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## What Kids Want in a Coach

We asked kids in an online survey: "What should a coach care about most?" You might expect them to answer "to focus on winning." But "Put me in, coach!" is what most kids really want.

In fact, the majority didn't think winning was all that important. Only 7% of girls said coaches should be most concerned with winning, while about 18% of boys said so.

Here's what boys and girls value most in a coach:

- 64% said **giving everyone a chance to play**
- 27% said **teaching new skills**
- 9% said **winning**

Striving for excellence is a great goal, but when coaches and parents apply too much pressure, kids can get overly worried or push themselves too hard physically, leading to injuries. Some kids may even go on unhealthy diets to lose or gain weight to be better at their sport.

And when sports become too competitive, kids who have only average or below-average skills might spend too much time on the bench instead of learning new skills.

Take it from 10-year-old Brandi, whose coach taught her how to hit a baseball. Before her coach showed her how, "I was swinging at mostly everything and I wasn't holding the bat right," she said.

### Life Lessons

Many kids told us how their coaches taught them important skills that made them better athletes. But kids also said that the best coaches do more than improve their swing or sharpen their three-point shots.

Cobi, 10, said the best lesson he learned from a coach was this: "If I lose, it does not mean I am no good or lousy. And I do not need to get mad or upset if I lose."

Lizzy, 11, said her coach helped her work through jealous feelings she had because a friend was a faster swimmer. "My coach showed me that I had to work for what I wanted and helped me reach my goal."

Kids also were clear about what they *don't* like in a coach: someone who yells and can't control his or her temper.

"Everyone will quit if they're having a miserable time," said Sara, 12.

But it's also bad news if the coach doesn't care at all about winning, said Katy, 11. She had a coach like that once. "Even if we were horrible at the drill, he would still say we were great and he wouldn't even tell us how to improve."

Kids know they need to practice, it's just that they don't want it to stop being fun. Deja, 11, said that it's a

two-way street — coaches need to be supportive and team members need to listen to the coach and cooperate.

Hannah said she learned a great lesson from her basketball coach this year. He told the team to "try your best and not care about winning." They started out losing every game, but ended up winning a tournament!

### **The Next Generation of Coaches**

Many boys and girls were already thinking about how they would handle their teams if they grow up to be coaches someday.

"I will give them all a second chance," said Jena, 11.

Pauline, 12, said she'd be upbeat and encourage her players to lead a balanced life. "I would not have favorites," she said. "I also would tell them that sports aren't their only matter in life, that they have to focus on family and schoolwork, too."

Kristen, 12, said this: "I would be tough, but know when to stop and let them enjoy their sport."

Cobi said if he's a coach someday, he'd let everyone play, even the players who are not the best. Why? "That's how they will become better."

Reviewed by: Mary L. Gavin, MD

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