



Dealing with Difficult Parents, Coaches & Staff

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Parents Can be Your BEST ADVOCATES

Your WORST ENEMIES

They Can be Your BEST ADVERTISERS

Your WORST PUBLIC RELATIONS



Likewise, Coaches and Staff

ARE A REFLECTION ON YOUR GYM

They ARE YOUR PROGRAM

Every gym has equipment.

The coaches and staff are the difference.

Discipline is defined at “Teaching that Corrects”

PARENT, COACH AND STAFF DISCIPLINE IS NOT THAT MUCH DIFFERENT THAN STUDENT DISCIPLINE.

- **LISTEN, REPEAT, VALIDATE**
- **GIVE OPTIONS: AVOID YES & NO QUESTIONS**
- **REDIRECTION**
- **PRAISE THE BEHAVIORS YOU LIKE**
- **COMPLIMENT SANDWICH**
- **SITTING DOWN AS A PARENT OR STAFF GROUP TO SET AND RE-SET RULES**
- **IF / THEN APPROACH**
- **DON'T SAY “DON'T”**
- **“I NEED”**
- **“I EXPECT”**
- **“THAT IS NOT OKAY WITH ME” OR “THAT IS NOT IN KEEPING WITH OUR MISSION STATEMENT.”**

Compliment Sandwich

- ▶ While you want to be specific in your compliments, you want your critique to be positive.
- ▶ A compliment sandwich consists of:

Compliment

Correction

Compliment



Building People...

A huge part of our jobs, as gymnastics coaches includes:

- ▶ Building people up.
- ▶ Listening to them
- ▶ Giving them comfort
- ▶ Helping them to feel good about themselves



Most of the time, We Can Circumvent the Problems BEFORE they Happen: Establishing the Parent Relationship

- ▶ We make the first impression
 - ▶ On the phone
 - ▶ As they walk into the gym
 - ▶ As we meet their child
- ▶ We set the rules
 - ▶ Safety
 - ▶ Class Structures
 - ▶ Payments / Reimbursements when they are displeased
- ▶ We create the environment
 - ▶ Positive
 - ▶ Child Appropriate
 - ▶ Clean
- ▶ We train the staff and define accepted behaviors

First Contact with the Parent

First contact on the phone:

- ▶ Be Excited!
- ▶ Give Credentials
- ▶ Explain Basic Class Structure
- ▶ TALK TO THEM!!!



First contact in the gym:

- ▶ Make Mom COMFORTABLE!
- ▶ Explain how the class physically works.
- ▶ Show her where to put her shoes!
- ▶ Walk her and/or her child out to the class
- ▶ Introduce her & her child to the rest of the class if it is a Parent and Tot Class.



“Hi, My name is Coach Beth! What’s your name???”: Meeting the Child...Uh, AND the Parent

The first meeting between the coach and the child is one of the most important moments in establishing the relationship.

Points to Remember as you meet your new students:

