



Australian Government  
Australian Sports Commission

# BEGINNING COACHING



FOURTH EDITION



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The Australian Sports Commission is the Australian Government agency that manages, develops and invests in sport at all levels. It was established in 1985 and operates under the *Australian Sports Commission Act 1989*. The Commission's national leadership role is achieved through the six operational areas: the Australian Institute of Sport, Sport Performance and Development, Community Sport, Corporate Services, Commercial and Facilities, and Finance. The Australian Sports Commission forms part of the Health and Ageing portfolio.

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# NATIONAL COACHING ACCREDITATION SCHEME OVERVIEW

The National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) is an initiative of the Australian Sports Commission. It is a progressive coach education program offering courses at various levels. The NCAS offers education, training and nationally recognised accreditation to people coaching beginner through to elite-level athletes. Coaches of children, adults, veterans, disabled or elite athletes at club, school, regional, state or national level can become more effective coaches through participation in the NCAS. Over 70 sports participate in the NCAS.

The NCAS:

- increases confidence and competence in coaching ability
- promotes an ongoing progressive improvement of knowledge and expertise
- incorporates an involvement with, and an understanding of, sports science enabling a more in-depth approach to coaching
- promotes the use of safe and correct techniques
- improves communication skills
- encourages the development of innovative coaching techniques
- aims to increase the enjoyment of sport for both coaches and athletes.

NCAS courses improve the competence of a coach, that is, their capacity to undertake all the important and identified elements of coaching. The important principles of competency-based training are:

- competency standards that specify the levels of knowledge and skill required
- flexibility in education training delivery
- equitable access to the program and equitable training methods
- assessment that measures the identified competencies
- a mixture of theory and practical training
- currency, that is, updating.

The levels within the NCAS have undergone some fundamental changes in recent years. The previous NCAS framework required sports to conform to a three-tier structure (Level 1–3). The NCAS now has a more flexible approach that allows each national sporting organisation to determine the number of levels in their coach accreditation pathway.

To find out the coach accreditation pathway your sport has adopted, please contact your state or national sporting organisation. For further information on the NCAS, visit [www.ausport.gov.au/coach](http://www.ausport.gov.au/coach)



# CHAPTER 1

## THE ROLE OF THE COACH

Coaches play an important role not only in the sporting life, but also the everyday life, of the participants they coach. Coaches have the potential to influence not only the development of sport-specific skills and sporting performance, but also the participant's development as a person and their approach to other aspects of their life. While at times it can be challenging, coaching can also be an immensely satisfying role.

To be effective as a coach it is important to understand the required role and responsibilities, the advantages and disadvantages of different styles of coaching, why people get involved in sport (participants, parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators), and how to develop effective relationships with everyone involved.

### What are the roles of the coach?

Coaches may be asked to be a person 'of many parts'. They often perform the following roles:

- a teacher passing on information and ideas
- a trainer improving participants' fitness
- a motivator instilling a positive approach
- a disciplinarian — firm but fair
- an organiser of training sessions, officials and parents
- a public relations officer
- a planner
- a fund raiser
- an adviser and counsellor
- a friend and mentor — supporting and nurturing
- a sports scientist — analysing, testing and evaluating
- a student — watching, asking questions, listening and learning.

Individual coaches will set their own boundaries regarding which of these broader roles they are or are not prepared to undertake.

The coach's role might vary depending on whether they coach purely for participation or for competition. For example, a coach who is working with a group of masters participants who are involved in the sport mainly for social and fitness reasons might take a different approach to their role than a coach working with a group of talented young 'up and coming' 14 year olds.

Some roles might change over time or depending on the group being coached. It is important that all coaches adopt an inclusive approach to coaching. For example, all coaches need to be able to provide opportunities for people with a disability to be involved in their sport, and this is not an onerous task if it is approached with the right attitude.





## Skills

To fulfil some or all of these roles effectively, a coach must have or develop a number of basic skills. A coach must have knowledge of the sport and an understanding of coaching techniques. The coach must also be able to:

- organise
- observe
- analyse
- adapt
- communicate
- improve performance.

These qualities are key requirements for effective coaching and will be discussed in more detail later in the manual. For now, let us just define these terms as they apply to coaching.

### Organising

A coach's ability to organise efficient and effective training or activity sessions, as well as organise participants during competition, where applicable, is essential. Organising is based on knowledge and planning.

### Observing

The coach should be aware of what is happening at all times. Observation provides the information on which the coach will base changes to the program and what the individual needs. The skills of observation can be improved and refined.

### Analysing

Coaches are continually observing and evaluating performances. They compare what is being done to what should have been done. Coaches should watch a number of performances. They should not act on just one observation; rather they should find out if there is a pattern of error.

A coach's ability to observe and analyse will improve as they become more experienced and each evaluation will help the coach advance.

### Adapting

Coaches often need to work with participants from different genders and a range of age groups, ability levels, disabilities and ethnic backgrounds. In addition, sometimes activities just do not work as planned. Coaches need to be able to adapt an activity or a session to suit the needs of all participants. For example, coaches can adapt the way they communicate to cater for participants who speak English as a second language or who have a vision, hearing or intellectual impairment. They might modify the rules of the activity, the size or location of the playing area, and the equipment used to cater for the skill or fitness levels or functional ability of different participants.

By adapting activities the coach can ensure that all participants are included and challenged and that participation is maximised. Good organising, observing and analysing skills help the coach effectively adapt activities to meet individual participant needs. As with the other skills, this becomes easier with experience and practice.

### **Communicating**

The coach's ability to improve performance and to maximise enjoyment and satisfaction depends to a large degree on an ability to communicate effectively; not only verbally, but also by listening and using appropriate non-verbal communication, such as body language (for example, grinning, sighing, shrugging) and vocal qualities (for example, tone, pitch, inflections). The coach can also communicate via demonstrations, written communication, diagrams and pictures, and make the content of their communication simpler or more complex.

Being able to use a wide variety of communication methods is particularly important when working with people with a disability or with participants from non-English speaking backgrounds. The use of questioning is also an important coaching skill. Coaches should encourage participants to think for themselves, and the use of questions can assist in this process.

### **Improving performance**

Improving performance is the major role of coaches. The advice and guidance of the coach is an essential part of improving performance. Coaches help participants learn new skills and help improve both fitness and skill levels. They also teach tactics, motivate and encourage participants, provide feedback, adjust training programs, add new elements, ensure participants are well prepared for competition, provide support before, during and after competition, and continually evaluate performance.

## **Responsibilities of the coach**

The role and responsibilities of coaches have broadened immensely in recent times. Dealing with ethical issues is becoming a regular part of a coach's duties. Increasingly, coaches are being required to face issues such as sportsmanship, doping in sport, cheating, bullying, eating disorders, respect for officials, abuse of power, discrimination, harassment and assessing when a participant should return to sport after an injury. It is therefore essential that coaches operate professionally and with integrity in their relationships with those who are participating in, or associated with, their sport.

The Australian Sports Commission (ASC) has produced a Coach's Code of Behaviour that provides consistent behavioural standards for coaches. Coaches are required to sign on to the Code of Behaviour as part of their NCAS accreditation.





In Australia, sport has a positive influence that enriches the lives of everyone involved in it. Sport plays a major role in shaping the Australian identity and culture and therefore we must ensure that it is based on ethical principles.

The Essence of Australian Sport defines the core principles of sport in Australia. By applying these principles to all roles and decisions relating to sport, the values and benefits which sport has to offer can be realised.

# the essence of australian sport

what we stand for

sport at all levels in Australia  
upholds the principles of

**fairness**

Operating within the spirit of the rules, never taking an unfair advantage and making informed and honourable decisions at all times.

**respect**

Recognising the contribution which people make to sport, treating them with dignity and consideration, as well as caring for the property and equipment they use.

**responsibility**

Taking responsibility for one's actions and being a positive role model at all times.

**safety**

Encouraging healthy and safe procedures, preventing and reporting dangerous behaviour, while demonstrating concern for others.

By applying these principles, sport helps to develop the virtues and personal characteristics of:  
Compassion, Determination, Integrity, Loyalty, Trust

In addition, sport helps to achieve the following outcomes:  
Achievement, Enjoyment, Friendship, Inclusiveness, Opportunity, Teamwork, Wellbeing

All Australians involved or interested in sport should embrace these principles and instil these values.  
This is The Essence of Australian Sport – this is what we stand for.



**Australian Government**  
**Australian Sports Commission**

Developed by the Australian Sports Commission  
in consultation with the sport industry

## COACH'S CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

- Operate within the rules and spirit of your sport, promoting fair play over winning at any cost.
- Encourage and support opportunities for people to learn appropriate behaviours and skills.
- Support opportunities for participation in all aspects of your sport.
- Treat each person as an individual.
- Display control and courtesy to all involved with your sport.
- Respect the rights and worth of every person, regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion.
- Respect the decisions of officials, other coaches and administrators in the conduct of your sport.
- Wherever practical, avoid unaccompanied and unobserved one-on-one activity (when in a supervisory capacity or where a power imbalance will exist) with people under the age of 18 years.
- Adopt appropriate and responsible behaviour in all interactions.
- Adopt responsible behaviour in relation to alcohol and other drugs.
- Act with integrity and objectivity, and accept responsibility for your decisions and actions.
- Ensure your decisions and actions contribute to a safe environment.
- Ensure your decisions and actions contribute to a harassment-free environment.
- Do not tolerate harmful or abusive behaviours.
- Place the safety and welfare of athletes above all else.
- Help each person (athlete, official, etc) reach their potential — respect the talent, developmental stage and goals of each person; compliment them; and provide encouragement and positive, supportive feedback.
- Any physical contact with a person should be appropriate to the situation and necessary for that person's skill development.
- Be honest and do not allow your qualifications to be misrepresented.



All sports involved with the NCAS also have a coach's code of behaviour — usually it is the same as the ASC's Coach's Code of Behaviour but sometimes it can vary a little. Contact your national or state sporting organisation for a copy of their code of behaviour.

Coaches can ensure that the needs and rights of all participants in sport are met by abiding by the Coach's Code of Behaviour — for example, to be treated with integrity, respect and empathy; to be safe; to have a positive experience; to be provided with equal opportunities; and to be exposed to positive role models.

Sports generally also have other policies in place to ensure the rights and needs of all sports participants are met. These should include the following:

- member protection policy (to safeguard members' wellbeing, safety and rights)
- junior sport policy (to provide guidelines regarding the involvement of young participants)
- anti-doping policy (to outline obligations and responsibilities regarding anti-doping)
- disability action plan (which looks at how the sport will include people with a disability).

These policies provide information and guidelines that will help coaches to provide safe and supportive environments and to promote professionalism. They help ensure that all participants — no matter what their age, gender, ability level, disability or ethnic background — have the opportunity to take part in sport and physical activity in a positive, safe and fair manner. In most cases, these policies and the good coaching practices associated with them are simply common sense and involve treating people as you would like to be treated yourself. Contact your national or state sporting organisation for a copy of their policies.

At all times it is important to remember that a coach can have a tremendous influence on participants' lives and what the coach does (for example, how they treat people, how they present themselves, the care they take in ensuring safety) is as important, if not more important than what is said. Coaches are a role model for the participants they coach as well as the parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators who are also involved.

## Extra responsibilities when working with children

It is important to note that coaches who work with, or have contact with, children have some extra responsibilities and requirements to ensure that the children they work with are kept safe and protected from harm. Child abuse is illegal in all states and territories of Australia, with each having their own laws that cover reporting and investigation of cases of child abuse.



Coaches who work with, or have contact with, children must have an understanding of child abuse, child protection and what to do if child abuse is suspected. Coaches should use good teaching practices to avoid child abuse, behave appropriately and create an environment where children feel safe and protected.

### About child abuse

- Child abuse includes physical (non-accidental injury and/or harm to a child), emotional (behaviours that can psychologically harm a child, for example, severe verbal abuse) and sexual abuse/misconduct (any sexual act or threat imposed on a child), as well as neglect.
- Evidence shows that the future wellbeing of a child who has been abused depends to a large degree on the quality and timing of help given to the child and their family.
- Abuse affects everyone — children, parents and the community. It has no age, gender, cultural, economic or occupational boundaries.
- Coaches need to be aware of child-protection issues and legislation to ensure that they establish positive, respectful and safe relationships with children in sport, and to ensure that they meet their legal and moral responsibilities. Parents will also be more confident if the coach is interacting with children in an appropriate manner.

### What is child protection?

- Child protection is a complex subject with a number of strategies involved. It includes policies and practices put in place to keep children safe from harm — from physical, sexual, or emotional abuse or neglect.
- Child-protection legislation sets out how child abuse should be reported and investigated, and imposes obligations on people dealing with children. This includes a requirement in most states and territories for people working with children, such as coaches, to undergo a national criminal history check (in other words, be screened) to determine their suitability for working with children.
- Most state and territory legislation also requires specific persons to report reasonable suspicions of children being abused or neglected. Individuals working with children, including teachers — and in some states and territories, coaches — are required by law to report any suspicions of child abuse or maltreatment, including neglect.

For child protection to be effective in sport, coaches need to:

- understand what is acceptable and appropriate behaviour
- be aware of the signs of abuse or neglect
- know who to report to if they suspect abuse or neglect
- understand and comply with the child-protection legislative requirements in their state/territory
- understand and comply with relevant codes of conduct.

A summary of child-protection information relevant to the sport industry is available on the ASC website ([www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics)) and the Play by the Rules website ([www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)).

