

# YES, YOU NEED TO WRITE A WELCOME LETTER

Set the right expectations, right from the start.

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Twenty20

You're all signed up to coach. Your background check has been submitted and there's a bag of soccer balls in your trunk. Now, it's time to introduce yourself to your team.

Sounds simple, but it's worth pausing here to make sure you get this very important step *just right*.

Mike Singleton, one of MOJO's go-to soccer coaches, and the former head of Massachusetts Youth Soccer for many years, estimates that he's helped tens of thousands of youth coaches with welcome letters. (Meaning, if you were a soccer coach in Massachusetts in the 2000s, these tips might look familiar.)

Here's the process.

First: Send an email to team parents. Let them know who you are and that you're excited to be coaching. Use the email to announce an in-person meeting at a time that's easy for parents to attend. This meeting is your chance to set expectations right from the get-go. Start the meeting by passing out copies of your agenda — your welcome letter — crafted from Singleton's comprehensive list below.

Team goals. Your first order business is to remind everyone that fun is the name of the game. Developing skills is another great goal for the season. Gently remind parents that winning is not the point. Singleton says it best: "Winning will be a by-product of our players developing skills and enjoying the game."

Style of play. Giving parents details of what kids will be learning is a great way to set expectations. Let them know that their kids will be playing multiple positions during scrimmages and games. Talk about teaching combination plays. Older kids might learn about making tactical decisions during games.

Attendance. Singleton starts this topic by saying, “I will be at every game and practice.” This emphasizes your commitment as the coach. Then request that the players also commit to being at all practices and games. Ask parents to share conflicts ahead of time, so you can better plan. Also, players should be picked up promptly when practices or games are over. Coaches get hungry, too!

Discipline. Explain your policy upfront. You want all kids to get the most out of practice. If one player is preventing that from happening, you need to take action. After two (or three) warnings, a player sits. Equate it to school. Singleton says, “All kids go to school and there are behavioral limits there.”

*How you talk to parents is the real difference-maker.* Singleton recommends asking them for advice on the best way to work with their child. By asking for their help, you’re showing that you want their player to have the best experience possible.

Communication. Let families know how and when to reach you – the more specific, the better. It’s OK to set boundaries. Do you prefer phone calls, texts or emails? Are weekends off limits? Singleton tells his team families, “Please do not ask to talk to me during a practice or game, or immediately before or after the game, or in front of your child.” Your attention is needed on the players during practice and games – for safety purposes most of all. Letting parents know the

best time for communication at the beginning of the season will help you avoid a distracting chat on the sideline.

Sideline behavior. Cheering is always welcome — yelling and sideline coaching, not so much. “If everyone is coaching, this will only confuse the players,” says Singleton. He keeps it light by telling parents to pretend soccer is a math class. Kids do homework for math and they have tests. What if all the parents went in on test day and started screaming? How good would the performance on those tests be? For soccer, the practices are the homework and the games are the test. “The players need to make their own decisions and we need to support them,” he adds.

Wrap it up. Finish with an enthusiastic “Let’s have fun!” You can’t say it enough. Leave room for questions. If available, pass out the schedule of all practices and games. After the meeting, email a copy of the agenda to the families.

Now everyone’s on the same page and you can focus on what matters.