

The Minnesota Youth Sports Research Consortium

Helping Create Change Across Youth Sports



Background Anger in Youth Sports

Negative coach and parent behavior at youth sport events is not only a popular topic of conversation among stakeholders of youth sport, but it is documented in scholarly literature, popular press sport parent books and the media. Unarguably the behavior of some coaches and sport parents is undesirable. Given the prominence and value of sports in the lives of many children and their families, this line of research maps the concept of background anger onto the context of youth sports.

Originating in developmental psychology background anger involves an angry verbal, nonverbal, or physical interaction between two or more people that does not directly involve the observer. Research indicates when children are exposed to sustained parent-to-parent background anger, it may have long-term health consequences and is distressing, especially when conflicts occur between adults and are left unresolved.

Outside of family life, it is difficult to imagine a more popular and sustained context where children are exposed to the frequency and variations of inter-adult and adult-child background anger that are evidenced at youth sport events.

Our evidence across different youth sports clearly documents that coaches, parents, and children frequently observe and experience background anger in some youth sport environments (e.g., yelling at the ref, coaching from the sidelines, embarrassing behavior, yelling child's teammates, yelling at or fighting with other adults), yet little is known about the influence of background anger on the attrition, sport experience, performance and psychological health of children and youth. Background anger is a potentially significant construct for research and applications in developmental sport psychology.

Currently we are examining age and gender differences in the magnitude of associations between background anger and youth athletes' psycho-social and physiological outcomes. To that end we are filming a series of video vignettes of common background anger behaviors in youth sport. In turn, we will expose children and youth to the video scenarios in order to experimentally test the effects of background anger on youth athletes.