**Note:** Child-protection requirements vary among different states and territories. Coaches should seek out information about the child-protection requirements in their state or territory.

### TIPS FOR COACHES WORKING WITH CHILDREN

There are actions a coach can take to ensure children feel safe and protected when participating in sport. These good coaching practices include the following:

- use positive reinforcement and acceptable language when talking about or to a child
- develop a calm and non-confrontational behaviour management style
- make any physical contact with children (or adults for that matter) in a way that makes them feel comfortable, for example, shaking hands and a congratulatory pat on the back. If a coach must make physical contact with participants as part of an activity, then they should explain the activity and what they will do, and ask the participant's permission to do that
- avoid situations where an adult may be alone with a child, for example, dressing rooms or first aid rooms
- when children need to be transported, ensure there is more than one child (and, if possible, more than one adult) in the vehicle
- manage allegations (disclosures) of child abuse through established processes and reporting lines to ensure there is due process and natural justice
- document all incidents involving physical restraint of children or violence involving children
- document all incidents that seem to be unusual or 'out of the ordinary'
- coach children to be a 'good sport', recognise that they have a right to feel safe, and know what they can do if they do not feel safe (if they are abused, harassed or discriminated against).

See the ASC website [www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics) for further details.

### CASE STUDY

One day, during a training session, junior baseball coach Diane noticed a stranger hanging around the outskirts of the playing fields. She had not seen this man before and knew he was not one of the player's parents or guardians — she had met them all at the pre-season parents and guardians meeting or shortly afterwards.

Diane advised the session supervisor and reminded the players about the squad rules regarding going to the change rooms (always advise the coach and go with another player), waiting for parents who might be late (always wait with the nominated supervisor for that session and ideally one other person), and the 'stranger danger' messages that they had learnt in school.

At the end of the session, Diane watched to ensure that all of the players were picked up by the person who had been nominated to do so. During this time, a parent of one of the players rang to say they were running late to pick up their child. Diane went with the player to the session supervisor and waited until the parent arrived and the child was safely in the car. It was club policy that two people — the coach and the session supervisor or another approved person — were always present before and after training sessions so that no child was left waiting by themselves.





## The role of the coach in anti-doping

Coaches have an important role to play in anti-doping and need to be aware of the substances and methods that are prohibited in sport. Some commonly recognised performance enhancing substances and methods include steroids, erythropoietin (EPO), human growth hormone (hGH) and blood doping. Some 'everyday' medications such as prescription medication, over-the-counter medication, supplements and illicit drugs may also contain substances which are prohibited in sport so care must be taken.

The impact coaches have on athletes places them in a position to play a significant role with regard to anti-doping in sport. An effective coach can help prevent athlete misuse or inadvertent use of prohibited substances and methods, and assist athletes to deal with other issues related to anti-doping in sport.

A number of factors may contribute to an athlete's misuse of prohibited substances and methods. These include the type of substance (for example, the effects of the substance), the person (dissatisfaction with performance) or the environment (perception that competitors are using prohibited substances and methods to improve performance).

To minimise doping in sport, the coach should plan and implement a comprehensive training program that develops the athlete in all areas. The coach should alleviate pressure on athletes where possible and care for athletes' wellbeing. Being able to provide information about the health risks and other effects of prohibited substances and methods to athletes and having a clear policy on anti-doping (ensuring athletes understand the consequences of using prohibited methods and substances) will also help.

### The World Anti-Doping Agency

The World Anti-Doping Code was developed in 2003 and subsequently revised by the World Anti-Doping Agency. The World Anti-Doping Code aims to harmonise anti-doping world-wide by setting the framework for sports' anti-doping rules. The Prohibited List of substances and methods is revised and published annually by the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Athlete support personnel are subject to anti-doping rules and a violation of these rules may result in a sanction.

Athlete support personnel includes coaches, trainers, managers, agents, team staff, officials, administrators, and medical or para-medical personnel working with or treating athletes in, or preparing for, sports competition.

Under the World Anti-Doping Code, if a person who is part of the athlete support personnel, including a coach, does any of the following then they are considered to have committed an 'anti-doping rule violation' and may be sanctioned under their sport's or organisation's anti-doping policy:

- tampers or attempts to tamper with any part of doping control
- possesses prohibited substances and prohibited methods
- trafficks or attempts to traffick any prohibited substance or prohibited method
- administers or attempts to administer a prohibited substance or prohibited method to any athlete, or assists, encourages, aids, abets, covers up any other type of complicity involving an anti-doping rule violation or any attempted violation.

According to the World Anti-Doping Code, athlete support personnel, including coaches, have the following roles and responsibilities with regard to anti-doping:

- to be knowledgeable of, and comply with, all anti-doping policies and rules applicable to them or the athletes they support
- to support and assist anti-doping organisations, including the Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, to conduct doping control
- to use their influence on athlete values and behaviour to foster anti-doping attitudes.

Further information on doping in sport is available on the ASC website ([www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics/antidoping](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics/antidoping)), Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority website ([www.asada.gov.au](http://www.asada.gov.au)) and the World Anti-Doping Agency website ([www.wada-ama.org/en](http://www.wada-ama.org/en)).

### TIPS FOR COACHES REGARDING ANTI-DOPING

There are actions a coach can take to minimise doping in sport, including:

- understanding the effects of prohibited substances and prohibited methods, including commonly used recreational drugs, on an athlete's health and performance
- planning and implementing a program that develops athletes in all areas
- alleviating pressure on athletes where possible, and expressing concern for their wellbeing
- educating athletes about the various anti-doping resources that are available and procedures for checking medications and gaining approval for their use, where required
- communicating beliefs about health and fair play to athletes by reinforcing that the use of prohibited substances and prohibited methods is cheating
- discouraging practices such as smoking, excessive drinking and the use of other substances that may be readily available in the local community, but are contrary to the idea of sport as a healthy pursuit
- being a good role model in relation to use of alcohol and other substances.



### CASE STUDY

Jack was a naturally talented high school athlete who had enjoyed considerable success in his sport. As he reached his final years of high school, however, other athletes, who he had previously outperformed, were starting to beat him. Jack found this hard to accept, and started thinking about using steroids to improve his performance. Jack enjoyed the status of being one of the best athletes, had set himself high sporting goals, and felt pressure to succeed for his school and for his parents, who had spent a lot of money to send him to this school.

Fortunately, Jack's coach had always been very approachable and instilled good moral values. The coach cared not only about the team's performance but also about the overall welfare of the athletes. Jack decided to talk to the coach about the pressure he was feeling. Jack's coach listened and told him he understood the pressure that Jack was under. He also reminded Jack about the sport's anti-doping policy and, importantly, why steroids were banned — the health risks, it is cheating and against the spirit of sport. The coach also outlined the qualities that had helped Jack become a champion athlete in the first place and the ways that Jack could improve his performance without resorting to the use of steroids.

Jack was glad he had spoken to his coach. He chose not to use steroids, instead he focused on addressing all of the aspects of preparation that would help him perform to his potential. While other athletes sometimes still beat him, Jack was able to outperform most of them and, more importantly, he was happy with himself for the decision he had made. Jack's coach helped him achieve this because of the effective coaching relationship he had established, his concern for Jack's overall wellbeing and the manner in which he dealt with the issue — encouraging Jack to think about the consequences of doping and providing him with other means plus the support and encouragement to achieve his goals.

### The inclusive coach

Being an inclusive coach is a fundamental requirement for being a good coach. Being inclusive means adapting and modifying coaching practices and activities to ensure that every participant — regardless of age, gender, ability level, disability and ethnic background — is included (that is, has the opportunity to participate if they choose to). Good coaches adapt and modify aspects of their coaching and create an environment that caters for individual needs and allows everyone to take part. The onus of inclusion rests with the coach.

Developing and delivering culturally appropriate, structured sporting activities for Indigenous sportspeople can be a challenge for any coach. Adapting existing contemporary coaching styles and techniques to meet the needs of Indigenous sportspeople, particularly in regions where Indigenous sportspeople may make up the majority of a team or club, provides the basis for a much improved sporting experience, retention in sport over the longer term and a potentially successful sporting pathway for Indigenous sportspeople to compete at the highest level in sport.

Cultural differences can be the reason for exclusion of Indigenous people in sport, particularly in remote regions of Australia. To ensure Indigenous people are included in sport, it is important for coaches to understand what culture is and the importance it plays in Indigenous children's lives.

Coaches do not need 'special' skills or knowledge to include all participants. Many people, for example, think that you need special skills or knowledge to coach participants with a disability. This is not the case. The basic skills of good coaching outlined in this manual, when applied with an inclusive philosophy, will ensure that the inclusion of all participants, including people with a disability, becomes a natural part of coaching.

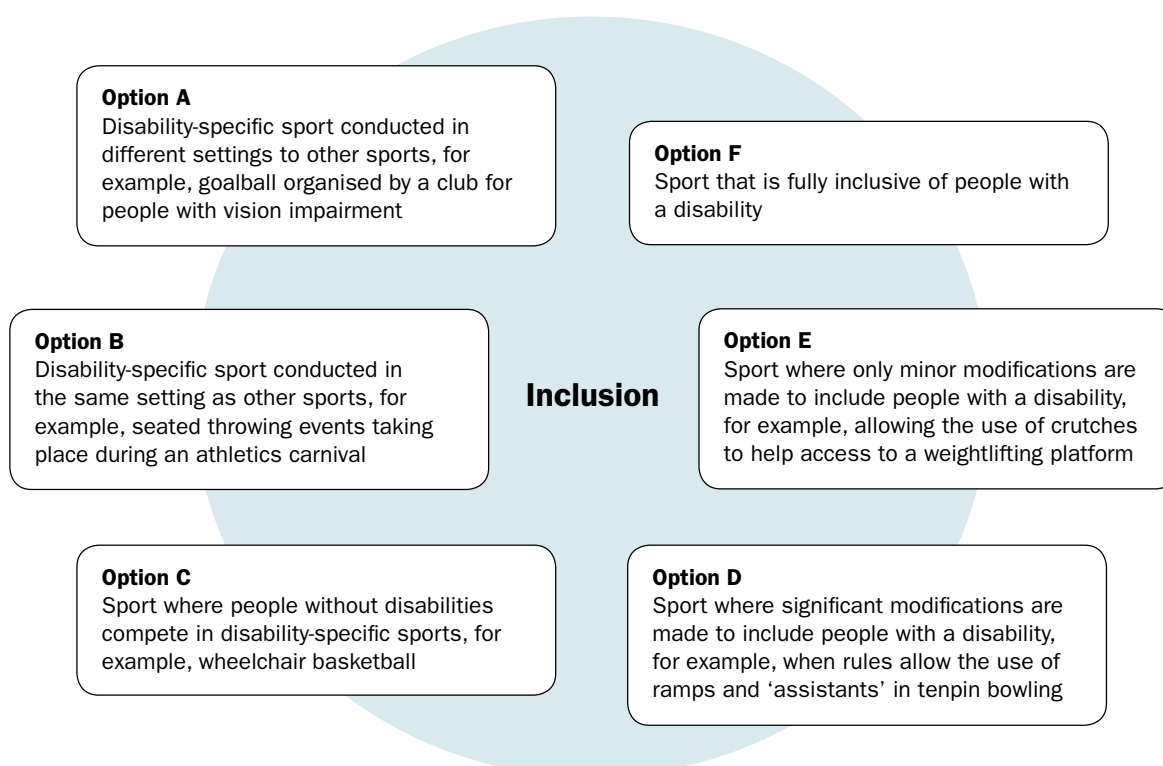
A useful tool for ensuring inclusive coaching is the TREE approach. It highlights four key areas that a coach can adapt or modify to better include all participants, including those with a disability:

- **T**eaching/coaching skills and style (for example, verbal instructions, visual demonstrations)
- **R**ules and regulations
- **E**nvironment
- **E**quipment.

Provided a coach is prepared to accept each participant as an individual, coaching a participant with a disability (or participants of varying ability levels or backgrounds) is not a difficult task. Every person is unique. Effective coaches adjust to accommodate individuals. Adopting an inclusive philosophy to coaching will benefit both the coach and the participants.

When including participants with a disability try to consider all the possible options for inclusion. Participants with a disability should be given a choice about how they are included. The participant may elect to be involved in a sport with total inclusion, for example, where an athlete with a disability trains and competes alongside athletes without a disability (examples include a cyclist with a mild level of cerebral palsy or a track and field athlete who has a vision impairment or a mild intellectual disability). In some sports, some minor adjustments to rules or equipment may need to be made so that the participant with a disability can compete. An example would be in a shooting competition where the participant who uses a wheelchair does not need to have their feet on the ground or in swimming, where a swimmer with one hand is not required to touch the wall with two hands.

Participants with a disability might also compete in events for people with a disability at an event at which there are also separate events for participants without disabilities. Another option is participation in disability-specific sports and activities. These are sports that are designed for people with a specific disability (such as goalball, boccia, wheelchair basketball and wheelchair rugby). Sometimes participants without disabilities also take part in disability-specific sports and activities. There are many options in sport for people with a disability. The diagram below outlines a range of options for inclusion. A participant is not restricted to one option either. There may be a number of options available at any one time.



## CASE STUDY

A group of cyclists with a disability often trained together at the local velodrome. Initially, their involvement and ability were ridiculed by some senior cyclists without disabilities who shared the same training time — they laughed at what they considered were ‘slow’ starts and resented sharing the track with them.

