



Know The Difference Between Negative Coaching And Abusive Coaching

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"My daughter plays competitive softball and is on a 14u team. We have an assistant coach who becomes very negative and rude when things are not going well. In a recent national qualifier tournament we went to, a player messed up at 1st and got tagged out. Upon the return to the dugout, the play was greeted with a dressing down that started with aggressive swearing.

Later in another game, the girls were not hitting well and the coach said, "If you can't bleeping hit, I may as well put X player in." The pitcher in that game pitched well through most of the game, but started to fade and the other team caught up. We ended up losing and in the after game meeting in front of the entire team, that player was specifically called out for losing the game. She was also asked to come to practice the next week with an explanation as to how/why she lost the game for the team. In another tournament, our one and only catcher was having a tough day and missed some balls. This same coach said to the Head Coach, that we need to find a new catcher, someone who can catch. Everyone heard it including the catcher who quit the team 2 days later. My daughter has hopes of playing at the college level and I am curious to know whether this kind of coach player interaction is something we/she should expect to continue as she gets older and competition gets tougher? Is this just the way it is and we should learn to deal with it? I don't want to teach my daughter that quitting is ok just because things are not going well, but I have raised my concerns about the negative attitude and nothing changes."

PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

This is a challenging question and I'm sure a difficult situation for you. At Positive Coaching Alliance, we are fortunate to get to work with researchers like Dr. Barbara Frederickson at the University of North Carolina. Dr. Friederickson's work centers around positive psychology and its effects on performance. Her work clearly demonstrates the reality that positive approaches work well to get the most out of athletes.

As a former teacher and school administrator, however, I would posit that your question relates to an issue that has nothing to do with whether the coaching behavior is overwhelmingly "positive" or "negative." Swearing at children and emotionally manipulating children is abuse. Taking your account of the story at face value, I would ask, would you accept this type of approach from your daughter's math teacher? Would a school administrator be duty-bound to intervene if a teacher were teaching in this fashion?

If there is even a question that your child is being abused, it would be wise to remove your child from the situation at least until the adults involved (possibly with the help of counselors or other professionals) can ensure that the situation is safe for your child.

continues



Negative vs. Abusive Coaching, continued

Feedback:

"Thank you. I have removed my daughter from the situation as did several other parents."

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