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## Coach, Can We Talk?

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# Coach, Can We Talk?

## **Abstract**

"Approach talking to a coach after praying for wisdom and writing down objective and productive facts toward helping your child change."

Posting about healthy discussions with coaches from *In All Things* - an online hub committed to the claim that the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ has implications for the entire world.

<http://inallthings.org/coach-can-we-talk/>

## **Keywords**

In All Things, sports, coaching, athletes, communication

## **Disciplines**

Christianity | Health and Physical Education

## **Comments**

*In All Things* is a publication of the [Andreas Center for Reformed Scholarship and Service at Dordt College](#).

# Coach, Can We Talk?

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 [all in allthings.org/coach-can-we-talk/](https://allthings.org/coach-can-we-talk/)

Chad Hanson

As a college coach over the years, I have heard this expression numerous times: “Coach, can we talk?” I’ll admit that this expression typically leads into conversations that are on the heavier end of the sports spectrum, regarding life, happiness, and future volleyball plans. On a rare occasion, I am surprised when that expression leads into good news or light-hearted dialogue. I try to be prepared for anything the athlete desires to share. What impresses me the most is that the athlete initiates the dialogue in the first place. I respect that fully and am most eager to listen.

A concerning trend has surfaced over this same span of time. That trend is the increased amount of direct parent-to-coach communication about the playing time or role of their child on a team. Or, maybe even worse, a parent will not address the coach directly, but instead will find other parents to vent their frustrations to. Worse than that is when parents go straight to the athletic director and bypass the coach altogether. Please allow me to ease your anxiety and mention that I completely understand that a child’s safety and health are of utmost importance. If either are at risk beyond the sport, then anyone and everyone involved in the situation should help to protect the child.

In anything short of safety and health areas, I firmly believe that parents should empower their children to speak to the coach about any issues the child may have. These conversations could take place over a few days or weeks of a season. A quick fix is seldom the result in real relationships. Also, these conversations should happen face-to-face at a time away from the sport and court. As I wrote in a previous article for [in all things](#), I think athletes in middle school should be having conversations with their coach about role or playing time long before a parent initiates dialogue on behalf of a child. Before I suggest phrases and questions for athletes to use with their coach, I need to share some assumptions I have made:

- 1. Trust is established at a minimum level. The parent or child believes that the coach cares for the child and wants to see his or her team be successful in all facets of life and the sport.**
- 2. The coach is experienced enough to be in his or her position and is willing to communicate with an athlete about the expectations.**
- 3. The athlete is the one who feels like he or she wants the situation to change or improve. The parents are not the ones driving the kid to play and to get more playing time.**

I would like to offer some questions for an athlete of any age to use to approach a coach and discuss an issue. These are not in sequential order, nor should they all be asked at one time.

- 1. How can I improve in a specific skill area or help my team compete better?**
- 2. What strengths do I bring to the team?**
- 3. In what areas do you lack confidence in me?**
- 4. Are you available before or after practice to help me grow through focused repetitions in the above areas? I will fully engage in the practice sessions that you plan while looking forward to bonus opportunities that you allow.**

**5. I want to grow in these areas that you have mentioned and will strive to do so. Will you be patient with me and point out my continued successes and areas of growth?**

Please notice that the above statements and questions are NOT about “playing time” or comparing one player to the next. The coach has to decide those elements regularly. The above statements are solely pointing toward the athlete’s growth as that growth relates to helping the team. That’s it. As a coach, I want to hear from my player’s words and see in their actions that they are team focused and care about their growth as it helps the team.

Parents, in the case that your child has already spoken with the coach and is still unclear with the plan of action or their role with the team, I would suggest you approach talking to a coach after praying for wisdom and writing down objective and productive facts toward helping your child change. Many parents use prayer and notes directed toward helping the coach change, but that most often leads to unproductive conversation. Using the above questions could be helpful to keep the focus appropriately toward team.

I would also like to offer some suggestions to help a coach field questions from parents who might be skipping the above steps by coming straight to you. With a smile on your face, simply tell the inquiring parent that you had already spoken with their child about the habits and behaviors of mom or dad at home and that you think the child should be aware of some better ways that mom or dad could behave. Okay, so that is way too abrasive an approach to get the parent to understand the folly of their ways (bypassing the opportunity for their child to talk directly with the coach first). *I just wanted to make sure you were still reading.*

Proverbs 15:1 says, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Instead of being defensive, remember the assumptions above. You genuinely care about each of your athletes. You have been put in this coaching position because you have earned it. The parent cares about their child’s growth and happiness, which might cloud the message you are about to give them: their child needs to grow in skill areas or team focus or sport understanding. Validate their child, be understanding, and be objective. After remembering the assumptions and validating their child, simply let the parent know that you will be happy to discuss these matters first with your athlete (their child). After that conversation, if there are further questions, you would be happy to meet with the athlete and parent. Coaches who communicate these expectations in a pre-season meeting will find great conversations throughout the season when the athlete says, “Coach, can we talk?”

Finally, for all of us to remember through times of tension:

*My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. James 1:19-20*