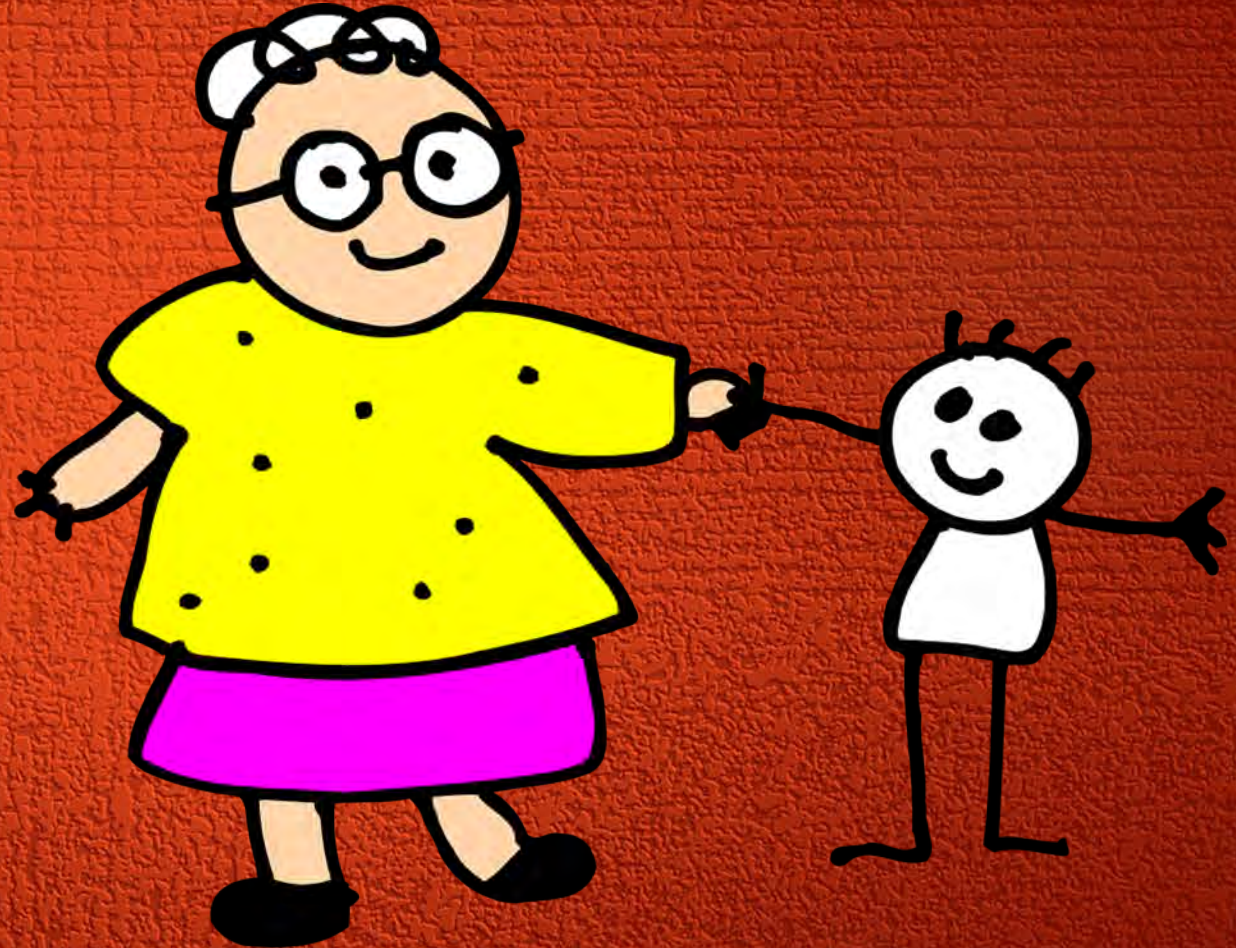
- ▶ SMILE!
- ▶ Make Eye Contact
- ▶ Drop to the child’s level
- ▶ Give your name first
- ▶ Praise something non-personal
- ▶ Tell something about yourself
- ▶ Repeat their names often
- ▶ Give instructions and explanations so they do not feel lost
- ▶ Invite them to join the class and introduce them to their new friends



Managing Parent & Tot Parents

Remember to

- ▶ Set the Rules
- ▶ Educate your parents
- ▶ Keep parents engaged in class
- ▶ Assign jobs
- ▶ Praise the child
- ▶ Praise the parent



Set Class Rules for the Parents as well as for the Children

- ▶ Stay with the children
- ▶ Help the children to follow rotation, and stay on task
- ▶ Assist the children at each station
- ▶ Discipline is the parent's job in a Parent & Tot class



Educate your Parents about the Physical Development of their Child

The more you educate your parents, the more they will trust you as their child's coach.

- Explain WHY we do not bridge children until age 5.
- Explain WHY their child doesn't jump with 2 feet yet.
- Explain WHY we must spot skin the cat carefully and support their child as they hang on the bars instead of allowing them to hang unsupported.



**THE MORE YOU EDUCATE THE PARENTS, THE MORE THEY WILL TRUST YOU.
THE MORE THEY WILL UNDERSTAND YOU KNOW YOUR SPORT.
THE MORE THEY WILL UNDERSTAND THAT YOU CARE ABOUT THEIR CHILD.**

Bring Articles from Outside Sources into the Gym

- ▶ Parenting Magazines
- ▶ Educational Materials
- ▶ For Special Needs Parents: April is Autism Awareness Month
- ▶ Congress and other Coaching Clinic Materials
- ▶ News Items affecting Children



Class Management:

Putting Mom to Work in the Parent and Tot Class

- ▶ Make sure that the parents know each other's name and know the children's names. They are your helper coaches
- ▶ As you demonstrate each station, show Mom how to spot, and show her what you are looking for.
- ▶ As the parents become comfortable with each other and the children, place them at stations to help each child.



