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Parenting at Events

The foundation to athletes success at events.



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Introduction



Areas we will cover in this presentation:

- Importance of an athlete support network
- Roles and responsibilities at events - Parents and coaches
- Finding the balance
- Behaviours and Body language
- Communication
- Reviewing

Parents play a pivotal role in creating high performance athletes. From the experiences they provide their children while young to the continued support and advice provided as their children progress to elite level.



As you can see in the presentation we will cover a number of areas to help best equip you with the ability to support your child to success. As a coach I can see the huge support that parents provide all the way up to, and past the athletes endeavour to reach their sporting goal. With Input from coaches and athletes themselves I hope it will give you some actionable points and tools to set in place to support an athlete throughout the emotionally challenging day that is a sporting event.

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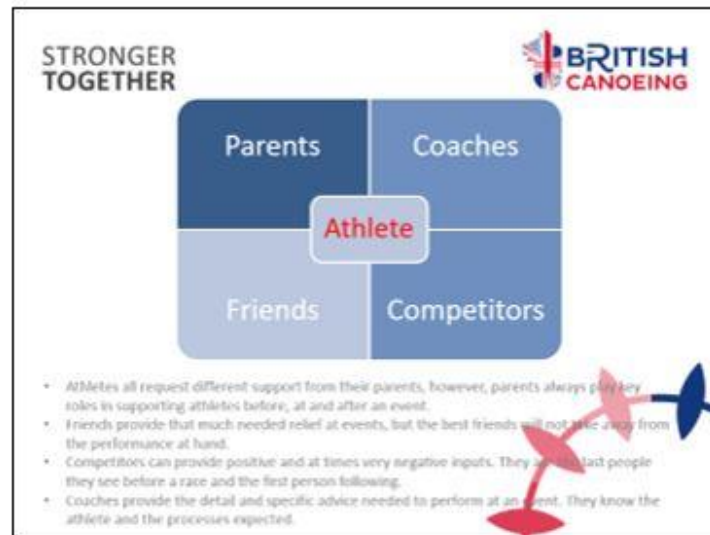


Importance of an Athlete Support Network at Events

Who plays a part and what do they
have to offer?



As well as the parents there is a whole support network for athletes around race day. It is important to know and understand the different roles these people can play and why.



With the athletes at the centre of it all whilst at an event there are four key stakeholders around them:

PARENTS; who offer the practical support before, during and after the events. They give up their time again and again to allow their child the best opportunity to reach their goal.

COACHES; who provide the detail and race specific support to perform at the event. Knowing the athlete and having a clear plan of the processes expected helps the athletes to perform at a high level.

FRIENDS; while at an event the friends act as a relief mechanism, helping to give the athlete down time to talk and relax before readying themselves to perform.

COMPETITORS; Regularly also friends are the people who at the end of the day they are there to beat. This can create a strange dynamic at times but can also positively motivate. Competitors are the last people they see before their race or run and predominantly the first person after. Management of this relationship is a key one to prepare the athletes with mechanisms to manage it.

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Parents Roles and Responsibilities at Events

As Told by the Athletes



For those of you who regularly support your child at a sporting event the chances are you might not always be aware of what your child expects and would like from you. We asked a range of slalom and sprint athletes on the England Talent Programme to anonymously share some of their thoughts and expectations for their parents at events.

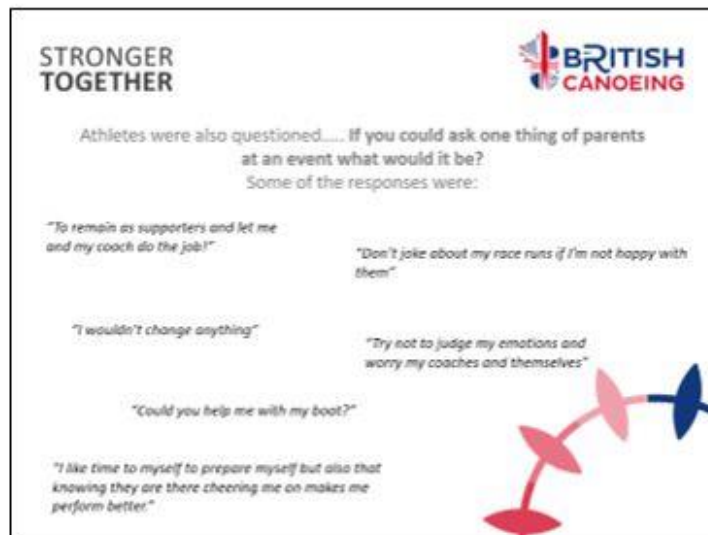


All the athletes were asked, what they see as a parent's role around a sporting event, these were some of their responses:

As you can see the most common word used was Support - This covered emotional, moral and performance support. The really important part that shone through in some of the other questions was the importance of consistent support. Regardless of a successful or disappointing result or time.