Fortunately, the coaches of both groups were inclusive, open-minded coaches. Both had competed at the highest level and both appreciated and respected the level of performance being demonstrated by the riders with a disability. Despite the loss of an arm or leg and perhaps a slower start, these cyclists were achieving outstanding times!



The coaches decided to run a joint training session and the riders without disabilities were given the opportunity to perform some of the training activities using, for example, one leg or one arm. Not surprisingly, the riders with a disability shone and the riders without disabilities suddenly realised their level of performance and developed a new-found appreciation and respect for their ability. A good camaraderie developed to the point that they often worked together to achieve the same end — optimal performance. Both groups benefited from this. This happened because of the example set by the two coaches.

All of the coaching strategies discussed in this manual are relevant to people with a disability. There are very few disabilities or medical conditions that completely preclude participation in sport. People with a disability take part in sport and physical activity for the same reasons as other people: to improve fitness, develop new skills, increase social contacts, and to have the chance to achieve and receive recognition.

### Qualities and skills of an inclusive coach

Qualities	Attributes
Patience	Recognising that some participants will take longer to develop skills or make progress than others
Respect	Acknowledging difference and treating all participants as individuals
Adaptability	Having a flexible approach to coaching and communication that recognises individual differences
Skills	Attributes
Organisation	Recognising the importance of preparation and planning
Safe practices	Ensuring that every session, whether with groups or individuals, is carried out with the participants' safety in mind
Knowledge	Possessing the ability to utilise knowledge of appropriate practices and how to modify them in order to maximise the potential of every participant

### TIPS FOR COACHES WORKING WITH PARTICIPANTS WITH A DISABILITY

Any coach can take on the role of coaching people with a disability. Some tips to remember include:

- People with disabilities have the right to participate in sport. They are very capable of being involved and can tell the coach what they are able to do.
- The basic principles of coaching apply when coaching participants with a disability. Provided the coach is prepared to accept each participant as an individual, coaching participants with a disability is not a difficult task.
- The needs, strengths and weaknesses of individuals will differ. The coach should assess each person's aspirations, needs and ability, and plan a training program accordingly.
- It is not necessary to acquire extensive knowledge of the disability. The coach needs to understand how the impairment affects the participant's performance and be able to plan and deliver a training program that best suits the participant.
- Effective communication is essential, especially for participants who have sensory or intellectual disabilities.
- Do not under-estimate ability — set realistic and challenging goals as you would for all participants.
- Medical conditions, such as diabetes, epilepsy, asthma and heart disease, should not preclude people participating in sport. Sensible precautions should be followed and the coach needs to be aware of the coaching implications of the person's condition and what to do in case of an emergency. (**Important note:** not all people with disabilities have medical conditions such as those mentioned above. In addition, some people without disabilities may have one of the above medical conditions. Do not restrict your medical screening to people with a disability!)

## Coaching styles

Regardless of the roles and responsibilities expected of a coach, the way that they carry out those jobs will generally determine their ultimate success. A coach's style will quickly be noticed by participants (as well as parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators) and this can be either a help or a hindrance.

A number of styles of coaching have been identified. They include:



#### Authoritarian coach

The authoritarian-type coach is very strict. They punish frequently and while there is good team spirit when the athlete or side is winning, dissent occurs when losing. The authoritarian has the personality to handle being 'hated' in order to have respect.



#### Business-like coach

The business-like coach is not very people oriented. They are keen on seeing the job done and expect 100 per cent effort at all times.



### **'Nice-guy' coach**

The nice-guy coach gets on well with participants of similar temperament who are self-disciplined. Participants sometimes take advantage of the nice-guy coach's personable, cooperative nature.



### **Intense coach**

The intense coach can easily transmit anxiety through their 'uptight' attitude. They are usually focused on the quality of performance and results.



### **'Easy-going' coach**

The easy-going coach is one who is casual or submissive and who gives the impression of not being serious.

Although there are advantages and disadvantages to all styles, all of these coaches can be successful. Coaches generally have a natural approach that will be a mixture of the above styles. Different coaching styles are appropriate for different situations and different participants. Coaches must realise their natural style may need to be adapted to suit their coaching circumstances. Looking at the advantages and disadvantages of these coaching styles will help in that adaptation. For example, the authoritarian coach would not be suitable for performers who need encouragement during the developmental stages. Conversely, the 'nice guy' coach would have some real problems in coaching a senior team towards a premiership.

Features that must always be present, and which require no adaptation, are the necessity to be positive and encouraging, and to ensure the safety of participants at all times.

## **Working positively with parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators**

Successful coaches need to be able to work effectively not only with the participants but also with the other people involved in the sport — this includes parents (if you are coaching children), partners of older participants, carers (for some participants with a disability), officials and administrators.

The first step to achieving this is to understand your motivations for coaching (why do you want to coach?) and also the reasons that others have for being involved. What do you all want to get out of your involvement? What are your expectations and those of others?

### **Why coach?**

Why have you decided to take on coaching? Do your reasons make your role easier or harder?

Consider the following reasons for coaching:

- 'I want to contribute to the overall growth of other people'
- 'I have a good time when I'm coaching'
- 'I like the recognition'
- 'I want to be known as a winning coach'

- 'I like to see others having a good time'
- 'I like to help others'
- 'I like the sense of control I get from coaching'
- 'I like to see the participants improve'
- 'It makes me feel I'm doing something worthwhile'
- 'I like to put something back into sport'.

For each coach, the above reasons will take on varying emphasis. This in turn will determine how much time the coach devotes to performing the various roles assigned to coaching.

### **Why do people take part in sport?**

It is important for prospective coaches to find out what the participants under their care wish to get out of being involved in their particular program. If the coach does this then they are more likely to be able to provide a program that meets the participants' needs and there is much less likelihood of conflicts and misunderstandings in the future. It is important to remember that the reasons why participants with a disability take part in sport are no different to the reasons of participants without disabilities. Below are some of the reasons people take part in sport:

#### ***Why do people participate in sport?***

Physical reasons	for example, to get fit, develop new skills
Psychological reasons	for example, sense of belonging, sense of achievement, thrill
Social reasons	for example, friendship, camaraderie

### **What do parents seek from sporting programs?**

Parents will have different reasons for having their children involved in sport and they will be looking for different outcomes. Some of these will include:

- improved self-esteem and self-confidence for their child
- safety
- fun
- child-minding service
- family involvement
- success
- groundwork laid for future sporting success.

### **What do partners seek from sporting programs?**

When coaching older participants, you may need to consider their partners, since they are an important part of the participant's life. Different partners will want or expect different things from their partner's involvement in a sporting or physical activity program. Some may want to be involved to varying degrees along with or to support their partners, others might be busy with other sporting activities or commitments and want little or no involvement.

### **What do carers seek from sporting programs?**

Some people with disabilities need additional help to take part in sport and physical activity and may bring a carer with them to your program. The role of the carer is generally to provide assistance that will allow the participant to take part in the activity. Their responsibilities can vary according to the disability and needs of the participant, and might include:

- helping the participant to get to, from and around the sporting venue
- getting changed into training gear and using equipment
- providing one-on-one assistance once the coach has given instructions (this does not mean the coach is not involved!)
- motivating and encouraging
- ensuring that they do not wander away from the group
- providing information to the coach if the participant is not able to provide it.

Carers might be friends or family members of the participant or they might be a professional, hired to provide personal care for the participant. Some carers come along because they want to be there, others because they have to be or feel obliged to be there. Some really like to get involved, others are really not that interested.

### **What do officials and administrators seek from sporting programs?**

Officials and administrators can also have different reasons for getting involved in sport. For most it includes a desire to contribute in some way to the sport and for many, the reasons are similar to those that participants and coaches have for getting involved in sport. These reasons include a:

- desire to make a contribution to the sport and to assist those involved
- sense of achievement from doing a good job
- sense of challenge from the role
- sense of belonging and friendships
- desire to be involved along with other family members, including children
- desire to put something back into the sport.

Once the coach understands the needs and motivations of the different people involved in sport, they are in a better position to develop positive and supportive relationships with everyone involved — not only participants but also parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators. All have a role to play if an athlete, team or program is to be successful and the enjoyment and satisfaction of everyone is to be maximised.

### **Working with parents**

Parents play a vital role in sport. Adults largely determine the environment in which children learn to play sport. Parental expectations have a significant influence on the attitudes of children towards participating in sport, on behaviour, levels of performance and enjoyment.

Establishing effective communication with parents is important. Through a cooperative effort, parents can contribute to a child's sporting experience so coaches should take time to interact with them and do everything possible to ensure they understand the coaching role and responsibilities.

A good strategy for working with parents is to provide them with an induction kit that includes the coach's contact details, when and where training will be held, how you will advise them if training is cancelled, what their children should wear for training and games, game schedule, and codes of behaviour for children and parents.



Parents' attitudes can go from one extreme to the other — from the over-protective, to the aggressive 'demander' — while others take no interest at all. Some can make a coach's task nearly impossible, while others are totally supportive and of great assistance.

In some cultures, parents and family have a very strong influence. For example, family and community tend to play a very important role in an Indigenous person's life. Family approval and acceptance of the coach and their training program is vital. Various family and community demands can result in unexplained absences from training or a fairly vague reason for non-attendance, such as 'family business'. As a coach, you should respect and be sensitive to the different cultural requirements of individuals.

### CASE STUDY

Alex is the coach of a regional under-16 girls basketball team. The 'star' player in the team, Cassandra, is from an Indigenous background. However she is often late and missed three training sessions last week because of 'family reasons'. Alex has heard there was a recent death in her community, but is getting extremely frustrated by this apparent lack of interest in the team and questions her commitment.

The major tournament is only three weeks away, and Alex is considering dropping Cassandra from the team. He decides to have a talk with Jim, who is a local Indigenous Sport Development Officer.

Jim points out the importance of family and community in Indigenous culture. A death in a community is a very culturally important time. Depending on the status of the person who died, the official mourning period can take days, weeks or even months.

However Jim agrees that Alex still needs to consider the team and suggests that Alex talk with Cassandra's family and about whether they think she can meet the commitments. Jim points out that gaining the trust and support of Cassandra's family will make the whole process much easier.

### Involving parents

It is important to get parents onside and involve them from the beginning of the season. This can be achieved by:

- encouraging their help and participation — many will not feel they can spare the time, or have the confidence to take on a major role but will be happy to help out with smaller tasks such as being a linesperson, scorer or helping with transport
- explaining your coaching philosophy and expectations of the participants and parents
- encouraging them to follow your lead of giving positive feedback — discourage destructive criticism of participants, officials, administrators or other teams, offer to help parents who are interested to better understand the game and the philosophy and aims of junior sport
- being prepared to listen when parents have concerns or issues to raise — although the coach has the final say in matters affecting the team, the parent may have a valid point.

### Pre-season meeting

A pre-season meeting is a good way to meet parents and to discuss philosophies and housekeeping matters. Give plenty of notice of the date and time of the meeting through either a short letter, email or a phone call. If parents find they disagree with the coach's approach, they then have the opportunity to look elsewhere for their child's sporting experience.

Hold the meeting at a suitable venue — a single team might meet in the relaxed atmosphere of the coach's home, while a larger venue such as a gym, clubroom or hall might be needed if the meeting involves more than one team. Not all parents will be able to attend so prepare brief notes that cover the main points of the meeting.



Below is an example of an invitation to a parents' meeting:

Dear Parents

My name is Heather Brown and I have been appointed coach of Bathurst Tigers under-10 netball team for this season.

This letter is to invite you to a parents' meeting and to briefly outline my coaching philosophy.

I have coached junior sport teams for several years and I am a Level 1 netball coach. I am really looking forward to meeting you and working with you over the coming months to make your child's participation positive and successful.

My coaching program will emphasise skill development, fun and working cooperatively.

I want the children to learn all the basic skills of netball and to become as skilful as they can. I also believe that forming friendships, developing a feeling of belonging and learning to share experiences with others are important to children.

It is my intention to give all team members equal opportunity to play during the season. They will experience playing in a range of positions as I intend to rotate players as much as possible.

I am inviting all parents to a short meeting at my home on Wednesday, April 2 at 7.30pm. At the meeting I will further outline my coaching philosophy and we can also discuss important matters such as training, fees and fundraising and how you might be able to help.

I look forward to meeting you.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Brown

### A POSSIBLE AGENDA FOR A PARENT MEETING

- Introduction and welcome — introduce yourself and any assistants. Briefly outline your coaching experience and qualifications
- Aims of junior sport — discuss some of the research findings as to why children play sport. Ask parents to think about why their child wants to play
- How important is winning? — briefly explain your philosophy, attitude and coaching style. Explain what it is that you wish to accomplish over the season and how you intend to go about achieving your goals. Talk about your feelings on player rotation, half games and so on
- Cover 'housekeeping' matters — explain things such as training times and venue, how cancellations to training will be communicated, equipment and uniform requirements, registrations and medical forms
- Seek assistance with as many jobs as possible — these may include scorer, manager, uniform officer, linespeople, anything that helps involve parents more
- Team rules — give a broad outline of your rules and expectations (participants should have an input into team rules at an early training session). Cover what you expect concerning behaviour and how you intend to enforce the rules
- Parents' roles — point out the value of parents taking an active interest in their child's sport, including attending as many games as possible. Discuss how you expect parents and spectators to act at games
- Question time — allow some time for general questions

Many of the strategies for working with parents (setting up clear lines of communication, the pre-season meeting, encouraging their involvement where appropriate, encouraging them to follow your lead of providing positive feedback, and being prepared to listen when issues are raised) can also be useful when working with the partners or carers of the participants.