UH, Mom...We're Over HERE!!!: Parental Discipline



“HEY, Johnnie, I LOVE the way you can walk on the beam ALL by yourself! Why don't you go get Mommy and show her how you can do that too?!”



“Take Mommy over there and show her what you have learned.”



“Hey, Mom, Come see what Johnnie can do!”

Or....

Hey, Mom! DID YOU JUST SEE THAT????

oh. You didn't?



Well, QUICK, come see
Johnnie did!"

...And My Favorite:

“Hey, you know what I think is really awesome? I think it’s really awesome that you guys have gotten to be such good friends. Ya’ll know what I think would be a really great idea? If you guys got together after gymnastics and met for lunch at McDonald’s or something so the kids could play and you guys could visit without having to worry about helping me.”



When Mom becomes Impatient with her Child..

- ▶ Smile, chuckle and remind her that her child is “only 2.”
- ▶ Let her know that you are not offended by the child’s developmental stage
- ▶ Pat her on the back and sympathize
- ▶ Let her know that a strong will might help her child say no to things later in life, and that might be a good thing.



VALIDATE THE PARENT



- ▶ Do not step on Mom's toes. She IS boss when it comes to her child.
- ▶ I frequently turn to the child and say, "Mom is the boss. She's even MY boss. So, if Mom says something, we have to do it."
- ▶ The only time I refuse a stamp to a child at the end of class is if MOM says they can't have a stamp.

Remember MOM is protective!

- ▶ Every single child is someone's most precious baby. Do not EVER forget that.
- ▶ This may be the first time a parent has allowed another adult outside of the family to have any authority over her child.
- ▶ If Mom sets down a consequence, help her follow through with it. Expect consistency from the parent just as they expect from you.



Praise Mom and Dad!



- ▶ Positive reinforcement doesn't just apply to the child. Mom and Dad need it too!
- ▶ Praise Mom and Dad when they do something well or exhibit good parenting skills.
- ▶ Be sure success is acknowledged for the child AND the parent.
- ▶ High-5 Mom and Dad
- ▶ "Look what WE did!" Build a team mentality.
- ▶ Each time you acknowledge success, you are reminding mom that you are a great coach and her child is learning. Mom LOVES to see her child succeed.

SO,

What about the Parent Who...

- ▶ Pushes their child too hard or expects too much?
 - ▶ Compliment the child before the complaint.
 - ▶ Point out the progress their child has made, specifically
- ▶ Wants their child to “be like Susie.”
 - ▶ Remind the parent that every kid is different with different strengths.
 - ▶ Give the parent examples of areas in which their child excels and refocus the parent on their child’s accomplishments.



....BUT AS MUCH AS WE TRY,
THERE ARE “THOSE PARENTS...”



ALWAYS REMAIN RESPECTFUL
ALWAYS REMAIN HUMBLE

NEVER INVALIDATE THEM
NEVER HUMILIATE THEM
DO NOT TALK DOWN TO THEM

- ▶ **LISTEN TO THEM!**
- ▶ **REPEAT THEIR OWN WORDS TO THEM**
- ▶ **STAY CALM: DO NOT LET YOUR BARRIERS DOWN**

- **Do not ever underestimate the wrath of an angry parent.**
- **Do not ever underestimate the potential of a parent's own ambition or vicarious self-esteem.**

When faced with difficult decisions:

Know your Gym Mission Statement

Know your Personal Teaching Philosophy

WHY do you coach?

Know it. Adhere to it. Stay TRUE to your belief systems.



Heart of Texas Gymnastics Mission Statement:

We are Heart of Texas Gymnastics. It is our mission to serve the community, providing positive experiences for its children. We strive to nurture the children with whom we work toward strong, positive self-images through their participation and achievement in gymnastics

Words of affirmation and acts of encouragement are the tools with which we teach. It is our hope that each child gains from their participation in our program learning gymnastics and life skills in a fun, loving and enthusiastic environment.