Transport and Nutrition were also very common words. Athletes are very aware (although not always outwardly) that their parents are incredibly vital in them being able to even get on the start line. Without yourselves spending the time to drive and feed the athletes they would fall at the first hurdle.

From my experience as a previous athlete and now coach it's not always noticed how much parents do in this area until the athletes become old enough to have to do it themselves, but don't worry all the open appreciation will come in time.



The final question we asked was simple – ‘If you could ask one thing of parents at an event what would it be?’ This left them open to ask anything. And I am happy to see that they were able to ask for reasonable and considerate things - I was expecting for a few more brand new boat or paddle requests! Take a look at some of the responses and potentially this is something you could ask your child to better improve both your event experience.

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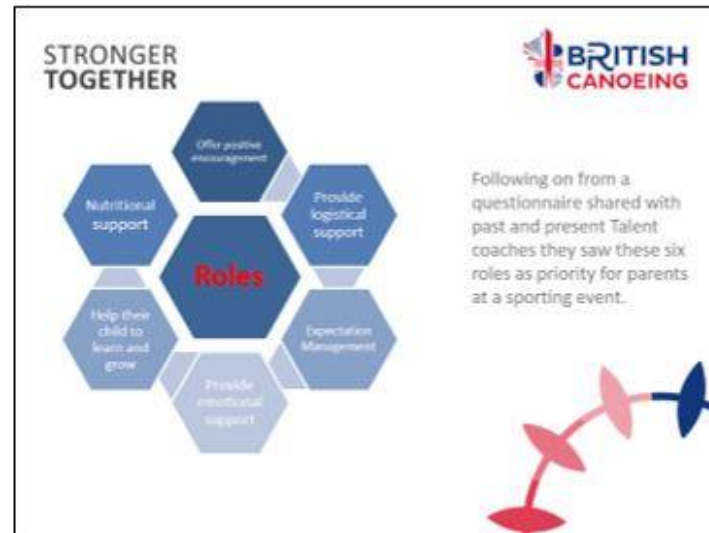


Parents Roles and Responsibilities at Events

As Told by the Coaches



Similarly to the athletes I also shared a questionnaire with the Junior Talent coaches, some past and present. This was to help parents understand what we, as the coaching team, expect and need from you at an event. I think that there are expectations that aren't always shared from the start and allow lines to become blurred. This can at times cause mixed messages for the athletes and priority should be to avoid that.



Linking well to the athlete's thoughts there was a belief for parents to provide the logistical support and emotional support. Parents know their child best and the emotional support they provide is far greater and more regular than any coaches can. There were also a number of points directed at helping parents to acknowledge the importance in letting their child learn and grow. This can be done through helping your child to begin to take some levels of ownership, challenging the athletes to learn from mistakes and also helping them to learn to manage their realistic expectations. The biggest thing is avoiding the extra pressure being placed on the athletes before they even get on the water.



These roles were backed up in the same question which was asked to the athletes. 'If you could ask one thing of parents at an event what would it be?'

Finding the correct level of involvement is really important and can only come if you challenge your child to see what they actually hope for and want from you. While still working with young children who are constantly developing and learning it all needs to be underpinned with emphasis of FUN. Always keeping that as priority will help you as a parent to be able to rationalise and bring it back to a clear motivational focus.

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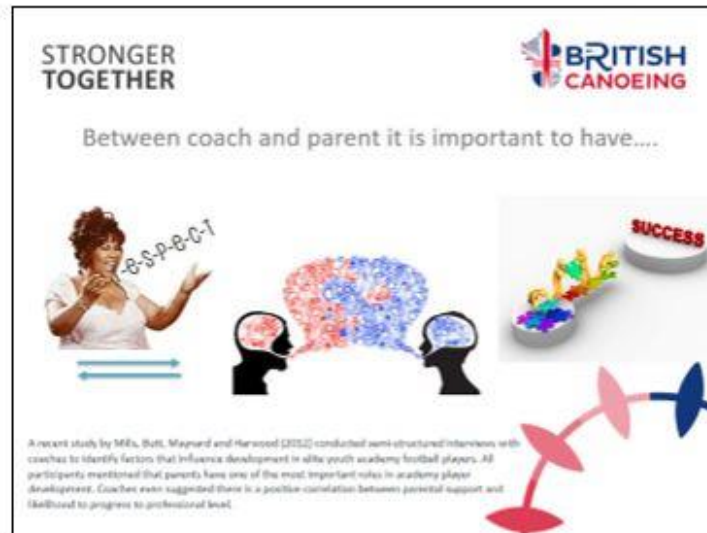