#### Working with partners

The key for the coach of older participants who have a partner is to consider the whole person and not just the participant involved in the activity. At a minimum, get to know the names of the participants' partners and perhaps their interests. Where practical, involve them if they want to be involved and always remember that the participants' time with you and your program is just one part of their life. Encourage participants to find balance in their lives and assist them to achieve this by being thoughtful, as well as practical, in the timing and duration of sport commitments.

#### Working with carers

The key for working with carers of people with a disability is to remember to always communicate directly with the athlete, no matter what their disability, rather than just communicating through the carer. Most athletes are more than capable of letting you know what they need, feel and think. Sometimes it will require careful listening, repetition for clarification, patience or different means of communication to get the correct message across. Having said this, it is also important that the coach recognises the important role of the carer — without them the athlete may not be able to participate. Encourage their involvement and assist them to provide the best possible support for the participant.

### TIPS FOR WORKING WITH PARTNERS AND CARERS

Many of the strategies for working with parents (setting up clear lines of communication, the pre-season meeting, encouraging their involvement where appropriate, encouraging them to follow your lead of providing positive feedback, and being prepared to listen when issues are raised) can also be useful when working with the partners or carers of the participants.

- **When working with partners,** get to know as a minimum their names and involve them to the degree that they (and their partner) would like to be involved, where practical. Remember that sport is just one part of the participants' lives and encourage them to achieve a balanced lifestyle. Assist them to achieve this by being thoughtful about the timing and duration of sport commitments.
- **When working with carers,** always remember to speak directly to the participant rather than just working through the carer. Recognise the importance of their role, encourage their involvement and assist them to provide the best possible support for the participant.

### Working with officials and administrators

Officials (referees, judges, umpire, scorers, etc.) are often placed in the unenviable position of alienating 50 per cent of the crowd and players at any given time, and can be subject to criticism, abuse and harassment. It is important to remember that officials have the same needs and motivations as others involved in sport and that they have a critical role to play in ensuring the safe and fair management of competition. Coaches can have a positive influence on minimising the abuse of officials and maximising the standard of officiating, and therefore competition, by developing positive and supportive relationships with officials.

It is important that coaches are good role models for the participants regarding how officials should be treated. A coach who verbally abuses or berates an umpire is giving the message to the participants that this type of behaviour is acceptable. Coaches should display professionalism in their behaviour towards officials, and encourage participants to do the same. The coach should warn and/or counsel a participant who displays abusive behaviour towards an official.

Administrators also have an important role to play in the smooth running of sport and can also be the subject of abuse when things go wrong. Most administrators also have the same needs and motivations as others involved in sport. By developing positive and supportive relationships with administrators, the coach can develop a better understanding of everyone's roles and they can work together in the smooth running of the sport.



### TIPS FOR WORKING WITH OFFICIALS AND ADMINISTRATORS

- A meeting with officials at the beginning of the season is a good idea. The coach can use this opportunity to introduce themselves and any support staff, to get to know the officials (get to see the human side) and to start developing open lines of communication away from the heat of competition.
- Invite officials along to pre-season team functions or meetings, where appropriate, in both formal (explain any new rules, how competitions will run) and informal capacities so that athletes and others involved in the program get to know them as people and not just as the face on the other end of the whistle or flag.
- Maintain open and positive lines of communication throughout the year — discuss any issues as they arise in an open and non-threatening manner away from the heat of competition. In this way the coach can help reduce the risk of small points of contention becoming major issues, minimise the abuse of officials and help ensure that any competition is played in a safe and fair manner for the enjoyment of all involved.
- Similarly, meet with administrators early and regularly to create and maintain open lines of communication. Understand their reasons for being involved, involve them and help them to help you.

## Developing a coaching philosophy

'There I was — my first day as the coach. They looked at me and were waiting to be told what to do. I asked myself "What am I doing here? What do I do?" Hey, I knew my sport but this was different.'

Even experienced coaches remember their first day 'on the job'. What helped them through the dilemma?

They had considered why they were there and what coaching was all about. They had considered why others wanted to be involved in sport and they had developed a philosophy of coaching based on all of this information.



A philosophy is a set of guidelines to govern our actions. It comes from:

- ideas formed from experience
- opinions gained from knowledge gathered
- hopes for the future.

Developing a successful coaching philosophy is based on:

- knowing why you coach
- knowing why people participate
- knowing why parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators get involved
- considering the opinions of others
- developing a set of personal guidelines on how you will operate as a coach.

It is important that coaches communicate their coaching philosophy to the participants, their parents, partners and carers, and the officials and administrators they work with.

### Characteristics of the respected coach

The respected and effective coach will:

- instil the highest desirable ideals and character traits into the participants
- be enthusiastic and show enjoyment for the task of coaching
- be self-confident, assertive, consistent, friendly, fair and competent
- have a sense of humour
- have a thorough knowledge of the rules, techniques and tactics of the sport
- be dressed appropriately to suit the session being conducted
- be an appropriate role model for the participants to follow
- have the responsibility of maintaining discipline throughout the session
- be very organised, not only for each session but for the entire season
- be able to justify, if necessary, why things are being done, or be 'big enough' to ask for suggestions when not sure, and to admit and apologise when they make a mistake
- understand that different people have different roles to play in sport and that if the best result is to be achieved all need to do their job effectively. This can be achieved by developing and maintaining positive and supportive relationships with all involved — participants, parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators
- continually seek to improve their coaching knowledge and skills
- be inclusive of participants of all abilities and disabilities, ages, genders, and ethnic backgrounds.

### CASE STUDY

Tim took up coaching after a successful career as an athlete and then as a teacher. He was grateful for the opportunities he had had in sport and the enjoyment that he got out of it, and wanted to provide opportunities for others to get involved in and enjoy sport.

Completely professional in terms of his preparation and presentation, Tim had an infectious enthusiasm for the sport and a friendly and engaging manner. As well as his ability to develop in athletes the physical and mental skills required to achieve their best, Tim had an inclusive and balanced approach that respected the rights and needs of all participants. He had a clear understanding of the importance of teamwork and an ability to develop positive and supportive relationships and create a sense of team among all involved — athletes, coaches, parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators. Everyone felt appreciated and respected and all were motivated to do whatever was required for the team.

The result? Most of the athletes in the program achieved personal bests, the program became recognised as one of the best in the local area, everyone involved felt appreciated and learnt first-hand the meaning and value of teamwork and Tim achieved his goals as a coach with that program. While he is no longer involved in coaching for other reasons, Tim's legacy lives on in the lives of the athletes, coaches, parents, partners, officials and administrators who had the good fortune to be involved in his 'team'.

## Further developing coaching knowledge and skills

This manual is just the beginning of the journey to become a successful coach. As coaches start to learn more about coaching, they will have questions and want to develop their coaching skills and knowledge further.

Where can coaches go to further develop their coaching knowledge and skills? There are a number of different avenues. They include:

### **Working with a mentor coach and watching and talking with other coaches**

Working with a mentor coach, joining a coaching association or group in your sport or sport in general, and watching and talking with other coaches can also help you develop as a coach. Making time for self-reflection, that is, reviewing training sessions, considering what worked well and what needs to be changed for next time is also important. It is not just about the participants learning but also the coach learning so that they continually improve over time.



### **Taking further generic or sport-specific coaching courses**

These might include general coaching principles courses and workshops as well as sport-specific courses and workshops, including your sport's NCAS courses. It might also include disability education and inclusive coaching workshops. More information about generic coaching courses that are available in your state or territory can be obtained from your state or territory coaching and officiating centre (see [www.ausport.gov.au/coach](http://www.ausport.gov.au/coach) for contact details). More information about sport-specific coaching courses that are available in your state or territory can be obtained from the state or national office for your sport. This will include information about gaining coaching accreditation in your sport, the coaching pathway, and what you need to do to maintain your accreditation (that is, your sport's updating policy). Information about disability education and inclusive coaching courses can be obtained from the ASC's Disability Sport unit ([www.ausport.gov.au/dsu/](http://www.ausport.gov.au/dsu/)).

### **Accessing relevant books, journals, magazines and newsletters**

There are many books, magazines and newsletters around that cover general coaching topics and/or sport-specific information and issues. The ASC produces an online magazine, *Sports Coach*, that has generic articles on a range of topics suitable for accredited coaches. The ASC's National Sport Information Centre can also help with sourcing information on areas of interest. For sport-specific publications contact your sport's state or national organisation.

### **Internet sites**

The ASC website ([www.ausport.gov.au/coach](http://www.ausport.gov.au/coach)) is a good starting point and the Play by the Rules website ([www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)) also provides helpful information for coaches.

For information that relates specifically to your sport, have a look at the website for your sport's state or national organisation and follow the links provided on that site; and, if at first you do not succeed, use a search engine to find the information that you are seeking.

Effective coaches are those who continually seek to improve their knowledge and skills so that they can continually help the participants to improve. Sport and coaching is constantly changing and it is important that coaches stay up to date in terms of their coaching knowledge and skills.



## Summary

- Coaches are important role models who can shape not only a participant's sporting experience but also their approach to everyday life. It is important that coaches have an inclusive and balanced approach, and respect and nurture the rights of all individuals involved in sport. Improving performance is only one aspect of the coach's role.
- Coaches who work with, or have contact with, children must have an understanding of child abuse, child protection and what to do if child abuse is suspected.
- Taking an inclusive approach to coaching will benefit the participants as well as improve the coach's own abilities.
- Regardless of what jobs are expected of the coach, how they carry out those jobs may determine their ultimate success.
- There are advantages and disadvantages to all coaching styles. All coaches have a natural approach that will be a mixture of the various styles. Coaches must realise their natural style may need to be adapted to suit their circumstances and the needs of individual participants.
- Two essential characteristics of any good coach, no matter which style is used, are being positive and encouraging, and ensuring the safety of the participants at all times.
- Effective coaches have developed a philosophy of coaching. Developing a coaching philosophy is based on understanding why you coach; why athletes participate; why parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators get involved; and being able to communicate your coaching philosophy to others.
- Parents, partners, carers, officials and administrators play a vital role in sport. Establishing positive and supportive relationships with everyone involved is important. It can also make the coach's role easier and more enjoyable. Through a cooperative effort, everyone can contribute to a participant's sporting experience. Take time to understand them and do everything possible to ensure they understand the coaching role and responsibilities and to develop a team approach.
- Coaches should ensure that they demonstrate positive, appropriate and acceptable behaviour at all times.

## References and further reading

Australian Sports Commission, Australian Sports Drug Agency and World Anti-doping Agency resources, including the *Anti-doping Information Handbook* (current), substance fact sheets, online substance information list, information on the therapeutic use of banned substances, and an outline of drug testing procedures and athlete rights.

Australian Sports Commission 2001, *Give it a Go!: including people with disabilities in sport and physical activity*, ASC, Canberra.

Australian Sports Commission 2004, *What's the Score?: the facts on alcohol, drugs and sport*, ASC, Canberra.

Australian Sports Commission 2005, *Disability Education Program, Module 6: Inclusive Coaching*, ASC, Canberra.

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## CHAPTER 2

# PLANNING AND REVIEWING

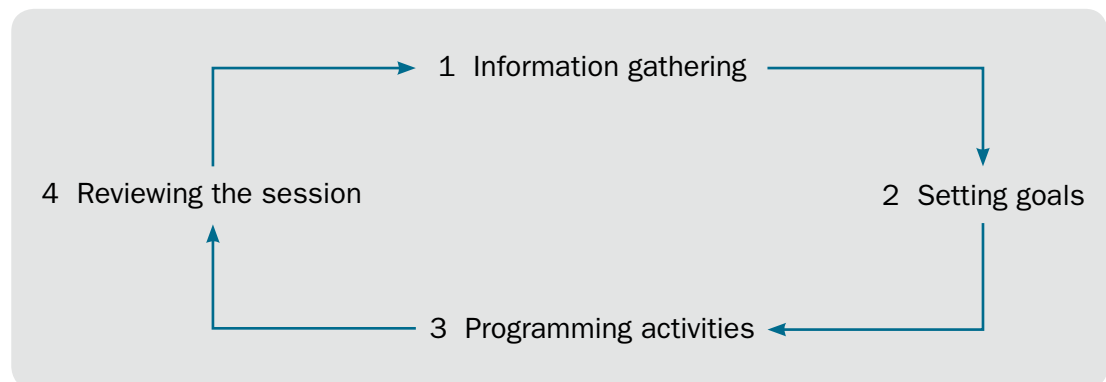
### The planning process

Planning sessions prior to training helps coaches make the session more enjoyable and profitable for the participant, and helps to make maximum use of the time available. Planning does not need to be a lengthy and arduous process — with practice the coach can quickly consider the session goals, identify activities and select equipment that is needed. Planning can make an enormous difference to the effectiveness and enjoyment of training sessions.

Effective planning helps ensure that the coach:

- has all the required resources available when they need them
- provides a safe environment
- maximises participation and makes effective use of the time available
- provides challenging activities that allow for progressive skill development in all participants
- includes all participants, regardless of their level of ability
- maximises fun and enjoyment.

Good planning involves the following steps:



The cyclic nature of this process means that reviewing one session will help to provide information that helps to refine the goals and activities for the next session, and so on.

### Information gathering

The first step in the planning process is to understand the individual needs of the participants. In order to do this, the coach must gather information about the participants, usually from a range of sources.

