

ENGAGING PARENTS

A guide to engaging parents in junior Rugby League

NRL Coach Education



Series Number 2

Why is it important to engage parents in Rugby League

With junior participation numbers increasing there is an active need for more and more volunteers in the sport. This, coupled with an ever-growing problem of spectator behaviour, makes your coaching job a lot harder.

Parent engagement is the key to alleviating many problems you will have as a coach. By engaging and communicating effectively with the parents of your team you will be able to reduce the conflict between you and parents as well as improve spectator behaviour on the sidelines. This will also provide you with opportunity to recruit some parents as volunteers within your team and make your job a lot easier.

There are 3 steps to effective parent engagement

1. Have a pre seas on orientation meeting for parents
2. Provide volunteering opportunities for parents
3. Communication

Recruiting volunteers is one of the biggest challenges for any junior Rugby League club. You, as a coach have potential volunteers from every child in your team.

Not only will volunteers give you some extra coaching or administration help, they will also gain an understanding of the time and effort you are putting in and thus less likely to criticise you, the club, or game officials.



The key to effective engagement of parents primarily begins with an orientation meeting that can be done in the form of the first training session or a team BBQ for everyone to get to know each other.



8 Steps to an Effective Parent Orientation Meeting

Step 1

Introduce yourself and your coaching staff

Introduce yourself to the parents by providing a little background about yourself within the sport and outside the sport (so they see you as a coach and a real person). Touch on your experience in the sport, whether you have coached before, and why you are coaching. Have each of your coaching staff do the same.

Step 2

Explain your coaching philosophy

This is a perfect time to explain to your parents what you want to achieve from coaching their children and how you expect everyone involved to approach the sport. You should explain your own philosophy but really emphasise that kids sport is about skill development and fun, it's not about winning.

Step 3

Explain your season plan

You can use this section to explain your season goals and how you will go about reaching them as well as the specifics of your program. When talking about specifics you can touch on:

- » When the season starts and finishes
- » The times and places for training and games
- » The equipment, if any, needed at training and games

When discussing season goals give an overview of what you will be doing at training and what you want the players to learn. You should ensure that you explain that the focus

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- 1 Introduce yourself and your coaching staff
- 2 Explain your coaching philosophy
- 3 Explain your season plan
- 4 Explain safety and any modified rules
- 5 Discuss the coach, player, and parent code of conducts
- 6 Explain your team rules
- 7 Volunteer opportunities
- 8 Question & Answer

of your training is not about winning games. Explain that your training will focus on skill development and fun enjoyable activities.

Explain your plan for equal involvement. Explain to the parents what system you have for ensuring all players get the same amount of game time, involvement etc. This can help alleviate conflict later.



Step 4

Explain safety and any modified rules

Use this time to explain to parents any modified rules of the game at that age group (if you don't know, check yourself). Many parents won't know the modified rules of the game and this can create conflict towards match officials.

Also use this time to explain the safety aspects of the game for their children in junior rugby league like the NRL Safeplay Code. If possible provide parents with documentation on the rule differences and the NRL Safeplay Code. Also explain the first aid system at the club and what care is available to their kids.

Step 5

Discuss the player, coach, & parent codes of conduct

Discuss with the parents the NRL codes of conduct for each group of people. Explain to them that your not signalling them out but these codes outline what is acceptable behaviour in the sport and what is not.

This is a good opportunity to talk about sideline behaviour on the weekends. You can explain that the kids are there to have fun and enjoy the game. Explain that there are no problems with parents encouraging from the sideline but there should be no yelling or abuse towards the team, the opposition, or the officials. Explain that these people are vital to the game continuing to run and even though they may feel frustrated, they should only encourage the team..

Step 6

Explain your team rules

You can explain any team rules here that you specifically use. Such as discipline

techniques you use at training. If you have open communication about these rules with the parents it will help avoid conflict later on. If the parents know about and agree with you on these rules then they are much easier to enforce. You can also retouch on how you plan to actively involve all players in the team. You may explain how you will rotate players on the bench or how you plan on having players in different positions. Conflict can arise later on if parents don't think their child is getting a fair go. If you have explained your system of fairness, stick to it, you can avoid this conflict altogether.

Step 7

Volunteering Opportunities

In this part of the initial meeting you can also explain the opportunities for parents to volunteer within the team and within the club. Even if you already have a coaching staff, you can explain to parents that you always need extra hands at training if anyone wishes to help out. You can also explain to parents the volunteering opportunities within the club itself as well and that anyone is interested you can help facilitate this. Volunteering opportunities could be anything from scoring, fundraising, BBQ & canteen, trainers, or equipment managers. If you can get a parent to volunteer to do a small job then you are more likely to encourage them to take bigger roles in the future.:

Step 8

Question & Answer

Allow parents the opportunity to ask any questions and try to give the best answers you can.



Communication with Parents

Communication with your parents is one key to avoiding conflict and successfully engaging parents. Some quick tips for communicating with parents are:

- Invite parents to the end of training or end of game talk to the players. This way you can pass on information directly to them.
- Take the time to communicate with each parent individually. Don't always talk to them in a group. If you get to know them away from football, there is less likelihood for conflict later.
 - » Communication Ideas:
 - » SMS & Email lists
 - » Season calendar
 - » Match reports by email and website
 - » Monthly newsletter
 - » Individual feedback
 - » Meetings
 - » Social Events

Volunteering opportunities

Having parents involved as volunteers in your team can help them better understand your job and its difficulties and provide you with extra hands throughout the season. Some volunteer positions you can have could include:

- » Team manager
- » Trainers
- » First Aid Officers
- » Assistant Coaches
- » Social Committee
- » Additional helpers at training

Having parents involved in this capacity will make your job easier and will provide the parents with a better understanding of what goes on. This understanding together with good communication will help keep parents informed and happy.

Summarise this information in an introduction letter to reinforce the messages

Tips for Parent & Officials

- » Sport should be fun
- » Your own agenda is not your child's
- » Emphasise the process of execution of skills instead of results and trophies
- » You are a role model to your children. You should show composure on the sideline so your children learn positive behaviours
- » Refrain from game time coaching. Just let them play
- » Ask the right questions. Your first question after a game should be "did you have fun" not "did you win"
- » Cheers all team members positively
- » Don't criticise your team, the opposition, or match officials.
- » Keep everything in perspective; remember that the focus of children's sport is to create an opportunity for fun and growth.