Parent/Coaches

Working in partnership



While at an event as discussed before, Parents and coaches are two important stakeholders. Working together means they can create a dynamic team that gives support and knowledge on and off the water to help create a fun and comfortable performance environment.



To create this environment some key aspects need to be considered:

Respect - Coaches to understand the parent's role and parents to understand the coaches without either one challenging the other on these areas while at events.

There might be difficulties and misunderstanding between the two however if communication lines are strong and always open they can be easily manageable situations which shouldn't affect the athletes. Communication is a continuous growing aspect of creating a working team so working out how each communicate best will make a big difference. Forward planning the correct times to have constructive conversations allows for preparation and productiveness.

Ultimately you are both there to work together to help the athlete reach their goal. So keeping the focus on their purpose and understanding each others will make this route to the goal an easier and speedier one for the athlete, with a lot less road bumps.

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Finding the Balance

Pushy Vs Neglecting



Balance is a hard word. Used in the context of food, work/down time, exercise it has many slightly different connotations. However for a parent at an event balance is vital. Making sure you're providing the correct level of support while at an event to help your child succeed. Too much, children feel extra levels of pressure, too little and the athlete is left feeling neglected and alone.



Pushy parents are often joked about but there is a chance things that you could be seen to be displaying pushy parent actions. If as a parent at an event, you struggle to control your emotions this has its consequences. You see parents at swimming galas roaring at their children, or touch line parents that are basically on the pitch with the children telling them what to do. This puts a huge amount of pressure onto the individual athletes leaving them with low self esteem that they might never be as good as you want them to be or anxiety that they are doing things wrong.

The infographic displayed on the right hand side provides some warning signs of behaviours which could be considered stepping into pushy parent habits. Ultimately studies have shown that athletes with Pushy parents have a far greater tendency to drop out of sports. Controlling how you act as a parent will hopefully keep athlete retention and improve their journey to their goal.

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Too little....

The drop off and dash parent can equally cause greater problems. It's important for an athlete to feel valued, supported and proud of.

Without that athletes are left feeling:

- Alone
- Nervous
- Different to other athletes who have parents there for them.

This is an added pressure that an athlete doesn't need to feel while at an event. They need support and guidance from parents.



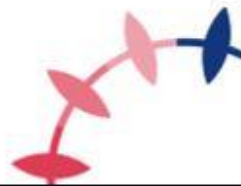
On the other side of the spectrum there is also a high risk that athletes can be left feeling alone, nervous and especially different to others if parents do too little. Competitions can be challenging to fit into the expanding calendar of day to day life. But if athletes are regularly left to fend for themselves or don't believe their parents care or support them this adds a whole greater level of pressure and self-doubt than any athlete needs, especially whilst they are there to compete. Ask questions, offer time and ultimately when at a competition remember why you are there, to support your child and their growth.

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Parent's Body language and Behaviours

Advice



I have spoken a lot about roles at events, but I want to give you some practical advice on areas you can really be in control of.

Behaviours and body language are the clear things that athletes acknowledge so let's make sure we are doing these correctly.

STRONGER TOGETHER		Behaviours		BRITISH CANOEING	
Do's		Don't's			
Encourage your child to develop their own self-awareness - Allowing them to fail and learn from this.		Become over-involved- Challenging people, over-promoting your child.			
Put trust in the coaches and show this. Working as a team.		Mollycoddle- Allowing them to be free and in control.			
Reassure your child that you are there when they need you and show your support.		Provide inappropriate coaching advice- Keep too-checking how they are and what they need rather than what they have done.			
Reinforce the need to enjoy it and have fun.		Emphasise the importance of winning and success.			
Focus on the processes, encourage them to focus on their own progression.		Over-attend your child. Give them space to do what they need to do for them.			
Comment on effort, attitude and offer practical support e.g. Eating properly.		Compare with others!			
Think about the last words you say to them before a race or run. Keep it simple, e.g. good luck, race well.		Ignore their needs. Especially at key times around competing.			
Agree on ways of communication prior to event.					