The kind of information gathered will depend on the demands of the sport, the age and level of development of the participant, and the level of sport at which they are involved. For beginners, the type of information required includes:

- previous experience in the sport
- level of development, both with the technical and tactical skills of the sport as well as their level of physical fitness

- goals and aspirations in the sport
- why they like to play the sport and what motivates them (for example, the fun of participating, being with their friends, learning new skills, competing, etc.)
- any illness, injury or medical condition that might restrict their ability to participate
- any support or modifications that might be required to allow them to participate to the best of their ability.

Coaches will also need to gather personal information such as contact details and medical information from the participant when they first join. Keeping accurate and current records, particularly of emergency contact details and relevant medical information, is crucial in case of an accident or injury. More information on gathering and recording medical information is contained in Chapter 3. Coaches should always take care to ensure that personal information about participants is kept confidential.

This type of information is best gathered directly from the participant and/or their parents (for children) at the start of the season or program. Many coaches use an enrolment form to gather the basic information and then might expand on this through a short discussion when the participant/parent hands in the form, or at the first training session. Other ways to gather the information needed might include:

- a simple skills activity at the first training session to help determine the level of development of the participant
- some fun games that elicit information from the participants — for example, passing a ball among the group and when each participant catches the ball, they have to answer a question such as 'Why do you like to play basketball?', or 'How many years/months have you played cricket?'.

Where a participant has a medical condition or a disability, the coach might also need further information from their doctor, physiotherapist or other carer to gather more detailed information. This should only be done after discussions with the participant and their parents, and if their permission is given. The coach should focus on the abilities of the participant and any modifications that might need to be made to the program to allow them to participate to their maximum potential. Of course all such information must remain confidential.

## Setting goals

Goals should be established for each training session. They help to guide the program and provide a reference point to monitor participant progress throughout the season.

Session goals will be derived from the longer-term goals for the participant. For example, if one of the goals for the season is for the participants to reduce the number of mis-fielded balls in T-ball, then one of the session goals might be for participants to consistently position their feet and body effectively to catch the ball. This goal then helps to guide the programming for that session and aids in the selection of activities for that day.



Do not forget to include the participants wherever possible in the goal-setting process — if they have been involved and consulted on the goals for the program, they are more likely to be committed to achieving them. Even young children are able to express an opinion about what they would like to do at training.

When setting goals try to follow the SMART principle — goals should be Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound. Structuring goals in this way will assist in evaluating whether or not they have actually been achieved during the review phase.

Goals can relate to any part of sporting performance, or can be all-encompassing, such as ‘to win a championship’. However, coaches should predominately set performance goals (for example, aim to hit as many forehands as possible deeper than the service line, during this session) rather than outcome goals (for example, winning the championship). Focusing on performance improves skill development and reduces stress that participants can sometimes feel when focusing on outcome goals. Participants are able to control their own performance, but there are many external factors that can determine the outcome of a game.

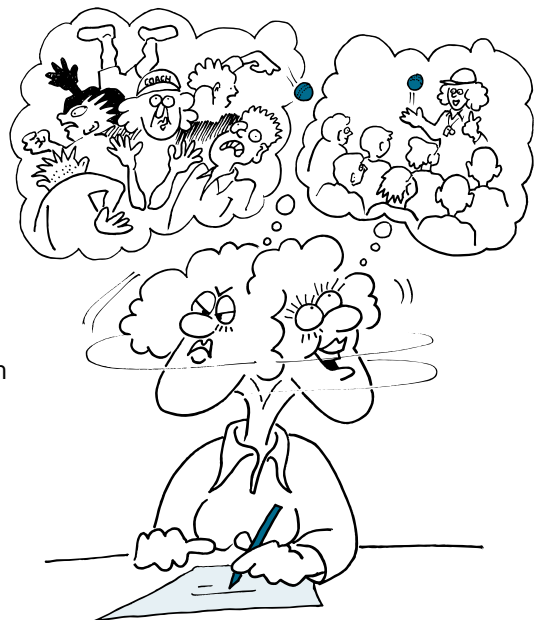
Coaches must also be flexible and prepared to adjust goals to suit the sometimes unpredictable changes that can occur in any coaching situation. Session goals and training plans may need to be quickly adjusted if a participant is injured, the necessary equipment is no longer available, or the environment presents a safety hazard (for example, a slippery surface). This ability to quickly adapt your plans is one of the skills of a good coach. Being able to adapt and adjust if something is not working according to plan is a skill that is likely to develop as the coach gains more experience and a greater repertoire of games and activities.

## Programming activities

Before considering what to program into a session, coaches first need to understand the basic elements of a training session.

### Elements of a training session

Each coach will develop their own approach to planning a session, however there is generally a pattern to the elements that are contained within a session for beginners. Training sessions should be developed from two or three goals that have been identified for that session. The session should begin with a brief introduction and warm-up, progress onto games and activities to develop technical and tactical skills and fitness, and finally the session should finish with a cool-down and some time for review. A good coach will be able to plan for each of these individual elements of the session, but make them flow smoothly, so participants are kept active and interested throughout the session.



Using this game-focused approach (the game sense approach), keeps up the interest of the participants, teaches technical skills, tactical awareness and decision-making, while at the same time developing fitness that is specific to the demands of the sport. For individual sports that involve few tactics and decision-making, a more traditional approach to planning may be more appropriate. For example, in sports such as swimming and rowing, coaches will place more emphasis on activities that focus on technique drills and the development of fitness and less emphasis on games.

The elements of a training session that all coaches should include are:

- session introduction
- warm-up
- skill and fitness activities
- cool-down
- review.

### Session introduction

An overview of the training session should be presented to participants prior to the session starting. This can either be posted on a notice board or whiteboard, or communicated by the coach as the participants gather to commence training. Swimming coaches often list the training program on a board adjacent to the pool. This is effective as swimmers can commence their program as soon as they arrive at the pool and do not need to wait for other members of their squad. The coach can also get on with coaching, and not be compelled to have to stop and explain the session to each swimmer as they arrive.



### TIPS FOR CONDUCTING A SESSION INTRODUCTION

- Keep it short and focused
- Explain the goals for the session
- Establish the tone of the training session
- Detail the organisation for training (for example, what groupings the participants will be working in for the session)
- Relay any important messages (for example, changes to training times, etc.)

### Warm-up

The warm-up should focus on low-intensity, skill-specific activities. There is now less emphasis on static stretching exercises and more emphasis on achieving readiness and ease of movement by slowly increasing the intensity of movement patterns and skills. For example, simple passing games in basketball and netball would form a good warm-up activity.

Active stretching can then easily be incorporated into these activities. A good example of this is after some general low-intensity movement activities, playing a 'freeze game' where, on a cue (either the command 'freeze' or being 'tipped' by another participant), the participants perform a stretching activity, until they become 'unfrozen' by another participant.

The length and structure of the warm-up vary among sports and the age and condition of participants, however their purpose is the same for all sports. It is designed to prepare the neuromuscular system for action, increase the blood flow throughout the body and prepare the mind for action. A good warm-up will decrease the risk of injury and increase the ability of muscles to work effectively throughout the session.

### *Skill and fitness activities*

This segment of the session is very important and usually the most enjoyable part of the session. The use of game-like activities is a great way to develop skills and fitness. There are two reasons for this:

- games, more often than not, increase the motivation levels in participants
- skills practised in competition-related activities will transfer better than skills practised in non-competition-related situations.

This is essentially the theory behind the game sense approach.

The other option for this part of the training session is to design competition-related activities that focus on a particular skill and/or strategy. An example would be to do unit trainings in rugby union. Players would practise line outs, scrums and back line plays.

The amount of time devoted to these activities will be determined by the length of the training session and the age and level of the participants. However, these technique and tactical-related activities should make up the bulk of the session. Coaches should attempt to devote some of their time to raise the intensity and conditions to a level that closely resembles what will occur in real competition.

### *Cool-down*

A cool-down (sometimes referred to as the warm-down) of five to ten minutes helps to distribute waste products through the body, gradually returning the body to resting levels and reducing the sometimes harmful impact of dramatic changes to the body's activity level.

The cool-down occurs immediately after training activities have been completed and includes low-intensity body movement, such as slow jogging or walking (which, once again can be incorporated into low-key games to keep interest levels up), stretching exercises, shooting at goal or light rowing back to the shed. It is during this part of the session that more time can be spent on static stretching (that is, to improve flexibility levels).

The cool-down is often neglected but it is very important and must be included in each session and after competition.

## **TIPS FOR STRETCHING**

When stretching muscles, it is important to ensure that the participants:

- stretch warm muscles
- are not bouncing during the stretch
- stretch gently to the point of mild discomfort, not pain
- hold static stretches for at least 10–15 seconds and repeat each stretch at least twice
- stretch muscles on both sides of the body, beginning with the larger muscle groups
- include stretches for muscles specific to the sport
- do not make stretches competitive.



### Review

The coach should review the training session with participants, highlighting important points from the session. This could occur either during or immediately following the cool-down.

The review also involves a discussion by coaches and participants about the important parts of the training session and should include some reflection on what worked, and what did not, during the session. This information then feeds into the planning process for future sessions.

Further information on reviewing sessions, including strategies to help review coaching effectiveness, are included later in this chapter.

### Selecting and designing training activities

When selecting or designing an activity, consider if the activity:

- involves all participants most of the time
- is motivating and/or fun
- is safe
- is relatively easy to organise
- has a logical flow from previous activities.

When designing or modifying games and activities, always keep safety and participant activity levels in mind. Ensure that games encourage participation from everyone and modify the 'rules' of the games if necessary to allow everyone to participate fully, regardless of their skill or ability level.



Coaches can get ideas for activities from a variety of places. Most sports have sport-specific coaching manuals and resources that will include suggestions for activities for beginners. Many sports have developed modified rules for beginners and have also developed activity sheets or game cards. The ASC also has a range of activity and game cards available, including games suitable for people with a disability (see [www.ausport.gov.au/about/publications/catalogue](http://www.ausport.gov.au/about/publications/catalogue)).

Observing other coaches (both from your own sport and other sports) can also be a great source of inspiration. Never be afraid to invent activities as well. When designing an activity, focus on the outcome (for example, teaching children to move into open space to receive a pass), and then work backwards from there. Inventing 'rules' for the game helps to focus on the particular skill being worked on. For example, children may earn a point every time they receive a pass in free space during a game. This encourages them to find ways to break free of their opponent and learn ways to move into open space. Taking the points focus away from scoring a goal and moving it to encouraging children to find space re-focuses their attention on improving their skills rather than on the goal scoring outcome of the game.

### Equipment and resource considerations

When planning a session, it is important to consider the equipment and resource needs of the activities. If an activity needs particular equipment (for example, markers, balls, bibs, goal posts, etc.), then the coach needs to ensure that the equipment is available. Sometimes coaches need to share equipment with others, so they may need to coordinate with other coaches or other people to ensure that it is available. Try to plan activities so that particular equipment is used for sequential activities, so that time is not wasted on setting up or packing away equipment.

### Inclusive coaching

One of the most challenging issues for a coach is dealing with multi-age groups and/or a wide range of sizes and ability. Good planning will help to focus on the individual needs of the participants and deal with these challenges. Inclusion works best when it is planned for.

All participants have different strengths and weaknesses, levels of ability, learning styles and different reasons for being involved in the sport. The role of the coach is to endeavour to meet all of their individual needs, while at the same time bringing them together as a team (or for individual sports, as a training squad) that works effectively together.

So how can the coach provide a safe, fun and challenging environment for everyone? Designing games and activities that can be modified to meet the needs of all participants is the key. The acronym CHANGE IT provides a tool that can be used to help modify the activity. Consider modifying the following factors to meet the individual needs of the participant:

**C**oaching style — for example, demonstrations, or use of questions, role models and verbal instructions

**H**ow to score or win

**A**rea — for example, size, shape or surface of the playing environment

**N**umber of participants involved in the activity

**G**ame rules — for example, number of bounces or passes

**E**quipment — for example, softer or larger balls, or lighter, smaller bats/racquets

**I**nclusion — for example, everyone has to touch the ball before the team can score

**T**ime — for example, 'How many ... in 30 seconds?'

### CASE STUDY

In flippaball (modified water polo for children), children play at the shallow end of the pool and are allowed to stand up during the game, while in the adult version of the game a player's feet must never touch the bottom of the pool.

For a group of young players with mixed swimming ability, the coach could easily modify the 'rules' during a flippaball training activity to provide a 'handicap' for players. The better players are only allowed to touch the bottom two times during the whole activity, mid-level players may only touch the bottom when catching or passing the ball, and new players may stand at any time.

Adjusting the rules in this way allows all players to participate to their maximum potential, without compromising the purpose of the activity. Indeed beginners are likely to learn that they are actually more mobile in the pool when they swim, rather than when walking on the bottom. This discovery will encourage them to swim more during the activity.

When including participants with a disability in a team or squad, the key guideline for coaches is to focus on their abilities, not their disabilities. Never assume what any individual is capable of. Always ask the participant what they can do and listen to their suggestions for modifying techniques or activities that will allow them to maximise participation. After all, they know their own capabilities better than anyone. When preparing a coaching program, examine what, if anything, needs to be adapted or modified. This can be done by:

- talking to parents, carers and significant others to further help understand specific needs
- talking to your coaching peers, particularly if they coach people with disabilities
- finding information about the impairment that may help the coach understand some general considerations relevant to their sport
- considering the ability of the participant to perform the skills and movements of a particular sport or activity. In other words, what or how the participant can:
  - see (predominantly relevant to participants with vision impairment)
  - hear (predominantly relevant to participants who are deaf or hearing impaired)
  - move (predominantly relevant to participants with a physical disability)
  - learn, recall or reproduce skills (predominantly relevant to participants with an intellectual disability)
  - perform tasks and activities (relevant to all participants).