Every child is special. Each child is a winner. Keeping safety in mind, we strive to give every child the opportunity to excel to the best of their ability. It is our wish that our influence in their lives be positive. Our goal is to help them develop into emotionally healthy, socially ready, and physically strong individuals as they prepare to become contributing members of our society.

Heart of Texas Gymnastics...

Building Young Champions!

An example of a “teaching philosophy” is,
“To do what is best for the child.”

TRUST and INTEGRITY

- ▶ Within this teaching philosophy there are implied goals:
- ▶ Gaining the students’ trust.
- ▶ Staying within their comfort zones
- ▶ Being honest
- ▶ Listening to them
- ▶ Setting ego aside
- ▶ Never being afraid to say, “I’m sorry.”
- ▶ Putting THEM first.



As They Express Their Concerns...

Powerful Words:

- “I need”
 - “I expect”
 - “The gym rules are....”
 - “For the safety of your child...” - Never apologize for adhering to safety guidelines
 - “I think I understand what you are saying...” - Repeat their words
 - “You have a valid point.”
 - “Thank you so much for coming to me with this concern.”
 - “That is not okay with me.”
-
- Use Compliment Sandwiches
 - “If / Then” works on Parents too
 - Don’t say “Don’t



When will my 3 year old learn to do a back handspring?

- ▶ This is a situation in which parental education is vital.
- ▶ Unreasonable expectations must be re-focused.
- ▶ Remind the parent that the child is very young and there are fundamental movements that are much more important to the development of their child than any “big skill.”
- ▶ Explain how the gaps created in ignoring fundamental movement directly affects their cognitive and academic development.
- ▶ Explain potential physical dangers to their child’s body if they are pushed too hard too early
- ▶ Remind the parent that:
 - ▶ The first concern is safety.
 - ▶ The second concern is that they learn to love movement,
 - ▶ The third concern is that movement is developed progressively
- ▶ If those are all in place, the skills will come.

When will My Susie get her kip?

“Hey, Mom...I know you want that kip as much as I do. Here are the things we are working on to get it....”

- ▶ List the drills you are doing to get the kip
- ▶ Tell her the things you are trying to correct
- ▶ Tell her the specific improvements for which you are looking

“Once these corrections are made, she will get it. Each child is different.”

Thank you **BOUNCE GYMNASTICS** for that contribution to gymnastics lore:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y5LZzJ5K_ug

My kid is better than the other kids!
(This is usually not a verbal statement)

“Susie IS awesome! I am so very proud of how she has learned.....”

Compliment her child,

Then...

Compliment another child.

“I’m so proud of ALL of my kids.”



MY KID!

My kid would never misbehave. (This is also usually tacit)

- ▶ REMEMBER: MOM and DAD LOVE their BABY! They do NOT want to hear bad news.
- ▶ If a kiddo has a behavior problem at the gym, he or she probably has a behavior problem in other environments as well.
- ▶ That means Mom and Dad are probably tired of hearing it, and can become defensive.
- ▶ OR...they may be status symbol kids. Mom and Dad feel that their child directly reflects on them.
- ▶ Remind them that their child is a CHILD. There will be mistakes and it is part of our job to help them to learn LIFE SKILLS.
- ▶ Seek their advice. BE GENTLE. “Hey, Mom. I NEED YOUR HELP. I am having a problem helping Susie to understand that she needs to stay with the class. Could you maybe remind her on the way to the gym each week that I want to keep her safe, so she needs to stay with the class?”
- ▶ “Is there something that you do at home that might help me redirect this behavior?”

Well, you can break the rules for.....ME.

- ▶ Rules are in place for a reason, whether it's a safety issue or a standard that helps keep the business running smoothly.
- ▶ Once you break the rules the first time, it becomes easier for "exceptions" to be requested or expected again.
- ▶ Stand your ground. Maintain the rules of the gym.
- ▶ If you explain the reason for the rules, people, in general, tend to be more accepting of the standards.
 - ▶ "The reason it is important for your child to stay with the class is because the older kids are tumbling and they could land on your child. This is why I need your help in keeping her with the class."
 - ▶ "...This is why I need your help in reminding her to stay off the equipment without a coach."
- ▶ "I apologize for any inconvenience, but I really cannot break the rule."

