



## How To Handle The Pouting Athlete With Attitude Problems

*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.*

**"I am coaching my son's 10U baseball team. There is a player on the team who has some pretty serious behavioral issues. In a game recently, he hit the first two batters he faced. As our pitching coach went out to settle him down, he started to lose it. We weren't gonna take him out of the game for hitting two batters, but we ended up removing him for his behavior. In the bottom of the first, he struck out and threw a second fit. A short time later, our pitching coach went to grab him to go throw a bullpen and work on some things. The kid refused on three separate occasions, so we took him out of the game for the remainder of the game.**

**We let him be for another inning or so before the pitching coach sat down with him and talked about his behavior. The coach told him to be a good teammate and get up and support the team. He continued to sit and pout for another inning or so until I went to him and asked him three times to get up and join his teammates on the fence while we were hitting. He refused all three times, so I asked him to get his stuff and leave the dugout. He initially refused that, but finally did so a moment later. We have had repeated issues with this kid and I've spent a great deal of time talking with the parents, but to no avail. The parents continue to brush it off as normal 10-year-old behavior and don't support us in our efforts to modify his behavior and/or hold him accountable. One of our coaches has been with him for 4 years now, and this coach insists that the kid is no longer with us or the coach will step aside. This coach is our team administrator and puts in countless hours to do all the behind-the-scenes work. While I fully appreciate the coach's stance, I'm finding it incredibly difficult to give up on the kid.**

**On the other hand, I'm not sure how much of an impact we can have in our limited time with him if the parents aren't willing to recognize any issues. There are obviously many more details to consider, but I'm consumed with making the right decision going forward and I'm wondering if there is someone on your end who is available to talk to."**

### PCA Response by PCA Lead Trainer, Joe Terrasi

Thanks for writing with such a challenging question. Having worked with children with behavioral challenges in the school setting, I can assure you that your inclination not to give up on the child is a good place to start. It may not be the easiest approach to live up to, but it is certainly in the child's best interest.

You are correct in identifying that the parents' reluctance to see the issues is difficult. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon. In school settings, we often try to bring together a team of the parents and all the professionals who work with the student to share concerns and identify consistent strategies. We encourage parents to adopt similar behavioral modification strategies and language at home as we are using in school. In your case, this may not be an option due to the parents' perspective, but it is worth attempting to have a face-to-face meeting with them. In this meeting, it will be helpful to ask non-confrontational questions about strategies and procedures that work well at home.

*continues*



## Pouting Athlete, continued

Whether or not you get buy-in from the parents, there are things you can do on your team to help the child. With any approach, it is important that you coordinate with all coaches to ensure that your approach to the child's behavior are consistent.

It will be helpful to work with the player to set up clear, consistent, and simple expectations for positive things he can do in a practice or a game. It is essential that you talk with him at a time when he is emotionally capable of listening and responding without feeling angry or threatened. The positive tasks can be simple such as, "we'd like you to help lay out the bats and helmets before practice - that'd be a great help to the team; would you be willing to do that with us?" This gives him an easy path to start on the right foot. It also gives you a chance to start each practice with him by praising his work and thanking him for being important to the team. It's important that you pick a task he will see as an honor rather than a chore - something he "gets" to do.

This can open the door to talking about simple, clear expectations for his behavior. At a time that he is feeling good about his role (when he is not currently angry or upset, for instance), you can help him identify specific positive behaviors that are expected. You can also help him understand that there are clear, non-punitive consequences for not doing things as expected. In many cases, the child can identify what those consequences can or should be.

When the child executes a positive action, reinforce that with praise. When he struggles, apply the discussed consequence without anger in a matter-of-fact fashion. Let your praise and gratitude be louder and more excited than any corrective action.

You also mentioned that there is a coach who is considering leaving if the child is not dismissed from the team. While I'm sure this is a frustrating situation for all involved, I share your inclination to prioritize the needs of the child over those of any of the adults. Additionally, there is value for all the players in learning to work with a difficult teammate from a stance of empathy and seeing the adults respond with both firmness and relentless kindness.

Helping a player with the types of behavioral problems you describe is a slow process; don't expect a complete reversal overnight. The key to success is to be clear, calm, and consistent and to establish understanding with the child before he is upset.

Someday he'll be grateful you didn't give up.

Thank you for your commitment to youth sports.

To read more questions and answers like this, or to submit your own question to the Ask PCA blog, visit:

[www.positivecoach.org/our-tools/ask-pca](http://www.positivecoach.org/our-tools/ask-pca)