



TIPS FOR A POSITIVE SIDELINE AND PLAYER-CENTERED PLAYING ENVIRONMENT

Today, as youth soccer in the U.S. sees the need for a Referee Abuse Prevention (RAP) program, AYSO has a unique opportunity to reaffirm our commitment to our mission. While some may view the RAP as a strict corrective measure, we see it as a chance to lead by example—by reinforcing the positive, respectful, and enriching play environments we’ve always championed.

As coaches, we set the standard!

We are 100% responsible for our actions and the atmosphere we create on the sidelines. Let’s lead with respect, perspective, and positivity—because our players and referees thrive in a fun, family-friendly environment. Be clear, this is not a goal—it is a responsibility!

1. Set Clear Expectations Early

- Preseason meeting:
 - Outline AYSO and team values, sportsmanship, and importance of positive sideline behavior.
 - Distribute the new Code of Conduct.
 - Emphasize respect for referees, no coaching from the sidelines, and positive-only comments.
 - Overview the Referee Abuse Prevention Program.

2. Encourage Positive Communication

- Cheer don’t coach! Remind parents to support all players with encouragement and respect, not instructions.
- Model behavior: Coaches and team leaders should demonstrate calm, respectful interactions. At ALL times respect officials!
- Help communicate and reinforce our core values to your team and parents.

3. Provide Opportunities for Involvement

- Give parents roles like team parent, snack coordinator, team photographer, or fundraiser lead. Involvement can foster a sense of community and reduce sideline stress.
- Create a Parent Liaison Role:
- Appoint a trusted parent to act as a bridge (sideline captain) between the coaches and other parents to help monitor the crowd and quietly remind others of expectations if needed. This helps diffuse tension and keeps communication flowing.

4. Model and Celebrate Sportsmanship

- Your own sideline conduct sets the tone. If you’re composed, respectful, and focused on the kids, it sends a strong message.
- Highlight examples of good behavior from both players and parents.
- Consider a “Positive Parent of the Game” shoutout or small reward.
- Send brief weekly reminders or updates that reinforce the values of the team and highlight positive sportsmanship (e.g., “Loved the positive support on Saturday!”).

5. Address Issues Promptly and Privately

- If issues do occur during a match, the coach, assistant coach, or designate deals with them promptly and effectively (in a private and non-confrontational method to avoid embarrassment).
- Be direct but respectful: “I appreciate your passion, but we agreed to create a positive environment. I need your help to make that happen.”
- Escalate if needed: If behavior persists, involve regional leadership.

6. Share Educational Resources

- Explain the “Why”: Help parents understand the damage caused by negative sideline behavior: undermining confidence, confusing kids with mixed coaching, embarrassing the team, and driving away referees.
- Offer articles or short videos on youth sports psychology, the impact of parental behavior, and the benefits of positive reinforcement.

7. Players!

- At all times take ownership for on field and sideline player behavior! Players should also know their responsibilities!

