

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

GSBYRA
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At the fall meeting the GSBYRA Junior Sailing Committee highlighted Parent Involvement as a key component of a viable junior sailing program. We decided at the meeting to develop a summary of ideas to increase parent participation at the club level. The purpose of this note is to summarize some of the ideas that surfaced in the discussions about this subject. It is hoped that we may add to this note and develop it further.

During the GSBYRA Seminar on Youth Sailing Program Management in March 2002, Joni Palmer had a section of her program devoted to working with parents. In fact she presented a paper at US Sailing's Junior Sailing Symposium in January entitled "Maximize Parental Involvement ... provide a structure where parents can have a positive influence." There were two key aspects that she discussed in our March program. First was establishing the parameters and the second point was value of a "Parent of the Day" program. Appendix 1 and 3 are the handouts Joni provided.

Why is Parent Involvement Important?

This may seem to be a strange question. There are many circumstances when parents need to limit their involvement as children are learning to sail. Ask many of us who have tried to coach our children in a sport. Also children need to learn to do it on their own. Optimist parents need to let the children take care of their boats, and equipment – some of us have learned this the hard way.

But there are lots of reasons for parent involvement.

1. Parents want to know that the activities their children are engaged in are worthwhile: That these are activities are fun, educational, safe and worth spending time doing. The children and the parents are essentially customers of the sailing program.
2. Parents of children learning to sail, unlike when I learned (during the 1950s), often are totally unfamiliar with the sport or for that matter any water sport. They need to learn what the activity is all about.
3. Parents pay the bills – let's face it at some point continuing to support a child's interest in the sport will require money and time.
4. Time. Yes, this is not really "a dump the kids off at the club" situation – it is for some - but when we speak of junior sailing, we are talking about the development of future sailors and leaders of sailing programs and yacht clubs.
5. Volunteers: Parents are a future source of active, contributing members at the Club level and longer term GSBYRA.

6. Potential: The record is clear – many of the strong programs in the sport – Toms River, N.J., Chicago, Ill., and Newport, Ca. – to name a few - are driven by parents.

The 2% Factor – A Word of Caution

Yes, there are some parents who are nuts. Joni Palmer says sports psychologists say that 2% of the parents are nut cases – the Little League syndrome – parents who try to live through their children. You cannot do anything to change this; to some extent you just have to live with it and minimize damage. These parents cannot be retrained. Hopefully they leave the sport –the sooner, the better.

This note will developed the following topics:

- Sailing Program Parent Orientation
- Parent Fun Activities
- Parents As Volunteers

Joni’s presentation “Maximize Parental Involvement ... provide a structure where parents can have a positive influence” is in Appendix 1. She makes the point that for “Involvement” to be a rewarding experience for parents and the Club, parameters need to be defined and communication must be clear and open. Look her list over carefully in Appendix 1.

Sailing Program Parent Orientation

Based on our discussions there is a real need to be sure there is a parent orientation at the beginning of the junior sailing program. This need is supported by the presentation made by Joni Palmer in the spring of 2000 and this has been confirmed by the experience of many of the member Clubs in the Association. What can be done? A parent orientation – a meeting with parents at the outset of the sailing program is a first step. In addition a parent handbook can go along way by putting key information on paper. Appendix 2 outlines some of the core content of a typical orientation session. Certainly we want to communicate what the program is all about and the key administrative features. Problems can be headed off by reviewing key policies and procedures, the activities and, of course, the focus on safety. Expectations need to be presented at the outset. Some of this can also be covered in a Parent Handbook. Finally at the end of the program we need to think about feedback mechanisms such as a questionnaire or feedback form. See Joni Palmer’s Appendix 1 for more ideas.

Babylon Yacht Club and Bellport Bay Yacht Club have handbooks in place and I am sure other clubs have them as well. Bellport and Babylon have agreed to share theirs with other Clubs. Although the handbooks discuss many factors that are specifically related to their respective programs; many features are generic and, in fact, Bellport’s was developed several years ago and was modeled after a handbook used in a successful program in Florida.

Items covered include: Objectives of the Program, Safety Issues, Program Content, Activities, and Policies and Procedures, as well as a section on racing activities and regattas, including directions to yacht clubs.

Many of these topics can be covered in an orientation meeting but the obvious difference is the orientation gets to the heart of the matter because it is a chance to meet the people. Present the instructors; give them an opportunity to do part of the orientation and to meet the parents. The head instructor as well as the adult person who oversees the program should be present and play an active part. Young instructors (16-22) really underestimate the importance of talking to the adults – putting the minds of the parents at ease and getting them to buy into the program at the outset. Yes, it is an information meeting and a marketing meeting.

