

# THE BIG KID



## 10 Steps to Bench Bullying by Coaches<sup>1</sup>

1. Interview the coach and his/her staff. Ask about philosophy, priorities, playing time, values and how he/she measures the outcomes of each.
2. If your child is already on the team and you have concerns, ask your child about his/her experiences, the messages that are being sent, listen to understand and follow each path your child raises a concern about.
3. Inquire of other parents who currently or who previously had children on the team.
4. Look for red flags: According to Kody Moffatt, MD, a pediatrician in Omaha and executive committee member of the Council on Sports Medicine and Fitness for the American Academy of Pediatrics, the number one red flag is a coach who wants “closed practices” where parents and other adults are barred from the practice. “That may be innocent, but as a pediatrician, a parent and a coach, I don’t think any coach should tell an adolescent not to tell another adult something.”
5. Be sure to attend (or perhaps rotate with other trusted adults) your child’s practices.
6. If you notice bullying behavior, document it and include specifics.
7. Identify and map behaviors to team, school and/or league codes of conduct. Use this as a tool to share very specific examples of your concerns.
8. Address your concerns directly with the coach. Focus on the impact on the children and be specific.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally published by the National Institute for Children’s Health Quality (NICHQ) and now available in the book *The Big Kid and Basketball ... and the lessons he taught his Father and Coach*

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9. If discussion with the coach is unsuccessful, reach out to the athletic director, school officials (if school-based program), and/or league officials, and share your findings.

NOTE: It is absolutely crucial to make note of how the coach is treating your child AND it is also critical to keep an eye out for how the other children are being treated as well. These are our communities and regardless of whom the child is, these behaviors are unacceptable, and it is incumbent upon us all to speak up for those who cannot do so for themselves and make a difference.

10. Ensure that you also focus on developing warm and trusting family relationships and positive home environments so that if your child is bullied the negative outcomes from the bullying will be minimized. According to the study “Families promote emotional and behavioural resilience to bullying: evidence of an environmental effort” published in the Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, “Warm family relationships and positive home environments help to buffer children from the negative outcomes associated with bullying victimization.”

Bullying by coaches is harmful and can lead to tragic ends. Together with these 10 steps we can identify it, stop it, mitigate its impacts, and help our children achieve their optimal health—physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

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