

Thinking of Changing Coaches?

Sometimes, for any number of legitimate reasons, you or your child may consider making a coaching change. Depending on the circumstances this can be a difficult decision to make, but the experience itself need not be an unpleasant one if the transition is handled in the right way.

The bottom line is communication and respect. First, speak with your current coach and explain why you are considering a change. The coach may be unaware that there is a problem and be able to resolve the issue. If, after speaking with your coach, you still want to make a change, be sure your account is settled in full. Your new coach should then communicate with your current coach to discuss this and other issues related to your skating before committing to a single lesson.

From the coach's perspective, the separation should always be respectful and professional, leaving the door open for future communication as needed. Be assured that even if a coach disagrees with your reasons for making a change, he or she should **always support** your right to decide what is best for you or your child and will treat everyone kindly and with respect.

Unfortunately, there are some coaches who feel threatened when students leave and who may occasionally threaten repercussions, such as encouraging his or her students to isolate the skater socially or asking other parents to get involved and pressure those involved to reverse their decision. Such tactics are an abuse of power, plain and simple and you should report the coach's actions to management or the club immediately. Send a clear message that you will not give anyone the license to bully you or your child ever.

Promotion, Solicitation & Tampering

Let's face it, coaching is a business, and most coaches are obliged to promote themselves and their business in some form or another—like having a website(!), teaching group classes, or passing out business cards. While there's nothing inherently wrong with self-promotion, there are lines that should not be crossed, especially where children are involved. Common problem areas in figure skating involve **Solicitation** and **Tampering**.

Solicitation is when a coach (or a parent or student acting on behalf of the coach) approaches another skater or his or her parent(s) in an effort to persuade the skater to change coaches. While there is no formal prohibition against this except when an athlete is "*skating or preparing to skate in an event at an arena in a test, competition, or exhibition*" ([PSA Code of Ethics, P.3](#)), it is a practice better coaches invariably see as counterproductive and unnecessary. It is also ethically questionable and can be detrimental to the athlete's interests—especially when handled in a carefully calculated or underhanded way. Some of the more problematic approaches I've witnessed all-too often include:

- A coach holding a pizza or pool party or other social event, or perhaps proposing a 'special' group number for an exhibition, then inviting other coaches' students to join the event or group and using the opportunity to pressure the skater to join his or her (social) group on a more permanent basis by changing coaches.
- A coach forming a clique or 'gang' of students, sometimes even requiring uniform apparel, and encouraging them to intimidate or pressure other coaches' skaters into making a coaching change.

Clearly, some of these techniques amount to little more than bullying and bribery, and it should be apparent that any coach who employs them has little or no confidence that he or she can compete on ability or performance. Worse, that coach is consciously putting his or her own self-interest above those of the child.

Tampering can be more insidious. One simple example: The coach or one of his or her parents approaches a skater and quietly suggests their technique or program is seriously flawed and will hurt their performance on tests or in competition. They are 'mystified' as to why the skater's current coach hasn't fixed the problem and may suggest that coach isn't knowledgeable enough to fix it. They offer the skater 'free' advice on what the skater should do, then smoothly segue into suggesting lessons to help the skater address these supposed flaws. While the coach may want you to believe his or her actions are entirely altruistic, the true motivation is invariably money or ego. What's best for the skater is usually well down the list of concerns.

What should you do? As a parent, the most important thing is to be alert to such tactics and remember that, like any teacher, the ethics a coach employs can have a profound influence on your child's own development. Any instances of solicitation or tampering should be reported to your coach immediately and, when they make you or your child uncomfortable or have a negative effect on your child's experience, to arena management as well.