

A GUIDE TO TEACHING KIDS HOW TO PRAY

1 John 5:14 “And we have this confidence in him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears it.”

Perhaps the most important and life-changing task that parents have with their children is to introduce them to God and the power of His unending love. Certainly, faith formation should begin in the home, as parents are the first great teachers of their children. However, as children become a little older and begin their formal education, clergy and educators begin to take on a much more prevalent role in the faith formation of youth. Other than parents and clergy, coaches can have a tremendous impact (if they take the right approach) on the spiritual growth and development of the young people in their charge.

Coaches have the perfect platform from which to share their faith. Most athletes greatly admire and respect their coaches and have a strong natural desire to listen to them and give their very best to do what “Coach” is asking of them. If a coach is a great role model and their players respect them, kids will naturally emulate the behavior they see in their coach... especially when it comes to faith and prayer!

Here are four suggestions for teaching kids how to pray, whether they are in second grade and just beginning their athletic career or perhaps just coming out for a sport as a high school freshman. These rules are pretty solid regardless of age:

1. Teach them that prayer is simply a conversation with God! Prayer is best when it is done in a respectful way, yet put in their own words. Perhaps tell children that it is like carrying on a conversation with their grandparents, who they have a deep respect for but also a strong bond of love. Let them know that God is always listening and very much wants to have a daily conversation with them!
2. A pretty good place to start is to extend words of thanks to God. We can thank God for our families, our home, and food on our table. We can also give thanks for our friends, our great school and team, our coaches and teachers, our pastor and church leaders, Jesus’ unconditional love, and other various blessings.
3. We can next pray for others in need... for those who are battling illness, injury, and adversity. We can pray for other families who are struggling with unemployment or homelessness, as well as other things that might be going on in our community. I think the key here is to thank God first and foremost for our many blessings, then pray for others before we pray for our own needs.

4. Lastly, we should pray for ourselves, our families, and our team. I always discouraged our players from ever asking for victory from week to week. I truly believe that God doesn't really care who wins athletic contests! We are all His children, so why would He favor one team over another in a game? However, I also strongly believe that God does care that we give our very best every day to make the most of the abilities with which we have been blessed. (See the TALENTS lesson at the bottom of this toolbox).

Our coaches used to tell our players to say a quick prayer before the snap of the ball on every play. Ask God for focus, toughness, courage, intensity, or strength... whatever you might need on that play. We would also encourage them before the game to "Take God with you on every play," in your heart, mind, and soul. I am convinced that Jesus is a GREAT teammate if we only allow Him to be!

As I mention in the "Essence of Coaching" article, is there anything we can do as coaches that is more significant than bringing Christ to others and bringing others to Christ? As we help our players feel more comfortable in their own relationship with Christ, the next logical step is to help them feel more comfortable sharing their faith with others through prayer. Few things we do in life are as intimate to us as prayer. However, in my years as a coach I learned that as players grow comfortable sharing with each other through prayer, the team bond that is created is a powerfully unifying force! The camaraderie and unity that is formed will lead to our players feeling a strong sense of family. The concept of playing with and for your "brothers or sisters" and with a sense of duty and obligation to make God proud is the essence of playing for a higher purpose.

Over the years I have learned that the teams who play together to bring honor to their families and to God are the teams who are the most fun to coach and who almost always perform their best when the going gets tough. I think this is what every coach wants... isn't it?

AT THE CENTER OF ALL OF THIS IS OUR FAITH IN GOD AND PRAYER!