For years we talked about this at BBYC and in 2001 we did it formally. Hey - it was easy and fun. Why didn't we do this earlier? Who knows – yet we are sure that it was done from time to time in the past but unfortunately organizations sometimes have no memory. At the end of last year my reaction was that we needed more contact with parents on some level throughout the program.

Moriches Yacht Club put a lot of emphasis on this during 2001 and they came away very enthusiastic about the impact it made on the program. Westhampton and Wet Pants have also shared with us some of their experiences.

Parent Fun Activities

Back in the day I remember when my parents (Ted and Billie Everitt) sailed in a parents' race and to my surprise my mother won a race with my boat, a boat that I thought was pretty slow at times. Hey - there were 12 boats in the race so it was not a lay up. But that is another story. Several clubs have conducted such activities. This idea is – old school but a modern version could be a good time. Best not to put the emphasis on winning – the key is to make it a fun experience.

Other approaches are to get something going that includes both parents and children together. Some Clubs have gotten their PHRF class to get families out. Other clubs have had a family sail to the beach or some other destination.

Bellport for years held a Bay Day. Activities designed principally for children but also designed to be a family affair. A fun day on the bay – that included balloon races, rowing, etc. Kent Picken developed a series of fun activities – some very intricate such as a “lily pad” run across tire tubes hooked together in the water. He engineered a water-dunking contraption. Get the commodore wet – it works. Kent capitalized on his engineering background and his sense of humor. The program had a good ten-year run.

I think the objective of these activities is to build a rapport – get the family interested and you will build youth sailing. Not everyone will race but a percentage will. And after all, there are lots of other things to do besides race one-designs or PHRFs. For the clubs that have community

based programs, this is particularly important because you are interfacing with a group that really has limited contact with yacht clubs and what sailing is all about. You want to develop community linkages. Simply getting sailing lesson families together for a cook out or other social function is important and it helps to build a relationship.

Parents As Volunteers

Joni's handouts have a number of ideas – perhaps the most intensive is “the Parent of the Day” concept. This is outlined in Appendix 3. My only question is whether or not some parents would actually be willing to do that job as Joni describes.

Other possible jobs include:

- Race committee work on a Club level
- Parent social activities
- Boat maintenance

Break the jobs that need to be done into tasks. Work with the strengths a person brings to the table – if you look for all the things they don't know or do, you will never be able to get help.

Joni Palmer advocates establishing a mentor system that she calls “a buddy system.” I think the buddy system is a great idea that can be applied to help not only to develop a volunteer program but also help to orient parents to this sport and to the club.

Source: This note was written by John W. Everitt, March 28, 2002 and will periodically be updated to add points. We should thank Joni Palmer for the ideas she has given us on this subject.

Appendix 1: Working Successfully with Parents in the Yacht Club Environment¹

By Joni Palmer

“Provide a structure where parents can have a positive influence”

- 1) **IDENTIFY THE QUALITIES OF A GOOD PARENT** (and the corollary)

2) PARENT EXPECTATIONS

- a. Daily involvement...can they watch rig? Hang around? Race days
- b. Travel to away regattas
- c. Competitions with boats that need “crews”... commitment between families
- d. Others.....

3) POLICIES

- a. The three D's of policy making
 - i. Define
 - ii. Document
 - iii. Distribute
- b. Why do you make policy?
 - i. Define policy for any problem that may arise so it is easy to handle.
 - ii. Define policy for problems that have occurred and you do not want to occur again
 - iii. People will get mad at the policy and not you.
 - iv. Protect yourself (and support instructors)
 - v. If in tight situation, can always make exceptions
- c. Examples of policies

¹ Presented by: Joni Palmer at the 2002 National Sailing Programs Symposium in St Petersburg, Florida

4) COMMUNICATIONS

- a. Initial contact with/ registration/ marketing materials
 - i. Mission statement
 - ii. Costs, times, boats etc
 - iii. Classes offered and curriculum description
 - iv. Frequently asked questions
 - v. Expectations
 - vi. Gear needed
 - vii. Instructor bios
 - viii. Committee contacts
- b. Parent Handbook
 - i. Policies... define document & distribute
 - ii. Mission statement/ goals of each class
 - iii. Committee
 - iv. Roster of students/ classes
 - v. History
 - vi. Communication hierarchy
 - vii. Juniors must read
 - viii. Parents must read
 - ix. Safety procedures and policies
 - x. Ethics and code of conduct
 - xi. Discipline
 - xii. Parent article
 - xiii. Expectation of involvement
 - xiv. Use of club owned boats
 - xv. Instructors
 - xvi. Calendar
 - xvii. Directions to clubs
 - xviii. Non member policy
 - xix. Age limits
 - xx. Class associations
 - xxi. Where to buy boat parts
 - xxii. Diagrams
 - xxiii. Travel guidelines
 - xxiv. Regatta checklist
 - xxv. Daily check list
 - xxvi. Rain/ bad weather policy
 - xxvii. Event descriptions
 - xxviii. Trophies and awards
 - xxix. Sailing terms
- c. Parent orientation meeting
- d. New Parent Buddy system
- e. Ongoing communication
- f. Follow-up after program
- g. Email? Web? Phone? Flyers?

