



Role of the Culture Keeper

Many PCA partner organizations and coaches appoint official "Culture Keepers" to help reinforce Honoring the Game as a paramount value in their organizations and teams. However, any parent can serve as an unofficial Culture Keeper. This document describes the role of a Culture Keeper.

A **Culture Keeper** helps shape the culture of a youth sports team and/or organization. Culture is simply "the way we do things here." The bedrock of a positive youth sports culture is Honoring the Game.

A **Positive Youth Sports Culture** involves not only the coaches and athletes, but also parents and fans. That's where you come in. The Culture Keeper's job is to spread the word about Positive Coaching to parents and fans on the sidelines. Here's how:

- > Become familiar with the three principles of Positive Coaching (*Honoring the Game*, *Redefining Winner*, and *Filling the Emotional Tank*). Read PCA material, check out the PCA web site (www.positivecoach.org) for more information. Ask the coach about anything you don't understand. In particular, memorize the elements of Honoring the Game (ROOTS) which include respect for

Rules
Opponents
Officials
Teammates
Self

- > Get to know other parents on the team at the beginning of the season. Talk with them about your role early on and ask for their support on the sidelines during games. Make sure they have seen the PCA Parent Letter and ask if they have any questions about it. If they haven't, give them a copy.
- > Model the Behavior You Want to See. Parents pick up on each other's behavior. If you harp at officials, other will be more likely to do the same. If you are calm and focused, it will be easier for them to act like you.
- > As the season progresses, continue to keep the idea of Honoring the Game alive with all the parents.
- > Welcome new families to the program and let them know up front "How we do things here."
- > Give occasional pre-game talks to the fans on the sidelines. Remind everyone to "Honor the Game", support all the athletes and to have FUN!
- > Be visible on the sidelines. Wear an "Honor the game" button to games and carry Honoring the Game cards and stickers with you to give to parents (Available from PCA's on-line store at www.positivecoach.org or call toll free 866-725-0024). Take the lead and demonstrate to others how to Honor the Game. Acknowledge those participants "doing it right." People tend to do what gets rewarded – so thank those who Honor the Game.

In spite of your work to help establish a Positive Coaching culture on the sidelines for your league or team, parents will occasionally step over the line because none of us is totally rational about our own children.

If parents get upset about calls made by officials or act in any way that doesn't Honor the Game, you can help reinforce a Positive Coaching culture by how you interact with them. Here are some guidelines for intervening with other parents on your team who dishonor the game (Note: we don't recommend that you intervene with parents from the opposing team as this can quickly lead to an escalation which is the opposite of what you are trying to do as Culture Keeper).

- Step 1** NON-VERBAL APPROACH: When an adult first misbehaves, hand him an Honoring the Game card or sticker. Nothing need be said at this point. You simply hand a card or sticker to the person. Many times this is all that is needed.
- Step 2** GENTLE APPROACH: Sometimes a non-verbal approach doesn't do the job. Then address the misbehaving adult in a gentle way. You might say, "You seem pretty upset." This will often get them talking to you rather than screaming at the official. You can then remind them that we respect the official even if we disagree with a call. Continuing in a gentle vein: "You may be right about that call being incorrect, but in this organization/on this team, we Honor the Game and show respect to officials even if they are wrong."
- Step 3** CALM AND ASSERTIVE APPROACH: Sometimes a person will not respond to gentle interventions. In these cases you need to be clear about how you feel about this person's bad behavior and what is expected. Yet stay calm. To paraphrase Rudyard Kipling: If you can keep your head while all around you others are losing theirs...you'll get better results. Getting upset at parents who are already upset may only add fuel to the fire. Be firm but calm. And if you can't be calm, then be as calm as you can be.

Here are some things you can say if Step 1 and 2 haven't worked.

"Remember we want to set a good example for our kids and Honor the Game."

"That's not the way we do things here in this organization/on this team!"

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

"It's not okay to act like that here."

"That kind of behavior has no place here."

Stand back from the person so that you don't threaten them by invading their personal space. You want to let them know their behavior is not acceptable, but not escalate this into something even worse. Do not put yourself at physical risk. If the person becomes abusive or continues to act inappropriately, do not retaliate physically or verbally. Simply withdraw and contact an official (either a board member or administrator of the organization, or the on-field referee) and tell him or her what is happening so appropriate action can be taken.

Final Word Don't forget to enjoy the season. It's going to be a great one.