It is also very important to consider the social needs of participants as well as their physical and technical ones. Understanding why each participant is involved in the sport will improve the coach's ability to design activities that meet their social needs as well. Children, for example, often participate in sport to be with their friends. Because of this, it may be appropriate to group participants, at least during some training activities, based on their friendship groups, rather than skill ability or positions played during the game (for example, forwards/backs, etc.). Warm-ups and cool-downs are a great time to group children with their friends.

Drop-out from sport in teenage girls has often been attributed to concerns regarding peer approval and self-image. Coaches working with this age group should therefore keep these issues in mind when planning activities, to ensure that they boost the participant's self-esteem, rather than undermining it by exposing them to failure and ridicule by their peers. Working in carefully selected groups can help to take the pressure off the less-confident participants at this age, particularly when introducing new skills.

## CASE STUDY

Mike is a Level 1 Riding for the Disabled (RDA) coach. He works in a local RDA centre that provides lessons for horse riders with a range of disabilities as well as for some able-bodied riders. Riders are allocated to classes on the basis of their abilities, so Mike sometimes coaches classes with a mixture of both able-bodied riders and riders with a disability.

Mike has become concerned with the progress of his Tuesday afternoon class. This is a group of young teenagers who have been riding each week for a number of years and have mastered the basic skills of horse riding. However the group does not seem to be enjoying their lessons much any more and seem bored with the activities he has been programming. There also seems to be divisions arising in the group, with the able-bodied riders tending to group together for activities and the riders with a disability also tending to choose to work together as a group. While understanding that the girls would choose to work in their friendship groups, Mike is not happy with the separation that seems to be forming in the group and decides to talk to the riders about it.

Initially Mike tackles the issue of boredom with the lessons. None of the riders has horses of their own, and only ever get to ride on the centre's horses once a week. Most of the group express frustration about this, as they do not feel they are progressing very quickly in their riding. They want to be able to ride at Pony Club events with their other friends who have their own horses, but recognise this is not possible without having a horse of their own.

Next, Mike tackles the trickier question of the groupings for activities. Mike discovers that a number of the riders with a disability lack confidence within the group and do not feel like they fit in very well. Mike asks the group for suggestions about how they could improve the situation and boost everyone's confidence and enjoyment. The girls suggest that Mike actually allocates riders to groups for activities in the future.

Mike follows up on this suggestion in the following lessons, but does not feel that it has actually solved the problem, as he feels that he is artificially forcing the mix. He also notices that the girls gravitate back to their old groups when the lesson has finished.

Mike decides to take a bigger step and speaks to the centre manager about the possibility of him taking the girls to a Pony Club rally on the centre's horses. The manager works with Mike to arrange the necessary transport and assistance from parents and liaises with the local Pony Club about a suitable event for the group to get involved in. They decide to start slowly and just join in one of the local Pony Club's regular monthly rallies and participate in the training activities, but not enter any competitions.

At their outing to Pony Club, Mike and the girls join in with the activities and have a great time. They also watch one of the Pony Club mounted games teams do a demonstration barrel game race, which they had recently won at the state championship. This team's demonstration gives Mike an idea, so he speaks to the Pony Club coach about his group of riders coming more regularly to Pony Club and joining in the mounted games events.

Back at their Centre, the girls work hard on their skills and with this new goal driving them, they work fantastically as a team to help each other prepare for their outings to Pony Club rallies. In fact, they work so hard that in the first barrel game race they enter, they come third!

Mike is delighted with the outcome and the improvement in motivation within the group. However, he is even more delighted with the gradual breakdown in the division within the group and the new-found confidence that the riders with a disability have developed through a focus on teamwork that the Pony Club outings have created.

### **Progressing activities within and across sessions**

Progressively building activities that develop skills and fitness will enhance performance. Each session should therefore build in intensity and consecutive sessions should continue to extend the participant. A review of the previous session will also assist the coach in progressing activities in the next session.

Steps should be incremental, however, and not place undue stress on the participant. As a beginner coach, the aim is to extend the participant, not exhaust them. This principle applies to skill learning as well as



fitness. Tired or overloaded participants do not learn well. Introduce new skills and concepts early in the session and then build activities to practise them in increasingly competition-like situations.

When planning a session it is often helpful to identify some key questions that might be posed during the session. Well thought out questions can help participants to learn new concepts more quickly. Questions cause the participant to analyse their own performance and improve the participant's understanding of the game. Learning in this way helps to embed the concept more quickly than if the participant is simply told what to do. This in turn increases the likelihood of the participant choosing the right option when placed in that situation again in the future.

Careful consideration of the season goals for the participants will help the coach to build their coaching program throughout the season. Reviewing the participant's progress at regular intervals will allow the coach to check whether they are still on track to achieve their goals, or whether modifications to the program are needed. Coaches may also find that their initial goals may not have been realistic, in which case, they should not be afraid to re-assess the goals and modify the program, either within a session or throughout the season.

### **Sample session planner**

The following sample session planner is a useful tool for coaches to use in planning their training sessions. It includes space for coaches to document their plans in a practical way and also serves as an excellent record of each training session. As the coach becomes more familiar with the planning process, they may want to modify this planner to suit the needs of their particular sport and their own personal planning style.

**Session planner**

Date:	Attendance:	Equipment needed:
Venue:		
Duration:		

Introduction (aims for session, reminders, etc.):		
Warm-up activities:	Drills and games:	Cool-down activities:
Coaching tips/ questions/challenges:		Class management/ energisers:
Review/evaluation (key points from session, what worked and what did not, modifications for next session, etc.):		



### TIPS FOR COACHES WHEN PLANNING A TRAINING SESSION

- Plan so that activities flow from one to the next smoothly. Have equipment close at hand and develop routines so that participants know what to do next
- Read manuals and books to get new ideas for activities and drills
- Drills and minor games from one sport can easily be adapted to suit another
- Over-plan rather than under-plan. It is easier to omit drills than to add unplanned drills
- Organise training sessions so that participants are actively involved. Use more groups with a small number of participants rather than a few groups containing large numbers
- Avoid activities that require inactivity or drills that eliminate participants. It is likely that the participants to be first eliminated will be the less skilled, exactly the participants who need most practice
- Plan drills so that participants have a good chance of success. This will improve motivation
- Even younger participants are capable of working independently in small groups. Develop activity station cards that explain the drill to be practised

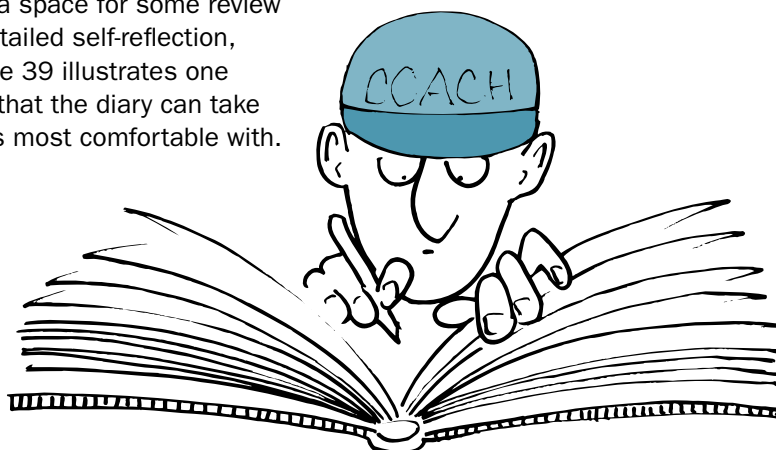
## Reviewing the session

It is very important to spend some time reviewing the effectiveness of each session. Ideally this will involve both self-reflection on the coach's part, but also gaining feedback from others will give a more balanced view of the coach's own performance. The participants, a coach or other person that you respect will be able to give constructive feedback. Do not be afraid to ask young children for their ideas. At the very least they will be able to tell you which were their favourite activities!

All coaches self-reflect, but rarely in a deliberate and systematic manner. There are a number of techniques that a coach can use to help them systematically reflect on their own performance. Three methods that can be used to self-reflect are the coaching diary, mentoring and video self-analysis. The value of these three methods is that they will help to structure self-reflection and relate it directly to the goal of improving your effectiveness.

### Coaching diary

Diaries help people to remember, to gain a perspective on their life and to self-reflect. A coaching diary is a good way for the coach to record and describe coaching experiences that they can then use to evaluate what worked well and what was less effective. The session planner on page 37 contains a space for some review points, however for a more detailed self-reflection, the sample diary page on page 39 illustrates one approach. It should be noted that the diary can take whatever form the coach feels most comfortable with.



**Example self-reflection diary**

Date:	Session time:	Participants:
Session description (including aims):		
Focus area: (tick appropriate box)    Teaching <input type="checkbox"/> Managing <input type="checkbox"/> Communicating <input type="checkbox"/>		
Things to improve:		Things to implement in the next session:
		Follow up evaluation after the next session:

**TIPS FOR USING A COACHING DIARY**

A coaching diary is a very effective tool to aid self-reflection and evaluate coaching performance. Make sure that you:

- keep entries simple and to the point
- try to focus on your actions and behaviours rather than just describing the activities that occurred
- include the things that you do well
- use it to analyse and explain your coaching performance. For example, why was the session today successful? What specifically went well and why? How can you build on this? What did not work and what needs to be done to improve?

### CASE STUDY

Sue is a gymnastics coach who works with a group of six to eight-year-old children. One of the children in the group, Hailey, has autism. Hailey is physically very able, but has difficulty relating to the other children and often withdraws from interaction with Sue as the session progresses. Once this occurs, Sue has great difficulty keeping Hailey's attention and motivation.

In attempting to learn what might cause Hailey's withdrawal, Sue starts keeping a coaching diary. In the diary she keeps brief notes on each session, including who attended, what activities the group did and, more importantly, what communication strategies she used (particularly with Hailey) and what effect they had. Over time, Sue realises that one of the triggers for Hailey was the level and type of communication she had with her. When Sue does a lot of individualised coaching with Hailey, giving her more intense one-to-one instruction, she tends to withdraw. If, however, she keeps her coaching more generalised and uses the other children to demonstrate a new concept or skill, Hailey's level of interaction with the group remains high and she stays interested in the session.

Using a diary helped to focus Sue's reflections and draw the connection between her coaching methods and Hailey's individual communication needs.



### Mentor coaching

Sometimes it can be helpful to discuss an issue or a problem with a colleague or friend. It can also be helpful to have someone observe you in action to provide another perspective on your coaching methods. Mentor coaching makes self-reflection a social and interactive process. The coach reflects with another person through dialogue, rather than alone and in silence.

The mentor's role is not to judge, but to gain an understanding of the coach's methods so that they can provide the coach with informed feedback. The mentor is there to listen and guide, not to do the reflection for the coach.

Three steps to effectively utilising a mentor coach are:

- 1 plan a preliminary discussion to consider your performance in the key areas of teaching, managing and communicating
- 2 focus on the identification of a particular behaviour to change and the formulation of a practical plan of action
- 3 a follow-up discussion after you have implemented the action plan will help to confirm that you have made effective changes to your coaching.

### TIPS FOR WORKING WITH A MENTOR COACH

Working with a mentor will be more productive if these key points are followed:

- focus on the goal of improving coaching effectiveness. Your discussions with your mentor may be quite wide ranging but should always be directed towards identifying areas of your coaching that need improvement and developing practical strategies to achieve this improvement
- record the key points from your discussion with your mentor — particularly your plan of action for the next session
- remember, improvement can be slow. Do not be afraid to discuss the same area of coaching behaviour again if the desired improvement is not evident.

### Video self-analysis

This method involves making a video recording of a coaching session and then analysing it to identify changes to be made. The coach might like to involve a mentor in the process to help in analysis and planning for improvement.

Using video allows the coach to see themselves in action. It also provides very detailed feedback. It has the advantages of being able to be replayed so that a particular segment can be watched again or analysed in slow motion. A video also allows the coach to focus on the participants' responses to their coaching styles. If necessary, the video might even be sent to a distant mentor who can advise on areas for improvement, assist to develop action plans for change and evaluate the implementation of plans formulated earlier.

### TIPS FOR USING VIDEO SELF-ANALYSIS

- Do not just film the participants — be sure to include the coach in action
- View the tape, identify things to improve and devise a plan for change
- Record a subsequent session in which you implement your plans for change
- Undertake follow-up self-reflection. How did you go? What more needs to be done?

### Evaluation questionnaire

To help evaluate coaching performance, a questionnaire such as the one on page 42 can be used. Ideally, this questionnaire should be completed regularly during the season to monitor and evaluate coaching performance. If working with a mentor, have the mentor complete it also, and/or perhaps some of the participants.