5) OTHER

- a. Regular social functions... take parent sailing
- b. Parent education of the sport
- c. Parent of the Day program
- d. Thank the volunteers... visibility, newspaper

6) COMMITTEE INVOLVEMENT

Appendix 2: An Example of an Outline of A Parent Orientation

PARENT ORIENTATION TO JUNIOR SAILING PROGRAM

S A I L S

Safety

- swim test
- PFDs
- Clothing
- Rules
- Drop off/pick up
- Management

Activity – What we do!

- Differences between sailing and other sports
- Weather
- Skill building
- Training
- Operating environment
- Equipment
-

Involvement

- Opportunities for parents

Level

- Outcomes
- Evaluation
- Feedback

Support – Forms

- Medical

Source: This was a topic I was assigned when I took the Level 1 Instructor program. The idea was to present a topic using an acronym. In this case SAILS. Yeah – I know it is too cute, Anyhow develop your own outline of the topics to be covered. This is just an example.

Appendix 3: Parent of the Day

PARENT OF THE DAY

1. POD Squad (Parent of the Day) is a great "term" to use.
2. Each participant's parent (mom or dad) is expected to give one half day to the program as a Parent of the day. Put this in a policy statement somewhere and distribute. Non-member parents are also expected to participate. This gets them involved.
3. POD is very instrumental to the program! It adds that extra hand for the instructors, helps with discipline problems, helps with safety, and provides immediate feedback about the program.
4. Equipment needed for daily POD: badge or visor for identification, hand held radio, first aid kit, sunscreen, copy of medical forms for kids, POD form, pencil, Start Sailing Right book, printer POD duties, medical problem "cheat sheet" for the kids, written emergency procedures, any other pertinent info. Suggest put all in a canvas carry-all bag that is known to be the POD Squad Bag.
5. Design a form (example enclosed) to be filled out by each POD at the end of each half-day duty. This is immediate feedback to instructors/ program organizers on how the daily program is going! Make sure you read these often and follow up on problems before they become major. Let instructors read each day. Keep copies.
6. POD should report at a certain time (usually 30 min prior to class) and stay until class is dismissed. POD's will be the supervision at lunch. AM POD stays trough lunch period and PM POD comes early to be present at beginning of lunch period. Specifically state times expected to be "on duty".
 7. Duties of POD (add whatever you need!)
 - a. Stay with the class group at all times
 - b. If class is on water, they should be around the dock at all times.
 - c. Help push boats off the dock and catch them when they come in.
 - d. Observe and help in discipline situations (work out specifics with instructors.)
 - e. Deal with minor first aid and contact the parent if a problem.
 - f. Oversee kids with discipline problems/ first aid while instructor continues to teach class. Takes kids to "bathroom" if it takes the kid far from class group.
 - g. If you have hand held radios, POD will be land contact for instructors while on water. (I.e.: emergency problems, a kid comes in to fix something on boat, basic communication!)
 - h. Help instructor if needed.

8. Things to be careful of: Little league parent syndrome. Instructors are the teachers, not the POD. POD is an observer/ helper. They do not need to know how to sail.
9. Instructors should meet w/ POD prior to class and talk about what and where they are going in class. POD should be introduced to kids in class.
10. Schedule POD assignments prior to sessions starting. Write up a schedule and distribute it. If a parent cannot make it on assigned day, they must make their own substitutions and report that to POD Chairman. Instructors need to be aware of changes as they come to rely on POD.
11. POD Chairman should send out reminder postcard (or phone) to each POD 3-7 days prior to their duty.
12. Try to be firm with each parent to participate! They usually love it and learn a lot. If planned ahead, they can reschedule work obligations. It also gives the parents a chance to watch as it is suggested they do not hang around on a daily basis.
13. Some instructors do not like the POD program, as they are usually not mature/ organized/ prepared to teach. If an instructor really complains, try to find out why.

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