

Communication Procedure

The purpose of the interscholastic athletic program at Spring Lake Public Schools is to provide an arena in which students can learn and grow in meaningful ways that are not always possible in a classroom setting. Everyone involved in the program, including our coaches, athletes, parents, and administrators, is committed to doing all he or she can to provide a positive athletic experience for each participant. Our ultimate success in achieving this goal is measured by our ability to establish lines of communication. Through good communication, people feel valued and understood, even if complete agreement is not always reached. Parenting and coaching are both challenging endeavors. Clearly, coaches and parents have at least one strong, common bond. They share concern for the well being of each athlete. By establishing mutual understanding, parents and coaches are better able to accept the actions of the other in order to provide a greater benefit to each athlete. Coaches and parents all want the athletic experience to be positive and educational for each athlete to the greatest extent possible. That does not simply mean that roadblocks along the way in the form of interpersonal conflicts are necessarily always negative. They are growth opportunities when parents and coaches work together.

Communication All Parents Can Expect from Their Child's Coach

1. Team Itinerary: Parents need to know the location and times of try-outs, practices, games, etc. Much of this information is given directly to the athlete.
2. Team Rules: Parents appreciate knowing not only the philosophy of the coach but also any team policies, including consequences that the coach establishes to supplement the rules and regulations adopted by the school.
3. Criteria for Team Selection: Parents want to know ahead of time the criteria that will be used in selecting the team.
4. Criteria for Earning an Award: Parents want to know the requirements for earning a post-season award.
5. Injury: Parents can expect to be immediately informed by the coach when an injury occurs that requires medical attention.
6. Problem Behavior: Coaches will call when their child develops unusual patterns of behavior such as unexplained absences from practice, moodiness, attitude problems, etc.
7. Discipline: the coach will inform Parents within forty-eight hours of all discipline that result in the loss of contest participation.

Communication Coaches Appreciate from Parents

1. **Schedule Conflicts:** Coaches like to know ahead of time about unavoidable absences, lateness to practice, or the necessity to leave early. Parents should inform the coach as soon as possible about schedule conflicts or when your child is going to be absent or late to practice.
2. **Emotional Stressors:** Coaches appreciate knowing about any unusual event in the life of an athlete that is causing the young person additional stress. Parents should initiate contact with the coach to provide insight into changes in your child's emotional state.
3. **Volunteers:** Coaches need help with so many aspects of managing the program that they are always glad to hear from parents who have ideas and are willing to work for the team.
4. **Forthrightness:** Coaches would like to hear about parental concerns directly, not third hand, before a situation has escalated. Every coach wants to try to resolve a conflict before it is taken to the athletic director, principal, or other higher authority or before it is discussed "in the stands".

Areas of Control that Belong to the Coach

1. Tryout procedures and selection criteria.
2. Position(s) played, lineups and playing time.
3. Offensive or defensive strategies and style of play.
4. Practice plans, drills and scrimmages.
5. Other players will not be discussed.

Appropriate Concerns for Parents to Discuss with Coaches

1. The treatment of your child.
2. Ways to help your child improve.
3. Concerns about your child's health and welfare, academic progress, or violations of the code of conduct.
4. **Wait 24 hours before initiating a conversation with a coach.**

It is sometimes difficult to accept that your child is not playing as much as you may hope. Coaches are professionals and they make judgments based on what they believe to be best for all students involved.

We encourage our athletes to become independent and speak for themselves; using respect and dignity. If after your child has spoke with the coach, and the situation has not improved, then it is appropriate for the parent to make contact with the coach and follow the protocol as outlined in this paper.

How to Discuss an Appropriate Concern with the Coach

Whenever a question, concern or complaint arises regarding an athletic situation, we have found the following line of communication very effective in resolving issues.

1. Start with the source. Talk directly with the coach, in private, face to face, away from the practice site or game arena. A telephone call may be necessary to arrange an appointment. Making an appointment, sitting down and listening to both sides is productive in reaching a mutually satisfying resolution. Our coaches are expected and encouraged to meet with individual parents to discuss concerns that affect that parent's child. Please do not attempt to confront a coach before or after a contest or practice. These can be emotional times for both the parent and the coach.
2. If necessary and if your concern is with A Sub-Varsity Coach, talk next with the Head Varsity Coach of the sport.
3. If necessary, talk next with the Athletic Director. A meeting may be arranged with the concerned parties to discuss the issue. Getting everyone together in the same room to communicate openly resolves most issues.
4. If necessary, talk next with the Principal. When stating your concern be prepared with the facts in so far as you understand, or can ascertain them. Think through your expectations for the outcome resulting from voicing your concern. Be clear about what you hope will happen as a result of your meeting.

As you talk with the coach, or other authority, repeat back what you hear him or her say to be sure that you understand the important points. Stay calm and friendly as you talk and listen. Take notes. Before the session ends, have a plan that is clearly understood by all parties. Check for mutual understanding. Set a time and method of responding if necessary. We always assume that all parties have the best interest of the student-athletes in mind when concerns are discussed and we make every effort to assure that the student is not penalized or placed in an awkward position as a result of voicing a concern. Moreover, we believe that parents and coaches, who share the common aspirations of academic success, self-esteem, and the sense of belonging, can work together to solve problems. We believe that adults can teach young people to resolve their own conflicts. This is part of the complete education that can be gained by participating in the interscholastic program.