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## The Importance of PACT

A sampling of data taken from MYSA parents, coaches and athletes from 2006-2007 paint a compelling picture as to the need and importance of PACT educational efforts. PACT helps parents and coaches work together to create a positive climate for youth soccer players and their families. While most parents and coaches “get it right” and an overwhelming majority of youth athletes enjoy soccer and report positive experiences —room for improvement clearly exists.

Take for example that, 90% of MYSA soccer parents report that people on the sidelines “never” or “almost never” distract athletes from focusing on the game, but only 26% of parents report people on the sidelines “never” or “almost never” coach from the sidelines (meaning 74% do witness coaching from the sidelines). Interestingly, MYSA coaches have a different perspective—6% report they “never” hear coaching from the sidelines.

### SO WHAT IS REALLY GOING ON?

It is likely that parents perceive that “coaching from the sidelines” is not distracting to their children....

Children tell a different story. When asked what they hear from the sidelines, a majority of youth athletes report hearing “yelling” —that for some is embarrassing, distracting, annoying and stressful. When polled, one third of MYSA athletes report they “sometimes” are directly yelled at, hear yelling at the referee (some of which are kids!), yelling at teammates and coaching from the sidelines....all of which can be distracting!

This gap in perception between adults on the sidelines and athletes on the field is telling, and reflects the need for education in how to make the soccer climate a more positive place for everyone—especially for youth athletes!

While not everyone on the sideline coaches and yells at referees all the time, it is clear these behaviors do occur and with some regularity and are likely contributing to the creation of a toxic soccer climate. MYSA parents and coaches report a wide-range of behaviors which occur on youth soccer sidelines.

The following percentage of parents’ (n=110) report they have “never” seen or heard the following on the sidelines:

- 33 % report they have never seen an adult act in a way that was embarrassing (66% have seen!)
- 35 % report they have never seen an adult act like a bad sport
- 59 % report they have never heard an adult encourage rough play on the field
- 67% report they have never seen two adults “get into it” verbally (i.e., yelling, arguing)
- 73% report they have never heard profanity loud enough for the athletes to hear
- 80% report they have never seen two adults “get into it” physically (i.e., fighting, punching)
- 89% report they have never seen someone show up intoxicated at a youth soccer game

The following percentage of MYSA coaches report they have “never” seen or heard the following on the sidelines:

- 21% report they have never an adult act in a way that was embarrassing
- 23 % report they have never seen an adult act like a bad sport
- 45 % report they have never heard an adult encourage rough play on the field
- 45 % report they have never seen two adults “get into it” verbally (i.e., yelling, arguing)
- 47 % report they have never heard profanity loud enough for the athletes to hear
- 89 % report they have never seen two adults “get into it” physically (i.e., fighting, punching)
- 89 % report they have never seen someone show up intoxicated at a youth soccer game

Let’s take the “worst” behavior—two adults physically fighting—and estimate the potential exposure of youth athletes to physical violence while at a youth soccer event.

Eleven percent of coaches and 20% of MYSA parents have witnessed two adults *physically fighting* on the youth soccer sidelines (by taking the reverse % of the “never” responses above). Currently, there are approximately 75,000 children in participating in MYSA soccer. That means that between 8,250 and 15,000 (11% and 20% of 75,000 respectively) MYSA athletes are *potentially exposed* to physical violence at youth soccer events. While MYSA stakeholders report that physical violence is not a *common* occurrence it does happen. However, less egregious forms of “bad” behavior and conflict are more common at youth soccer—yelling, verbal arguments, and coaching from the sidelines. In sum, verbal yelling, verbal conflict and physical forms of conflict have been coined “background anger” by youth sport researchers at the University of Minnesota. Why is this important?

Research clearly demonstrates that exposure to background anger in the context of the home, leads to negative and maladaptive child outcomes (i.e., stress, anxiety, depression, aggression). Currently researchers are testing how existing background anger in youth sports affects youth athletes—but it is not too much of a stretch to conclude that background anger in youth sports most likely affects *at least some* children and youth athletes (and their siblings who spectate from the sidelines) in very detrimental ways.

We can do better! The PACT program helps coaches and parents focus on things they can control and get on the same page in creating a nurturing climate in youth soccer, on and off the field, for the benefit of everyone, and most importantly for all youth athletes!

PACT helps parents and coaches get on the same page in developing and maintaining a nurturing climate where positive development can occur.

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