

HOW PARENTS/CAREGIVERS CAN INCORPORATE EMPATHY WITHIN THE SPORTS EXPERIENCE

One of the best ways that parents/caregivers can support a positive sports culture is by incorporating empathy into their interactions with their athletes, the coach, and the team community. By showing empathy, sports parents/caregivers can help all involved feel heard, valued, and supported no matter the challenges they face on and off the field.

The following tips can help lead interactions with empathy.

WITH YOUR ATHLETE

- Model empathy - the best way we can teach our athletes empathy is by modeling it.
- Help athletes identify and name their emotions.
- Actively listen to understand – maintain eye contact, face each other, ask open-ended questions, and repeat back what you heard, i.e. “What I hear you saying is...”.
- Demonstrate care to support struggling athletes or to celebrate their successes.
- View empathy as a way of leading interactions at all times – not just a tool to use in certain situations.
- Be available to connect with your athlete - but let them lead the conversation. If they don’t want to talk about practice or a game, give them space until they indicate they are ready.
- Be mindful of your body language and tone of voice when having conversations.
- Share real life examples of empathy in sports and in the news.
- Remove judgement when hearing your athlete’s perspective.
- Recognize any bias you may have that could affect how you respond to your athlete.
- When needed, take a breath so you can thoughtfully respond, instead of letting your emotions get the best of you.
- Don’t make assumptions about how your athlete is feeling – confirm with them.
- Thank your athlete when they share their feelings.
- Resist the urge to fix situations for your athlete – give them the space to figure out what they need and support them however you can.

HOW PARENTS/CAREGIVERS CAN **INCORPORATE EMPATHY** WITHIN THE SPORTS EXPERIENCE

WITH YOUR ATHLETE'S COACH

- Give the coach the benefit of the doubt and try to understand and support the coach's tactical decisions.
- Avoid putting your athlete between you and the coach.
- Support your athlete to self-advocate.
- Remember that the coach has their own life away from the sport which can impact how they show up.

WITH THE TEAM COMMUNITY

- Connect with and get to know the other parents/caregivers on the team.
- Recognize that everyone comes to games with their own lived experiences that may affect how they show up.
- Maintain silence when disagreeing with an official's call – everyone has a different perspective on what happens during certain plays.
- Support other parents/caregivers without judgement.
- Advocate for or use a communication platform to keep the team parents/caregivers connected and able to support each other where necessary.

