

“ When Parents Cross the Line”

Bruce Brown, speaker for the National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics and its “Champions of Character” program, has great advice for the parents who have children competing in high school athletics. “Athletics is one of the best places for young people to take risks and fail,” Brown said. Brown outlines “red flags” that indicate a parent may be too involved.

1. Parents who share the credit for their child’s accomplishments.
2. An athlete who avoids a parent after the game.
3. When the game’s outcome means more to the parent than the player.
4. Parents who try to solve problems best left to the team and players.

Brown encourages parents to ask their sons or daughters these questions before the season starts.

1. Why are you playing?
2. What is a successful season?
3. What goals do you have?
4. What do you think your role will be on the team?

He encourages parents to ask themselves the same questions, plus what the parent hopes to gain from their child experience. “If your answers are different from theirs, you need to drop yours and accept theirs,” he advises. For example, if an athlete is playing basketball because he likes the sport and enjoys being apart of the team, trouble is inevitable if the parent’s chief objective is to win a college scholarship.

The coach – parent relationship can be a delicate one, and Brown said there are “appropriate” and “inappropriate” subjects to discuss with coaches. Appropriate subjects include mental and physical treatment of a child, ways to help their child improve and any concerns about the athlete’s behavior. Inappropriate subjects include **playing time, strategy, and other team members**.

Brown is quick to remind everyone that the only guarantee in a sports season is “that it won’t be perfect.” “Even if there aren’t problems among players, parents and coach, there are going to be problems with relationships on the team, problems with playing time, and problems with individual and team success,” he said. As a coach, Brown said he had one commandment for his players: “Don’t let your teammates down.”