

Best Practices for Coaches

3 Main Topic Categories Addressed

SOMD Training Weekend
Friday, 26 March 2010
Towson, Maryland

1. How to Manage Athlete Behavioral Challenges

Approaching athletes with autistic spectrum disorders:

- Minimize the verbal; emphasize the visual.
- Ensure there is a schedule that is posted and reviewed.
- Be clear and consistent.
- Reduce sensory overload – minimize distractions.
- Know the family/caregiver dynamic so that you can effectively anticipate the athlete reaction.
- Structure and predictability provide a more calming effect.
- Often times, having another athlete demonstrate an action will encourage the athlete with autism to mimic the behavior of the athlete who is demonstrating.
- Video the athlete in action; emphasize individual strengths and make suggestions for improvement.
- Develop a buddy system for peer coaching.
- Be aware of changes in medication which could affect the athletes' behavior/ reactions.

Managing athletes unable to stay with assigned group:

- Create a buddy system. Encourage each athlete to stay with their buddy.
- Systematically, place the person inside the group.
- Provide positive feedback when the athlete stays with the group.
- Establish clear ground rules by setting parameters; ensure that all coaches enforce them.
- Give the athlete a specific job or responsibility to encourage staying with the group.
- Create contingency plans; the athlete must know that if he/she does this, he/she is provided with what they want (that is still appropriate for the individual and the team).
- Be sure athletes are identifiable (such as providing contact information in the credential); if they “run” and they are “found”, they can be escorted to the appropriate delegation.
- Divide up supervision responsibilities with coaches and chaperones; allow those athletes who need to “explore” the opportunity to do so, but under the guidance/supervision of a coach/chaperone.

Working with athletes who have severe behavior problems:

- Ensure safety first. Move the athlete or move the team.
- Establish a “team contract” defining expectations.

- Establish relationship with the athlete so that they have confidence and trust in you as a leader.
- Don't overreact; take the time to find out what is going on within the athlete medically and/or emotionally.
- Ensure that adequate staff members are present to take care of the athlete with severe challenges as well as the others.

Working with disruptive athletes:

- Get to know the athlete: know what they like and do not like; communicate with each other frequently; show every athlete attention at practice and competition.
- Recognize triggers.
- Be consistent. Be sure athletes are aware, in advance, of the consequences of their behavior – must be enforced by ALL coaches.
- Privately communicate with the athlete to determine the reason for the disruptive behavior. The athlete should feel a part of the process to correct the problem. It is wise to have at least two coaches or a coach and another adult be present for the conversation.

Communicating with athletes who have attention deficit disorders (ADD):

- Use interactive approach; use cueing to keep on task.
- Provide structure with a wide variety of activities and quick changes to prevent boredom.
- Change the activity every 8 minutes (guideline). It is a good idea to use a timing device or starting cue that is appropriate to the sport during competition – provide a consistent signal that relates to their sport.
- Make the athlete responsible for leading an activity; change athletes each day.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Communicate at the same level as the athlete (if athlete is short, bend down to his/her eye level).
- Introduce the activities and the sequences of activities so the athletes know what to expect.
- Realize that children with attention deficit disorders are paying attention to EVERYTHING.
- Incorporate competition into the practice that is true to the sport. It is more fun to race than to run laps. Make practice and competition activities purposeful. This also helps prepare the athlete for the real competition.

Communicating with athletes who are minimally verbal or non-verbal:

- Get their attention; ensure they are looking at the demonstrator; demonstrate the skill one-on-one or in a group with other athletes.
- Communicate with the parent or caregiver to discover how the athlete communicates.
- Know what motivates the athlete.
- Provide frequent repetition and reinforcement that can be verbal (good follow-through – can read lips) and nonverbal (high five; thumbs up).

Working with an athlete who does not want to compete in the middle of an event:

- Calmly ask “why?” to determine the reason for the situation and listen (if athlete is verbal), restate what they have said to ensure understanding. Validate the athlete's feeling . Clarify acceptable behaviors and explain consequences of non-compliance.
- Have extra staff available to assist with difficult athletes.

- Have a supervision plan in place with coaching staff and chaperones
- Peer encouragement

Deflecting acting out behavior into productive practice habits:

- Re-direct to desired behavior.
- Set boundaries; be mindful of the boundaries and enforce them.
- Watch for cues/triggers and be proactive to re-direct.
- Get to know the athlete first which will provide opportunity to best prepare.
- Know when it is best to remove the athlete from the game/practice; also provide opportunity to re-enter activity when desired behavior is present.
- Assign a specific individual to the athlete in advance so as not to “push the athlete” too far by having too many people attempting to illicit appropriate behavior.
- Discover and understand the root of the behavior.
- Be sensitive to what the athlete needs; let him/her know what is and what is not acceptable and how they will be allowed to rejoin the group.

2. How to effectively motivate athletes

- Make practices fun.
- Stimulate & provide competitive experiences during each practice.
- Break out into small groups to work together.
- Record the progress of each athlete – track their personal bests; posting their progress provides recognition and reward.
- Add positive consequence/rewards – must be carefully selected; it is recommended that food not be a reward but something that is still meaningful to the athlete.

3. How to make practices more effective

- Four components of an effective practice include:
 - Warm up & stretching –
 - Buddy up.
 - Encourage each other.
 - Skills instruction –
 - Reinforce what was taught in earlier practices.
 - Introduce new skills at the beginning of practice, not when athletes are tired.
 - Competitive experiences –
 - Provide competitive experiences that relate to the game/sport/competition.
 - Prepare athletes for real competition.
 - Cool down / team talk –
 - Set a routine.
 - Say the oath (rotate among team members each practice so that all have a chance during the season).
 - Play a song.
 - Have athletes monitor each other during practice then acknowledge one thing each did well that day.

- Have the athletes thank volunteers who have helped that practice.
- No athlete should ever leave a practice or competition with their self worth tied up in numbers.
 - Reward effort and attitude.
 - Set and measure goals for each practice and competition.
- Encourage athletes to be service providers in the community.