



Emotional Change in a 6th-Grader

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"I've got a player on my 5th/6th-grade girls team who, while she practices and plays the same way, has gone from happy and energetic to down and more withdrawn. I'm confused because her effort is still there in practice, she treats me with the same respect, and she is getting noticeably better on the court, but her emotion is much different. What should I do?"

PCA Response by Mike Town, PCA Trainer–Hawaii

This child is in a season of her life where she faces many changes and adjustments. Because her effort and performance continue to be solid, even improving, from a coaching perspective there is not much more to say or do. Her improvement may actually be a result of increased focus and effort to compartmentalize, which brings with it a change in her behavior or level of communication in practice.

When there seems to be a mood change, I generally leave it alone depending on my relationship with the athlete. When I know the child well, I might gently ask: "How's it going?" or "You just don't seem yourself, what's up?" You may get anything from a shrug to "OK" to tears. But don't push it. Doing so may alienate or embarrass the player, making things worse, and besides, few coaches are qualified to handle the major issues that may arise from delving into a child's personal life.

When I don't know the child, sometimes the opening or closing ritual after practice might surface something when we speak about how each athlete tried hard. Beyond that, I have found it best to leave it alone.

PCA Trainer Mike Town is a retired judge, based in Hawaii, who has coached collegiate basketball, as well as volleyball, swimming and outrigger canoe paddling.

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