

# Coaching Your Own Children



Australian sport is founded on the goodwill of volunteers. As a result, adults often find themselves in situations where they have to make a choice - whether or not to coach their own child. Generously, many put up their hand to do this rather complex, challenging and often thankless job.

## The good

Fortunately, it is possible to successfully coach your own child! And when done well, there are potential benefits for both the child and the adult.

Children who have been coached by their parent have reported that they enjoy improved closeness through

- increased praise (e.g., “she points out my good plays”),
- involvement in decisions about training and games (e.g., “he asks for my input”), and
- simply greater amounts of quality time spent together (e.g., “I get to hang out with her more”).

Of course, there’s the added perk of never being late for training if your parent is the coach! For parents too, when things are going well there are tremendous positives such as

- increased levels of pride (e.g., “I get to watch my son grow”),
- improved social interactions (e.g., “I get to know all of the other children and parents”), and
- the notion of quality time together (e.g., “sport provides us with special time for her and I”).

## The bad

Unfortunately, coaching your own child is also laden with potential traps and pitfalls.

Children who have been coached by their parents have also reported

- times of conflict (e.g., “she doesn’t like it when I talk back”),
- unfair behaviour (e.g., “he treats me harsher than my teammates” OR “he goes easier on me and my teammates notice”),
- increased expectations (e.g., “she notices when I’m not doing my best”) and
- an overall lack of understanding (e.g., “he doesn’t listen to me”).

Parents who coach their own child have spoken about difficulties in

- separating the roles of coach and parent, e.g., “I find myself carrying over coaching conversations to home life”,
- dealing with rebellious behaviour (e.g., “my daughter objects to everything I do at training”),
- time issues (e.g., “time pressure with work means I’m tired and grumpy by the end of the season”), and
- knowing that they treat their child differently (e.g., “I know I’m harder on my daughter but I want to avoid perceptions of favouritism”).

## The balance

‘Balance’ appears to be key to whether or not the situation works!

First, be aware that you are wearing two hats – parent and coach.

Both child and parent should be clear about what it means when the coaching hat is on (e.g., the child will be treated like everyone else on the field) and when the parent hat comes back on (e.g., they are an important part of a loving family).

Second, be sensitive to favouring or harshly treating your child. Your child should have to earn their place, but should not be made to work harder than anyone else to secure it. Getting feedback from your child, other team mates and parents about what is going well and what is not can be valuable in maintaining this balance.

Third, no matter what, you should have other shared interests. By having other family activities and special times together, parent-coaches can avoid sports overload with their child.

Questions you might ask yourself (and your child) prior to becoming their coach:

- What does my child think of me coaching them?
- How well can I separate the roles of parent and coach?
- In what ways might I treat my child differently to the other team members?
- How will others react to me coaching my child (e.g., team mates, parents)
- What are the other parts of my life that I spend quality time with my child?

## Final thought

As a general rule, coaching your own child tends to work better when they are younger (and more open to parent feedback). Having said that, no family circumstance is the same so it is important for everyone to make up their own minds about the key issues in coaching your own child. No matter what, this time in your life will pass by very quickly so no matter your decision, enjoy the time spent in sport.