Young people's experiences of parental involvement in youth sport
[Alex Scrandis, Karl Stedman, Imaki Senada, Kiyonori, Renshi, Senadali](#)

In a study about Young people's experiences of parental involvement in youth sport these were some of the Do's and Don'ts of behaviours that can affect athletes experiences while at an event. Have a read and think if there are any easy wins you could make with small alterations to your behaviours.

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Body Language

Nearly 93% of how you communicate with your young athletes is based on **body language**. "Athletes look at parents' facial expressions; that says more than words," Dr. Monika Schloder

To help children feel more confident, be sure to smile when they look at you.

The Positive Coaching Alliance suggests that parents give kids a "flushing" sign with their hands after their kids make mistakes. This tells them to flush away the mistake and move on.

As well as behaviours the other things that the athletes pick up on is Body Language. Most communication when your child is going down the course or warming up on the lake is done through signals. A simple smile after a race could make all the difference. This small clip talks about the use of a gesture (mistake signal) that can be used and understood by many and make a big difference while athletes are competing. (PLAY VIDEO) Imbedding this action or gesture prior to the event will help to make the most of it while at there. It will indicate many words while only using one action.

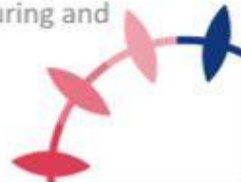
Sports Parents, Watch Your Body Language with Your Young Athletes
November 18, 2010 By [Patrick Cohn](#)

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Communication

Productive, encouraging
communication before during and
after an event.



Communication - Words can be interpreted in many ways but are key for parents and athletes to use while at an event. The next slide shows a video about how the correct use of communication creates a strong successful difference.



(PLAY VIDEO). The importance of focusing on your child and not others will help them in their route to success. They can only control the controllable which relates to the actions they do. Communicating these expectations clearly and then putting a focus on the positive areas of what they have done will create a strong connected communication pattern from parent to child.

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Reviewing

The long drive home.



I identified earlier that transport is a key role for parents. Within transporting you also have to bring in the emotional support - This is especially present in the long drive home.



Using the drive home productively to review allows the athletes time to be able to:

- Vent and express disappointment OR
- Share expressive excitement.
- Question things through carefully
- Maybe even just recap the weekend as a whole.

As a parent this is where you can make a big impact. Through bringing the conversation back to positives it will improve the overall memory the athlete has of an event. By chatting through the negatives and attempting to flip those to actionable changes to be made in the future this will help them to make positive changes for next time. There is also scope that during this time the parents best cause of action could be just silence to allow the athlete to process what has happened. In this instance allow it to happen.

Overall the drive home closes off the competition, so the key thing is that you leave the car with a clear calm understanding of the things that have happened at the event. Avoid negativity as it can leave a mark come the next competition.

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Recap



- Talk to your child and see what support they desire at an event.
- Understand your individual role as a parent at an event.
- Working with the key people within your child's support network is important.
- Avoid adding any extra pressure through what you say and do.
- Positive communication is key. (As mentioned heavily in Andy Hounslow's Parent chat)
- Review but don't over do. Keep the chat simple, don't ask too many questions and try to turn negatives into an actionable positive.



So as a summary to help you and your athlete spend some time asking what they desire at an event. Try to understand your individual role as a parent at an event. Every athlete wants something slightly different.

The whole support network is important and should be used and will help make your role as a parent easier to manage.

Be aware that what you as a parent may say or do can add pressure or leave the athlete feeling alone - Stay clear of this to help create the right environment for your child to perform.

Positive communication (even when the athlete might not be feeling positive). Reinforcing the FUN element whenever you can.

And lastly using that review period wisely. What have they done - Putting emphasis on Positive and Turning negatives to an actionable positive?



I hope that this has given you some thoughts especially with the racing season coming up. I look forward to hearing any changes or alterations that you might make to improve things. You as parents can use each other to learn from the experiences to help the athletes be the best they can be. If you have any questions then please post them and I will try to answer or if not able to I will look into the answers and share with you all at a later date.

If you have time now please put any thoughts onto the chat. Otherwise as part of a follow up of this presentation Daniel will be sharing a small questionnaire (link below) to allow us to get responses from all the key stakeholders.

https://britishcanoeing.formstack.com/forms/parenting_at_events_webinar_feedback