needed, dressed and ready to go, possibly filling water bottles and getting them to the bench area, helping as a scorekeeper/timekeeper if necessary, helping to record team statistics). Be sure to let them know when they are welcome in the locker room and when they might be a distraction (like during a last-minute talk before hitting the ice). Address how you would expect them to behave in the stands during the practices and games in terms of cheering for your team (keeping it positive and not yelling instructions), and how they treat the referees and the opposition emphasizing that there should be absolutely NOTHING directed to either of them by parents, unless it is after the game and they are congratulating or thanking them for a good effort. Discuss how they can best assist in helping their player to improve by refraining from coaching in the stands or in the car on the way to or from the arena. Suggest that the way they can help most is to take an interest in the sport, watch games on television with them or attend "higher level" or professional games locally if available, by encouraging their player to skate as much as possible, either at open skating or in the back yard, play hockey off-ice in the driveway or basement at home as much as possible, and let the coaching staff do the coaching. Lastly, but probably, most importantly, remind them that this is a fun activity for their child, nothing more, and that in no way are they as parents, or you as a coaching staff, involved in the competition in any way.

## Communication

Let them know how you will communicate with them, via mail, e-mail, phone, in-person at practices and games etc. for any information they need to know. Direct them in how to communicate with you, when is the best time to reach you and what is the best method to use. Explain that there are some issues that need to be addressed between parent and coach only and that they should be done in privacy, and that you are more than willing to take the time to do that. Be sure to let them know to come directly to your or your staff with any issues or problems, and that you will be upfront and honest with them. Gossip and rumors among parents spread like wildfire and serve no positive purpose on any team.

Most of all, make them feel a part of the "parent team", but be sure they are very clear in what their role is, and how you can all work together to have fun and rewarding season for the players.

... most importantly, remind them that this is a fun activity for their child, nothing more, and that in no way are they as parents, or you as a coaching staff, involved in the competition in any way.