

Player Development Project

Unknown Damage from the Sideline

By: Gordon MacLelland

Sideline support and direct instruction are two very different things. In this article, Founder of Working with Parents in Sport, Gordon MacLelland discusses the damage that can be caused from parents overstepping and instructing children while they play.



Every weekend all over the world millions of parents, children and coaches set off for their weekly sporting ritual 'Match Day'. Many will follow the same process each week and will never question their routine or behavior.

Many of these parents and coaches are well intentioned, trying to support their child and their team through match situations totally unaware of the damage they may be doing by overly involving themselves before and after but crucially during the game itself.

I say that they are unaware because if they are not the current climate on the sidelines is far worse than I currently fear.

This morning I carried out a little experiment at an Under 8 grassroots football match in the UK. I counted the number of tactical instructions yelled from the sideline by parents and coaches to the children. There were 134 yelled out in 40 minutes of play. I must stress that this did not include positive praise.

A counter used to record sideline instructions at a youth football match.



Now imagine as adults if we were embarking on a task and during this time, we were being yelled new instructions, in this case approximately four a minute. Now imagine on top of that, that some of these instructions were also contradictory. I believe that not only would we struggle to concentrate but we would struggle to make the correct decisions that we were originally carrying out. Just think how this must feel for a child actively involved in a sporting situation?

If parents and coaches are not aware of the damage, they are doing by directing play and yelling tactical instructions from the touchline then I hope that this article will give them something to mull over.

Caught up in the excitement and emotion of a game, many parents and coaches feel that they are really helping and supporting their children whilst watching by shouting technical or tactical instruction. Whilst this may on occasions in the short term prove successful there are major long-term implications of this for the player.

1. It reduces problem solving skills
2. It decreases decision making skills
3. It reduces creativity in young players
4. It reduces the child's enjoyment
5. It increases the pressure on the child
6. It increases anxiety in the child
7. It prevents children from mastering life skills
8. It decreases the ability of the child to cope independently (particularly if the parent and the coach are not around)

Bearing all this in mind it is important that we then generate an understanding of how all of this is linked together with the behavior that we are displaying. The following infographic from our friends at believeperform.com gives us a very powerful visual image.

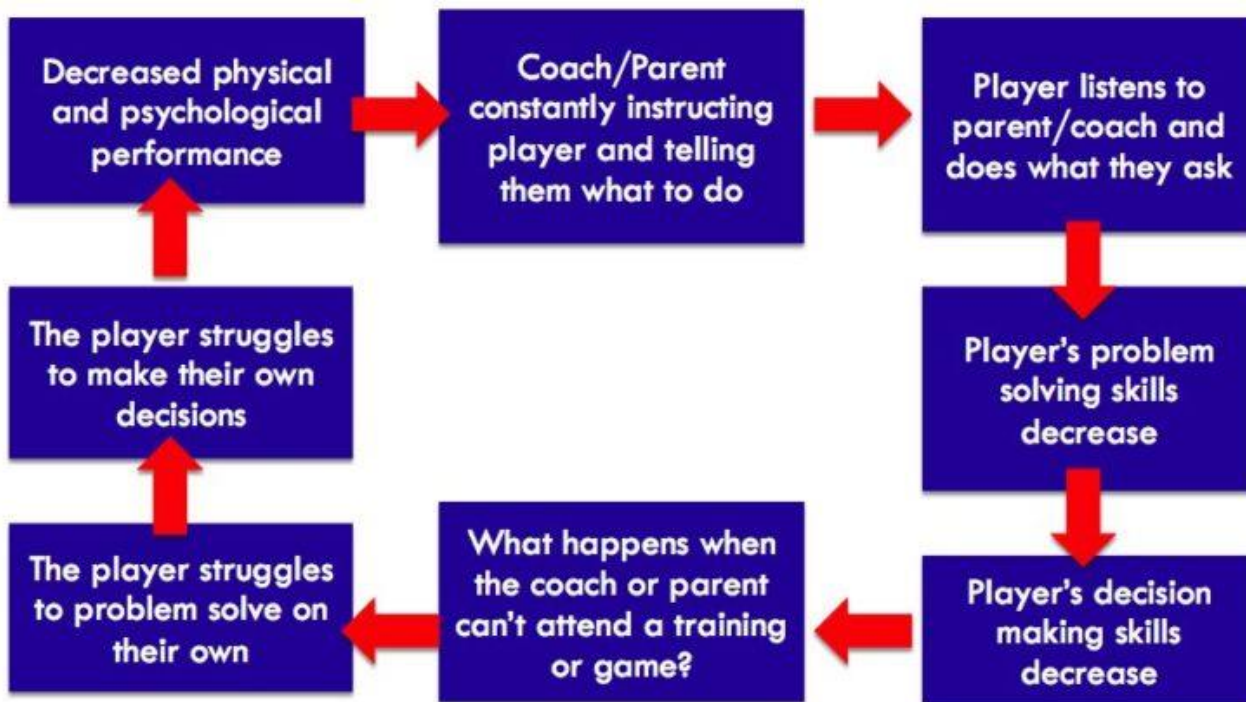


Image Credit: believeperform.com

My message to parents:

Are you shouting tactical instructions on the sidelines?

If your answer is, "Yes," then stop. Stop now.

I can already hear you justifying why. I can already hear you rationalizing your particular approach. I can hear you because I could be you. I am you. I want to right the wrongs for my child. I want him to score. I want him to feel joy in victory. I want him to avoid the pain of losing. I want him to know I am there, that I love him, that I am his biggest fan.

But, let me ask you:

Do you think it helps?

It does not.

No justifications, no intelligent counter arguments. No nonsense. Screaming and shouting tactical instructions is bad. It is that simple. I did not make it up.

My message to coaches:

The above still applies however there can be a little bit of flexibility if you are trying to assist your team and individuals but it should be a very measured approach.

We have a number of parents who contact us who have been told by organizations what they would like them to do and how to behave but then they have to watch the coach do exactly the opposite. Coaches must be great role models for parents and help create the right environment for the children by leading from the front. Parents will then follow.

With positive support only on the touchlines can we regain control of an environment that is in real danger of spiraling out of control. In its current climate the only people who are suffering in the long term are the people who we love and want to achieve the most; the children.