

Communication Strategies for Young Coaches

It can be difficult for a young coach to effectively communicate gym safety rules to adults. As a gym owner, it is important to provide coaches the communication tools necessary to keep your gym safe.

Make gymnasts and parents aware of your safety policies. During enrollment, ask parents and gymnasts to read and sign your safety policy. Keep the signed policies on file. You can also hand out safety flyers during gym events. Your written safety rules should:

- Outline areas that are off limits. Markel's claims history suggests making the pit and trampoline off limits during birthday parties, sleepovers, and open gyms.
- Post warning signs to indicate areas that may be hazardous to visitors. For example, differences in mat height and gaps between mats can cause a trip and fall accident. People frequently blame their fall on failure to maintain safe premises.
- Identify who will be in charge of gym activities.
- Request parental/adult cooperation with all rules.

Designate key personnel to address parental behavior that violates your gym rules or threatens anyone's safety. For example, angry parents or parents who think they still have the same skills and flexibility as they did when they were children may require personal attention. Note that managing some parental behavior should remain the responsibility of a mature member of the gym.

Playing to Win: A Risk Management Guide for Nonprofit Sports and Recreation Programs, offers tips to help young coaches handle angry parents:

- Never ignore or dismiss a parent's complaint.
- Do not lose your cool.
- Allow parents time to explain their concern, and don't interrupt.
- Show your concern by saying "I'm sorry that you feel your child has been treated unfairly."
- Ask questions with the goal of clarifying the parent's concern.
- Present several solutions to demonstrate willingness to work with the parent to solve the problem. Don't make promises you can't keep, and explain what you can and cannot do.
- Conclude the discussion on a positive note with a statement like, "please feel free to come to me in the future if you have additional concerns." You can use this information to develop a script for young coaches to use when they supervise birthday parties or open gym.

If you have a safety or risk management question or a suggestion for a topic, please contact Markel's Risk Management Department at safety1st@markelcorp.com.