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# Should I Coach My Kid or Not?

When we consider coaching from the perspective of what is best for the athlete, it is important to consider them as an individual first. Good coaches present their knowledge to every athlete the same way. Great coaches understand the human and their potential. They work to support not only their learning, but their growth to reach the desired endpoint.

**The best way to work best together includes getting on the same page, understanding the human, and growing through continual feedback.**

## Getting on the same page

### Share your values, your boundaries, your why

Athletes should have a clear vision of the coach, their values and why they coach the way they do. By sharing the reasons behind the approach, athletes (and parents) get a better understanding of why things are done that way. This will increase buy-in, and reduce friction caused by differing expectations.

It is important to set boundaries and expectations at the onset of a relationship. Having a clear conversation, rather than handing out a list of rules will allow time for explanation, clarification and questions. Bonus points if you can have a healthy collaboration!

Here's an example: *"In my experience, I find athletes can learn a lot from a consistent debrief process following a tournament. Is this something you have done in the past? If yes, what worked well? To stay consistent with all my athletes, I use \_\_\_\_\_ format. When do you think makes the most sense for us to review this together- the day of the tournament? On the following day? I have found that waiting a week is too long, so I'd like to make sure we have at least 30 minutes set aside early in the week to review this together. How does that sound?"*

Coaches, athletes, and parents should also have healthy boundaries and respect what each other needs for everyone to do their best work. Be sure to link back to your values and explain the rationale.

## Learn from the athlete what works for them!

It can be very helpful to understand more about the athlete's learning style and preferences related to feedback. As a parent, you need to be able to sit down and ask your athletes this; you can't go off assumptions about 'how your kid is,' as coaching and providing sport-related feedback is different than holding them accountable for cleaning their room or doing their homework. When coaching younger athletes, you may choose to obtain some information from parents, as well as the athlete themselves.

## Questions you can ask to uncover more about the athlete are:

- What are 5 words you would use to describe yourself? (or How would your friends/teammates, coaches describe you?)
- When and how do you learn best? (i.e., like doing yourself, watch videos, get written feedback, receive information ahead of our conversation so you can think about it)
- What is your favorite part of playing golf?
- What has been your experience in golf?
- What style of coach do you like or respond to best?
- What are you focused on in golf right now?

Athletes might not know the answers to these questions- they may not have ever been asked or thought of them before! If the athlete is unsure, discuss an option you think might work (based on age, experience, demeanour, etc.) and make sure to check in after a few weeks and again in a few months to see if any adjustments can be made.

**"If we strip back the label, we find that feedback has both a past and a future. There's a looking-back component ("here's what I noticed") and a looking-forward component ("here's what you need to do"). So to clarify the feedback... we need to "be specific" about two things: 1) where the feedback is coming from, and 2) where the feedback is going."**

- Douglas Stone & Sheila Heen, Authors of "Thanks for the Feedback: The Science and Art of Receiving Feedback Well"

## Providing Feedback

Athletes will need to hear feedback to help them improve. If more than one person is giving feedback (e.g., parents and coaches, multiple coaches). It is most helpful for those involved to connect with the athlete on what works best.

Imagine you are a 14-year-old and you get instructions from one coach to change a specific thing about your swing. You work really hard every day to adjust and gain consistency in the new swing. The next week you get feedback from a parent or another coach *'That looks awful! What are you doing? What happened to your swing?'* What would you think? How would you feel? Now what are you going to do with your swing?

Hearing different opinions is common, and part of an athlete's growth will be learning the skill of hearing feedback, considering options for themselves, and deciding next steps based on what they feel confident in and what is important to them. As athletes are working to develop that skill, consider how you can support them in making decisions they feel aligned with. By having multiple opinions from older or more wise humans, it can cause a significant amount of anxiety and stress for the athlete, who wants to do well and not upset anyone.

## Some key points for providing helpful feedback are:

- Finding out what the person wants to learn and how they feel about certain things
- Setting expectations on the feedback process and staying consistent (e.g., 'I want to hear your thoughts on how it went, then I'll share 1-3 things I think we can focus on for the next week based off of this round)
- Keep the relationship, objective, and how you feel about providing the feedback as priorities in the conversation
- Be clear
- Check for understanding, thoughts, and questions
- Provide different types of feedback: coaching, evaluation, and appreciation
- Ask the athlete for what they think could be the focus or change to make. A great opportunity to practice this skill is to list out a number of options together and review why they may/may not work.