**How do you rate as a coach?**

	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
<b>Communication</b>			
1 Did I reinforce the actions of the participants in a positive manner when they performed correctly?			
2 Did I reward effort in addition to outcome?			
3 Did I give compliments sincerely and honestly?			
4 Did I use sarcasm to get my message across?			
5 Did I give constructive and specific feedback?			
6 Did what I said to the participants match my non-verbal actions towards them?			
7 Was I consistent and fair in my treatment of all participants?			
8 Did I over-coach during training/game by giving too many instructions?			
9 Did I change my communication methods to suit the needs of the participants?			
10 Did I encourage the participants to have an input into team decisions and did I listen to them when they had something to say?			
11 Did I reinforce team rules fairly and consistently?			
<b>Motivation</b>			
12 Did I show the enthusiasm while coaching that I expect from the participants?			
13 Did the participants have fun during the training/game?			
14 Was I aware of any anxiety or nervousness experienced by the participants and did I help to reduce this?			
15 Did I emphasise winning too much?			
<b>Leadership</b>			
16 Was I prompt in arriving at training/game?			
17 Was I well prepared and organised for training sessions?			
18 Was my training session varied and interesting so that it challenged all participants and developed self-esteem and confidence?			
19 Did every participant have equal game time or did I over-play the more skilled participants?			
20 Was I able to analyse skills and correct errors when they occurred?			
21 Did I exercise self-control in situations that made me angry?			
22 Was I sensitive to the individual needs of all the participants?			
23 Did I personally demonstrate good sporting behaviour?			
24 Did I argue with, or complain about, officials?			
25 Did I encourage parents to attend games?			
26 Was I patient and tolerant with all participants, regardless of individual skill levels?			

Adapted from a questionnaire by Maureen Weiss, Institute for the Study of Youth Sports, Michigan, United States, published in *AUSSIE SPORT ACTION*, Spring 1992, Australian Sports Commission, Canberra.

### TIPS FOR USING EVALUATION QUESTIONNAIRES

Completing a questionnaire focuses thoughts and provides an easy-to-use but effective form of evaluation for coaches.

- Tick one response per question
- Ask a mentor coach and participants to complete the questionnaire to independently evaluate your coaching performance
- Focus on a few areas of improvement at a time rather than trying to improve every aspect of your coaching
- Complete the questionnaire at regular intervals to monitor your improvement and coaching performance

Ideally, self-reflection is not a one-off thing. It should become a regular part of a coach's program. Checking performance through a diary, with the help of a mentor or by viewing a video recording, is a very good means of ensuring that the coach continues to improve.

No matter which self-reflection method, or combination of methods, is used remember that change can sometimes be slow. The coach may need to examine the same area of coaching (teaching, managing and communicating) a number of times.

It is a simple point, but one worth stressing — effective coaches take responsibility for their own effectiveness.

## Summary

Planning is an important part of the coach's role. The main components of the planning process include:

- information gathering:
  - considering the type of information to gather
  - looking at where it can be gathered from
  - keeping the information confidential
- setting goals:
  - setting SMART goals
  - ensuring a mix of performance and outcome goals
  - being a 'flexible' coach
- programming activities:
  - using a session planner
  - including all the elements of a training session — session introduction, warm-up, skill and fitness activities, cool-down and review
  - selecting and designing appropriate training activities
  - being an inclusive coach
  - progressing activities within and across sessions
- reviewing the session:
  - considering what to review — including managing, teaching and communication
  - how to review — including a coaching diary, using a mentor and video self-analysis.



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## CHAPTER 3

# RISK MANAGEMENT

The Australian Sports Commission would like to acknowledge the assistance of the following people and organisations in the preparation of this chapter:

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- Tim Frampton — Law Sport and Dispute Resolution.

Many beginner coaches are not familiar with risk management. They may naturally focus their initial coaching attention on their sports techniques and tactics. However, as well as the hands-on coaching activities, coaches also have other important duties. Coaches have always contributed to behind-the-scenes roles, however, as sport has developed, coaches have become more accountable. Society has developed expectations that affect coaches from grassroots to elite levels, irrespective of whether they are a volunteer or a professional coach.

The accountability that coaches are required to demonstrate is known as ‘risk management’.

Risk management is not just a term that means the coach should be responsible and use common sense in undertaking their coaching responsibilities. It means much more than this. Managing risks in coaching is law!

### Legal responsibilities of the coach



Just as everyone has to obey rules when driving a car, there are rules that must be obeyed when coaching. If a coach breaks the rules, then they are accountable. The level of accountability depends on the seriousness of the breach of the rules. Coaching is no different to any other professional occupation. Rules apply!

The good news is that, as with driving a car, rules help keep everyone safe in sport. As a coach, you have a legal duty to exercise reasonable care to avoid injuring or causing damage to participants and others under your control. This is commonly referred to as ‘duty of care’.

Laws are enforced by courts, and most people have heard of criminal law. However, coaches must also be aware of common law and how this affects them. Criminal laws are established by parliamentary acts. Common law (tort law) is established by social standards. A judgment is made based on what is a ‘socially acceptable’ standard (that is, comparing what a person did against what action their peers would take in the same situation). A judgment is made considering what is fair and reasonable, given the same or similar circumstances. Common law judgments, like criminal law, are based in the courts, and are concerned with determining if a coach has breached their ‘legal duty’.

A breach of legal duty is called ‘negligence’. Negligence is unintentional harm caused to others as a result of carelessness. It occurs when a coach does, or omits to do, something that a prudent person would or would not do. In other words, the coach’s actions would be judged by what society reasonably expects of a coach. The question to ask is did the coach act inappropriately, or did they fail to act when they should have done something?

However, it is not all doom and gloom. Rules help to keep everyone safe. By understanding the rules and applying common sense, the likelihood of litigation is greatly reduced, and the participants and others will be safer.

### The coach's legal duties

Provide a safe environment	Facilities and equipment must be safe for both the participant and others involved in the activity session. Adverse weather conditions must also be taken into account during all activity sessions. Existing codes, standards and use of approved safety equipment should be met. All equipment should be kept in good order and always be adequately repaired so that it is safe to use at all times. Participants, especially children, should be protected from harassment, discrimination and abuse while involved in sport under the coach's care.
Activities must be adequately planned	Unplanned or poorly planned activity sessions can impair learning, limit progress and cause injury. Using appropriate progressions in the teaching of new skills, especially potentially dangerous skills, and providing activities that cater for the range of ability levels in your group is imperative. This requires careful planning.
Participants must be evaluated for injury and incapacity	Participants with an injury or incapacity should not be expected to perform any potentially harmful activity. No participant should ever be forced to take part in any activity that they do not wish to. Individual difference must be accounted for.
Young participants should not be mismatched in activities (unless the coach adapts and modifies the activity to safely include all participants)	Young participants should be matched not only according to age, but also height, weight and maturity. Skill levels and experience should also be considered. If the group includes participants with a wide range of age, height, weight, maturity and ability levels, activities should be modified so that the coach can safely and effectively include all participants.
Participants must be warned of the risks of the activities	The risks of any activity can only be legally accepted by the participants if they know, understand and appreciate those risks. This includes a duty to warn 'others' associated with the participants. For example, parents may need to be warned of car parking risks or other facility-related risks.
Activities must be closely supervised	Adequate supervision is necessary to ensure the playing area is as safe as possible. Each activity will have its own specific requirements in this regard.
Develop clear rules for activity sessions and general conduct	Many injuries are the result of fooling around in change rooms and playing areas. Clear rules should be developed and enforced for behaviour in a range of situations.
Coaches should keep accurate records	Adequate records are useful aids for planning and are essential in all cases of injury or other significant incidents. Injury or incident reports (as appropriate) should be made as soon as possible after an injury or significant incident occurs. Note that an injury report is not a 'diagnosis'. A sample injury report form is provided later in the chapter.

It should be noted that whenever children are involved, the duty of care will generally increase. This is because, unlike adults, children are not mature enough to fully assess all of the risks and potential consequences of participating in an activity or to form their own view on whether or not they wish to accept all of the risks of being involved in an activity. Coaches of children need to be mindful of the extra care necessary. This may also apply to some participants with an intellectual disability or mental illness.

Coaches are expected to manage risks all the time. Knowledge, preparation and prevention are important factors for coaches in managing risk. The aim is to keep participants safe and protect the coach from legal action.

Accreditation courses and updating activities are examples of 'good practice' for coaches and provide a framework to develop a good understanding of the coach's legal responsibilities.

Simple, responsible 'good practice' coaching guidelines are included later in the chapter.

Remember that risk management is an ongoing process.

### CASE STUDY

Brian normally coaches in a club. On this occasion he offers to 'fill in' for an ill colleague who conducts the local school program. Brian is an accredited coach but is less familiar with coaching larger numbers of participants. Brian sets up a circuit of activities, designed to keep all participants active. Brian begins the class and is quickly absorbed with providing feedback to the participants. Brian notices that one of the participants, Nicole, is struggling with an activity and he moves to assist her. Brian's attention is diverted from the class to focus solely on Nicole. Unfortunately another participant is injured while Brian's attention is focused on Nicole.

The legal action cites that Brian was negligent as he failed to adequately supervise the group's activity. Failure to adequately supervise is among the most common causes of litigation in sport.

Brian's situation teaches coaches to:

- know the participant's abilities and any individual needs
- know if individual participants need extra attention and ensure that the other participants' activities can be managed safely
- position themselves in order to supervise participants all the time (ensuring they can see and hear what is going on).

## Applying risk-management principles

Most coaches are genuinely concerned about the wellbeing of participants under their care and aim to prevent incidents that might injure or damage the participant. Physical injuries affect participants, but issues such as contractual disputes, unfair treatment and discrimination can also affect their wellbeing and performance. This is referred to as 'damage' and managing risks associated with damage is becoming more important.

Physical risks are more obvious. Coaches are more likely to understand that the equipment that is used by the participants needs to be safe, and it is easier to spot a physical risk than risks associated with damage. The current trend in society is to look to someone to blame in the event of an unfortunate accident or incident.

Risk management involves the analysis of all situations involving participants and others under the coach's care. Developing risk-minimisation strategies to reduce these risks is important for the coach.

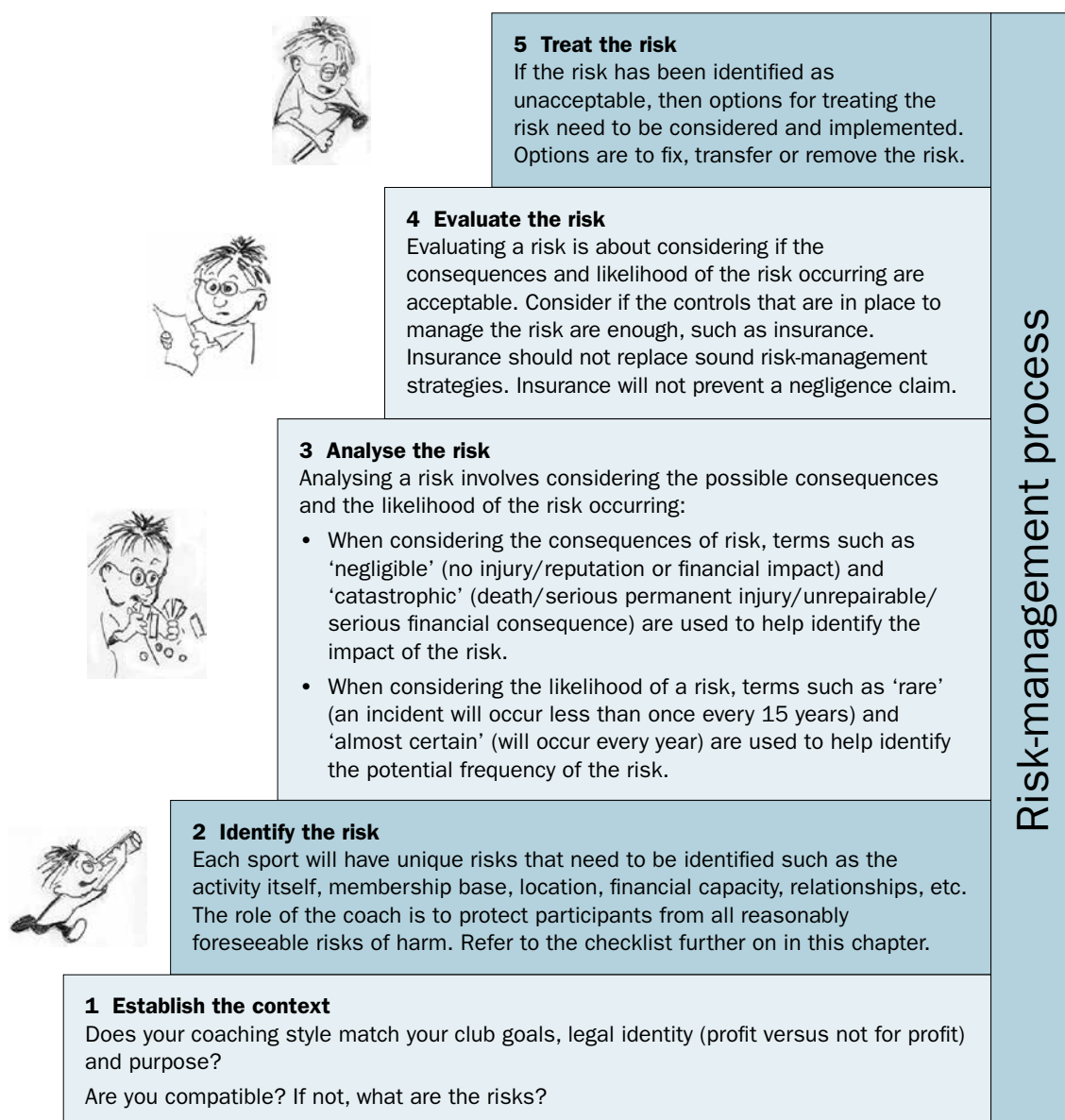
Any litigation is likely to be distressing for all involved and it goes without saying that 'prevention is better than cure'. Coaches need to embrace proactive risk-management methods to control their exposure to risk and deal with the 'find someone to blame' social attitude.

