



How to Intervene

(When Someone Dishonors the Game)

To create a Positive Coaching culture* in which everyone (coaches, players, parents, officials and spectators) Honors the Game, it will sometimes be necessary to intervene when people misbehave. (*Culture is simply "The way we do things here.")

Even when everyone knows what is expected of them, emotions can get out of control. When a parent yells at an official about a questionable call, there must be a consequence. Most effective is when other adults (on the same team) intervene to let the misbehaving adult know that his behavior is not acceptable because this is an educational-athletic organization for young athletes, not a professional contest designed to entertain fans.

You can help establish and protect a positive culture for your organization by taking a stand. Here are some guidelines for how to intervene when someone dishonors the game.

Be Prepared: You never know when someone is going to misbehave so the best approach is to always have the tools of the "Culture-Keeper" handy. Always wear a "We honor the game here" button to games and carry Honoring the Game cards and stickers with you.

Step 1: Handouts: The first thing to do when an adult is misbehaving is to hand him a card or sticker. Nothing need be said at this point. You simply hand an Honoring the Game card or sticker to the person. Many times this is all that is needed. You are reminding him in a low-key way what is expected of adults at an educational-athletic game.

Step 2: Questioning: Sometimes the handout doesn't do the job. Now you can ask the misbehaving adult a question. "Do you think you are Honoring the Game right now?"

You can also make a statement that will serve the same purpose as a question. "You seem pretty upset." This will often get them talking to you rather than screaming at the official. You can then remind them that part of the way we do things here is that we respect the official even if we disagree with a call. "You may be right about that call being incorrect, but in this organization, we Honor the Game and show respect to officials even if they are wrong."

Step 3: Assertive Statement: Sometimes a person will not respond to your more subtle interventions. In these cases you need to be clear about how you feel about this person's bad behavior and what is expected. Here are some things you can say:

"That's not the way we do things in this organization!"

"Yelling at the official is not Honoring the Game."

"It's not okay to act like that in this organization."

"That kind of behavior has no place here."

It is important that you stand back from the person for two reasons. One is that you don't want to threaten them by invading their personal space. You are trying to let them know their behavior is not acceptable, not escalate this into something even worse.



How to Intervene

You also do not want to put yourself at physical risk. There have been many examples of adults physically striking each other at youth sport events in recent years. If the person becomes abusive to you or continues to act inappropriately, do not retaliate either physically or verbally. Simply withdraw and go to Step 4 (below).

Step 4: Official Warnings: If the misbehaving person does not control himself at this point, official sanctions need to take effect. If you are not an official of the organization, contact an official to tell him or her what is happening so appropriate action can be taken.

If you are an official of your organization (board member, administrator, etc.), you need to take steps to keep this situation from getting out of control. Consult with the head official for the game. The official (or you) should issue a warning to the head coach of the team whose fan is misbehaving. The coach should be told that it is his responsibility to control his fans or the game will not continue. The coach should be directed to talk with the misbehaving adult to let him know that his actions are unacceptable.

Step 5: Physical Removal: It is unlikely that it will come to this, but if you do get to this point, you need to make sure this kind of misbehavior doesn't spread. People watch to see how organizations deal with misbehavior, they learn from it, and they shape up their behavior if they see that the organization means business.

At this point, the offending adult has continued his misbehavior. It is time to stop the game and tell him that the game will not continue until he leaves the premises. (Again, as in Step 4, this should be done in conjunction with the head official.) If the misbehaving adult refuses to leave, stop the game and call the police to have him or her removed.