Hollow Threats

- ▶ Hollow threats are a disciplinary pitfall. They undermine boundaries and rules.
 - ▶ If a coach sets a rule and a consequence it **MUST** be **GOLDEN**.
 - ▶ That means to we, as coaches, have to be very careful that we don't set consequences to which we aren't fully willing to adhere.
- ▶ Likewise, if you have a parent who is throwing down hollow threats to their child, that parent is undermining your authority. This cannot happen.
- ▶ If it is a one-time occurrence, try not to make a huge issue out of it, because we all make mistakes.
- ▶ If it happens repeatedly, expect the parent to follow through.
 - ▶ “Susie, I’m so sad. You know why I’m sad? I’m sad because Mom said that if you did that again, you were going to have to go home. Mom is the boss.” “Mom, you are welcome to schedule a make-up class.” It usually only takes once to stop that problem.



Coaching from the Sidelines

- ▶ The parent who sits on the sidelines tossing corrections into the workout can be a huge distraction. Like other issues, if it is a one-time event, try to ignore it and move on.
- ▶ If it becomes a habit, it must be redirected or stopped.
 - ▶ Try to explain your process to the parent. “I know how much you want her to get that skill. I want her to get it too. I’m working really hard for her by doing these things.”
 - ▶ Give a list of drills you are working on and tell the parent what they are correcting.
 - ▶ Explain the safety issues first (“I need her arms straight so she doesn’t hit her head on the ground. We can focus on her pointed toes after that.”)
- ▶ Explain that getting too many instructions from too many people at once can get confusing and ask the parent to allow you to focus on one thing at a time.
- ▶ If it continues, separate the kid from the parent by placing yourself between the parent and child to give instruction or by moving to another area of the gym.

Abusive Parents

- ▶ WE ARE MANDATORY REPORTERS. FIRST AND FOREMOST, IF YOU SUSPECT ABUSE, YOU MUST REPORT IT WITHIN 24 HOURS TO YOUR LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT.
- ▶ In the moment, place yourself between the child and the parent and talk to the child as you give instructions.
- ▶ Move the child away from the parent and back to the class or activity.
- ▶ Stay calm.



...and What About the Coaches and Staff?

How do you want to be perceived: as a professional or as an amateur?

▶ Appearance

- ▶ Set dress codes
- ▶ Personal Hygiene and Grooming should be the same standards as the kids

▶ Body Language

- ▶ Video the coaches on the floor and show them what the parents see without sound.

▶ Attitude

- ▶ Leave issues at the door
- ▶ ...but remember, we are all human. If a coach is dealing with especially difficult home issues, have compassion for that. Help them cover their classes. Give them the time needed to deal with their emotions. It's better to have them out of the gym for a few days than to have a stressed coach on the floor.

Basic Professionalism

- ▶ **Class preparation**

- ▶ Punctuality

- ▶ Missed Shifts

- “How have you covered your classes?”

- ▶ **Lesson Planning**

- ▶ **Progressions**

- ▶ **Rotations**

- ▶ **Cleaning the Gym**

- ▶ **Medical Information**

- ▶ Establish protocols for emergencies



Customer Relations

- ▶ **Greeting & Meeting : Assign a Greeter, if necessary**
- ▶ **Roll Books : Remind Coaches to call absentees**
- ▶ **Leading Warm-ups : Assign leaders for each hour so that one coach does not have to warm-up every single class. Other coaches should be moving around the warm-up group, fixing positions and interacting with the kids.**

Dealing with Other Staff



▶ Team Work

- ▶ Remember to work as a team.
- ▶ Do not throw coaches and staff under the bus to students or parents
 - ▶ If you have a parent complaint against a coach or staff member, start with “I understand, and I will speak with that coach regarding the issue and get back with you on our resolutions as soon as possible.”

▶ Peer Responsibility

- ▶ Know the Safesport standards
- ▶ Set the gym proactive policies that meet the minimum of the Safesport standards.
- ▶ REPORT abuse to appropriate law enforcement, USAG and Safesport Center.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or I can be of assistance in any way, please feel free to email me at:

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Thank
You
from the
HEART of
TEXAS!