



APA Division 47

SOCIETY FOR SPORT, EXERCISE  
& PERFORMANCE PSYCHOLOGY

# SPORTPSYCH WORKS

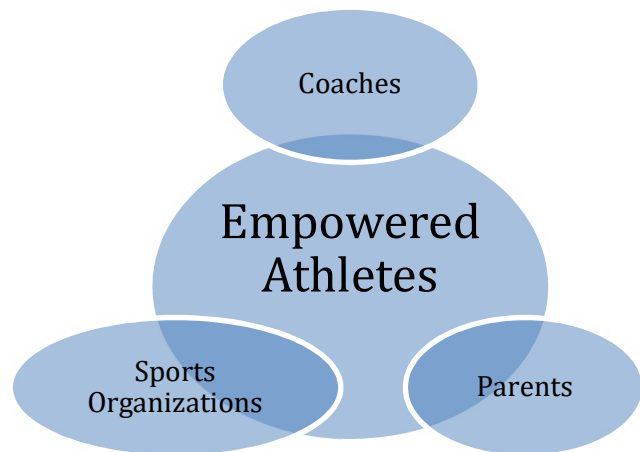
## Volume 5: Supporting the Athlete in Society Issue 4: Sport Advocacy

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### Empowering Athletes Through Sport Advocacy

Sport Advocacy means that coaches, parents, athletes, and sports organizations “act on behalf of the athletes’ rights and responsible practices” (Heil, 2016, pg. 3). Although advocacy may involve moments of progress and setbacks, embracing advocacy as a foundation of professional practice increases the likelihood of producing continuous and durable action that drives change.



### What Can Athletes Do to Support Sport Advocacy?

#### Be Self-Reliant

- Be aware of and accountable for team behavior on and off the field
- Learn to speak clearly and to develop key communication skills.
- Advocate for yourself and for the needs of others.

#### Support Your Teammates

- Be supportive of your team mates on and off the field.
- Be a force in developing a positive team culture.

#### Remember your Resources

- Parents.
- Coaches.
- Teammates.
- Sport organizations.
- Student organizations.
- Student health and counseling services.

***“The power and influence a coach wields over the athlete, for good or bad, is without parallel ... If the culture of sport is to change, coaches will need to lead the way” (Heil, 2016, p. 12).***

## What Can Coaches Do to Support Sport Advocacy?

Coaches can support and contribute to sport advocacy by being aware, accountable and ready to act and by being clear, compassionate and courageous when acting.

### Awareness

- Educate yourself and your athletes about governing guidelines.
- Support contextual awareness.
- Guide athletes toward responsible decision making.

### Advocacy

- Leverage authority and influence.
- Encourage systemic change.
- Speak on behalf of athletes facing challenges circumstances.

### Clear & Courageous

- Understand both the risks and responsibilities of advocacy.
- Consider implications of your speech and actions.
- Be a role model for your athletes concern as an advocate.

## What Can Parents Do to Support Sport Advocacy?

### *Advocate Against Tolerance of Violent Behavior.*

- Appeal as a group to the sports organization or school on behalf of the student athletes to raise awareness of violent behavior.
- Ensure that appropriate and swift penalties are enacted for players for excessive aggression and for coaches who promote irresponsible aggressive play (Frankl, 2016).

### *Be Aware and Ready to Act.*

- Tune in to your child's emotional states.
- Prevent hazing by helping your child develop empathy for other. Discuss how they would feel if they were treated that way (Smoll, 2013).

### *Teach Student Athletes Self-Advocacy.*

- When parents speak on behalf of their child, it stifles the child's willingness and ability to self-advocate (Ellis, 2014).
- Understand the long-term benefits of self-advocacy, i.e., increased ability to manage challenges in adulthood.

### *Acquaint Yourself with Sport Culture.*

- Ask questions about safe play guidelines and safety equipment, and about training and knowledge of coaches and officials.
- Strive to understand the overall culture of the school sports program or youth league.

### *Provide Communication and Support.*

- Encourage open communication with your child. Try open-ended, low-pressure questions such as, "How was practice today?" Let your child speak.
- Ensure your child feels supported. Make sure your child knows you value your child more as an individual than as an athlete.

## Where Can I Learn More about Sport Advocacy?

Ellis, K. (2014). Self-advocacy-Helping student-athletes address issues on their own. *National Federation of State High School Associations*. Retrieved from <https://www.nfhs.org/articles/self-advocacy-helping-student-athletes-address-issues-on-their-own/>

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