## How to undertake the risk-management process

There are industry standards about how to undertake the risk-management process. The standards provide a comprehensive guideline for managing risk in sport and recreation. Coaches should be aware of the standards, as they are expected to play a role in the risk-management process, especially if they are one of the decision-makers within their sporting organisation. The process will help the coach to identify both the obvious and obscure risks.

Beginner coaches, like experienced coaches, need to be able to demonstrate a reasonable level of responsibility in managing risks. An effective way to do this is to complete a risk-management planner based on the standards guideline. A risk-management planning template is provided on page 50.

The standards advise that risk management is undertaken in steps. There are five steps in the risk-management process:



### The risk-management planner

The risk-management planner focuses the beginner coach on Step 2 and Step 5 in the risk-management process (see risk-management planning template on page 50).

Step 2 is about identifying the risks for your sport. Coaches should ask themselves what things can happen and how can they happen? Be aware that what one person regards as a risk, another may not. Defining a risk is influenced by the coach's experience, cultural perception, knowledge and skills.

A simple approach to identifying risks is to seek answers to the three 'W' questions:

- **What** is the source of the risk?
- **What** can happen?
- **What** will the consequences be?

Due to the dynamic nature of risk, there is no right or wrong way of identifying it. To assist the beginner coach with limited experience in defining the diversity of risks and identifying what risks are important, risks can be categorised into three areas:

- environment
- program
- personnel.

By asking the three 'W' questions across these three categories the beginner coach is well on the way to managing risks simply and effectively.

For example, with regard to the environment:

- **What** is the source of the risk? *The sun ...*
- **What** can happen? *Participants can get sunburnt or heat stroke ...*
- **What** will the consequences be? *Severe injury to participants ...*

The next step is identifying how the coach is going to manage the risk. The most common approach is to either remove the risk entirely, or to implement strategies to minimise the risk.

Coaches can avoid the risk by not continuing an activity, or removing the risk from the activity. Coaches can accept the risk, providing that the strategies they have implemented reduce the risk to being minor. When implementing strategies to minimise risks, it is important to regularly review the process.

The example below shows how a coach can use a risk-management planner.

Risk identification	Strategies to minimise risk	Timeline	Responsibility
<b>What</b> is the source of the risk? <i>Equipment is unstable</i> <b>What</b> can happen? <i>Equipment could fall</i> <b>What</b> will the consequences be? <i>The participant may sustain serious permanent injury. Participation numbers may fall due to unsafe practices. I may be sued for negligence.</i>	Remove the risk — remove the equipment <b>or</b> Reduce the risk — stabilise the equipment with additional supports Lower the equipment	Before the start of the training session	The coach



**Risk-management planning template**

Risk identification	Strategies to minimise risk	Timeline	Responsibility
Program			
1			
2			
3			
Environment			
1			
2			
3			
Personnel			
1			
2			
3			
Other			
1			
2			
3			

## Implementing good coaching practices to reduce risk

The objective of risk management is to produce the safest possible environment for the participants and others, which will reduce the likelihood of litigation against the coach.

Knowing that the coach has a legal duty to the participants and understanding what this entails will help the coach to minimise risks. While it is not possible to have a totally risk-free environment, how the coach acts can impact on the safety of the participants.

Good coaching practices that coaches can abide by to reduce risk associated with coaching include:

### Planning coaching sessions

It is important that the coach develops a written plan for each coaching session. Chapter 2 provides more detailed information on the planning process. It is a good idea to keep a copy of your coaching session plans for future reference, and in case any issues arise at a later time. It is also useful to note any modifications that you made to the plan during the course of the training session (for example, if you needed to change an activity).

### CASE STUDY

Colin sustained a spinal cord injury when he fell attempting a skill that he was not ready for. Coach Darryl had planned Colin's training session, however Colin was very keen to move forward and attempt the next level of the skill. Colin's teenage peers were also keen for 'progress' and contributed to Darryl's decision to allow Colin to 'fast track' and perform the skill.

The legal action cites that Darryl was negligent as he failed to adequately implement the planned training program. Failure to adequately plan is among the most common causes of litigation in sport.

Darryl's situation teaches coaches to:

- plan for the sequential learning of skills
- ensure that participants have the physical abilities to perform the skills
- not deviate from their plans.

### Child protection

All coaches need to be aware of issues associated with child protection. As well as there being specific criminal laws that will be discussed further on in the chapter, there are some basic good coaching practices that coaches can abide by to reduce risks associated with working with children (see Chapter 1 for further details).

### Pre-participation screening

Coaches need to ensure that they choose activities that are appropriate for the participant's physical stature and ability. This is particularly important for young participants. Where possible, coaches should be aware of any health issues that the participant might have and which might affect their participation in sport.

This can be achieved by ensuring that all participants complete a medical history on joining a club. The form should be completed at the start of the season and updated at least yearly. A sample medical history form is included on page 70. Medical history forms allow the coach

to be aware of any specific conditions a participant has and to be prepared should an emergency arise. They also ensure the coach has the emergency contact details for every participant under their care.

Coaches can only request that participants and/or their parent/guardian complete the form, as it is legally and ethically inappropriate to insist on this. It is up to the participant's parent/guardian to disclose any medical condition that may affect their participation in physical activity.

Most people respond positively if it is made clear that information is sought to help structure/modify the participant's program to better cater for individual needs. This good coaching practice approach is particularly important for participants who may be returning to physical activity after an injury or illness and to best cater for participants with a disability.

Information gathered by the coach regarding a participant and their medical history or injuries should be treated as confidential. This information must be used with discretion while preserving the privacy and rights of the participant as well as meeting the needs of the club. The participant should always be told why the information is being collected and, if the *Privacy Act* applies, that they have the right to access that information. Any data collected must be protected from misuse and loss, and from unauthorised modification. Be aware that privacy legislation in some states is very particular regarding how to collect, keep and dispose of medical records. Coaches should confirm with their club or sporting organisation whether there is any relevant privacy legislation that they need to consider. Coaches must seek the participant's permission before revealing any medical information to a third party, except in emergency situations (for example, if a participant is unconscious and needs to be treated by qualified medical personnel).

It is good coaching practice to be aware of individual needs and to be especially careful when new participants join a session for the first time. Sometimes clubs offer promotional days and it is always a good idea to ask the participants if they are all feeling well and ready to go. Watch the participants closely in the warm-up to check ability levels in these situations.

### **Warming up prior to activity**

Ensure that every session starts out with appropriate warm-up activities. The warm-up helps to prepare the body and mind for the activities, thus reducing the likelihood of injury. The warm-up is so called because it involves warming up and preparing specific joints and the body generally for the extra stress of strenuous physical activities.

Warm-up activities usually begin at a low intensity and gradually build to the level required in the session. This usually includes some stretching. Beginner coaches should avoid stretching activities that require a partner to assist, full rotations of the neck or any bouncing or 'wind-up' style activities.

### **Matching participants**

Choosing activities that are appropriate for the physical, social and emotional fitness level of the participant is very important. It is good coaching practice to be aware of individual differences within the group and adapt activities accordingly to meet the varying needs of the participants.

It is important to keep competitions balanced in order to reduce injuries. Consideration should be given to the size, strength, skill and psychological maturity of the participants in ensuring balanced competitions.

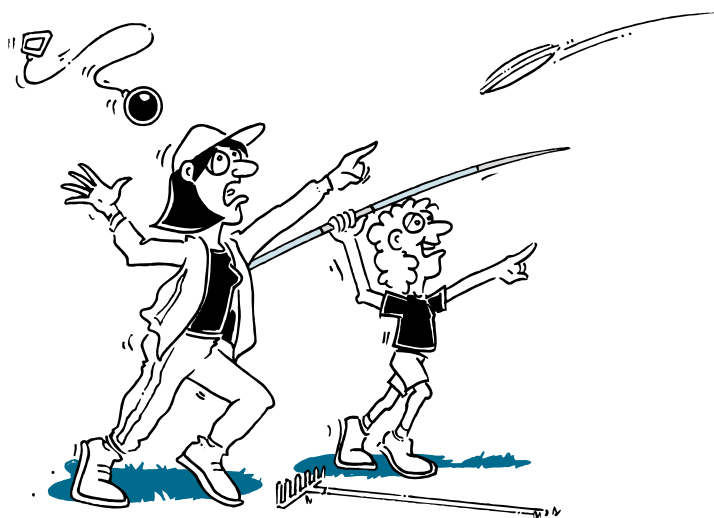
Ensure there are very gradual progressions in the intensity, duration or volume of activities and be aware of anyone whose ability may not match the activity or the group. Physical abilities can vary greatly with participants with a disability, or with young participants undergoing growth spurts or puberty.

Matching participants appropriately and considering individual 'readiness' is very important. It is not a good idea to allow participants to select their own teams, as often they can be made up of participants with much stronger abilities that can be a risk to weaker participants.

Do not assume that participants will have the same level of motivation and/or skill level that you may have had as a participant.

### Obeying the rules

Clearly state the rules for any activity and ensure that all participants understand and abide by the rules. Regularly remind participants of the importance of good sporting behaviour and fair play and be a good role model to demonstrate this. Coaches should develop clear, written rules for training and general conduct. Rules should be promoted in 'plain view' using easy to understand wording (pictures and diagrams may be useful also). Advise participants of the rules through newsletters, membership schemes and regular reminders.



### Playing areas, facilities and equipment

Always check equipment, surfaces, areas and lighting to ensure that they are suitable and safe prior to training sessions and ensure that any obstacles are clearly marked. Protective equipment should be used if necessary and should be properly fitted. It is the coach's responsibility to ensure that personal safety equipment is fitted appropriately and is in good order.

Beginner coaches need to be aware of 'peripheral' facilities and equipment. As well as checking the participants' immediate area, the coach must make the effort to check on the surrounding area such as kitchens, toilet and showering rooms, and equipment storerooms.

### TIPS FOR COACHES TO ENSURE SAFETY OF PLAYING AREAS AND EQUIPMENT

Ensure that:

- playing areas are level, firm and free from obstructions, such as holes or exposed sprinkler heads
- permanent fixtures such as goal posts are padded, flexible and highly visible
- corner posts and other field posts cannot injure participants on contact (these should be made of cardboard or other 'non-threatening' material)
- there is adequate lighting if playing at night
- there is adequate matting where necessary (for example, gymnastics, high jump)
- perimeter fences are well back from the playing area
- spectators are kept well away from the playing area.

The use of appropriate and properly fitted equipment is essential to reducing the risk of injuries. All equipment that is used should be:

- suited to the size and ability of the participant
- regularly checked and maintained
- sufficient in number
- padded as appropriate
- stable or movable if necessary
- properly erected/constructed.

The Safer Sport Program is an initiative of Sports Medicine Australia (*How to Become a SportSafe Club* [1998] is a particularly useful resource). The program has been developed with the philosophy of providing a safe environment for all people who engage in sport and to maximise participation in physical activity. Sports Medicine Australia strives to achieve this by providing courses with an emphasis on gaining practical skills in injury-prevention, injury-management and crisis-management techniques that can be used in the sporting environment. For further information go to [www.sma.org.au](http://www.sma.org.au).

### Protective devices

There are many protective devices that are designed to reduce injuries in specific sports. Mouthguards, appropriate footwear, protective padding (for example, shin pads), goggles/goggles, helmets, gloves, personal floatation devices, hand guards, wetsuits and so on are specifically designed for sport. Their use, where appropriate, is strongly recommended. When protective equipment is being worn, it is important that it is used for its correct purpose and is correctly fitted and in good condition in order to reduce the risk of injury.

Coaches should insist that participants wear protective equipment, both during training and competition. When examining protective equipment, the coach should:

- check that it fits the participant correctly
- regularly check and maintain protective equipment
- have participants obtain new equipment prior to each competition season if necessary
- ensure equipment is specific and appropriate for the sport, size and age of the participant
- ensure the equipment is being used according to the manufacturer's guidelines and the recommendations of the governing sporting body.



## Environmental conditions

### *Hot or humid conditions*

Participants, especially those who are unfit or overweight, are more susceptible to heat illness. Encourage participants to wear loose, lightweight, light-coloured clothing made from a natural fibre (for example, cotton). Avoid intense activity in hot or humid conditions and monitor participants carefully for signs of heat illness. These include tiredness, weakness, headache, cramps, nausea, flushed skin, excessive sweating or fainting. In the event of a participant suffering from heat illness, the coach should remove them from the activity, lay them down in a cool place, provide plenty of water to drink and cool the participant by sponging them with water or placing wet towels over them.

Help participants avoid sunburn by encouraging them to:

- slip on a t-shirt
- slop on some sunscreen
- slap on a hat.

Fluid replacement is very important and coaches should be aware of the following:

- participants should be well hydrated before the activity begins
- thirst is a poor indicator of fluid replacement; encourage participants to drink before they are thirsty
- schedule regular drink breaks during the activity
- plain water is an effective fluid replacement, sports drinks are also an acceptable fluid replacement and may encourage greater fluid replenishment.

### *Cold and/or wet conditions*

Ensure that participants:

- avoid standing exposed to the cold for long periods
- change wet clothing as soon as practicable
- wear clothing that is appropriate for cold conditions (for example, dress in layers to trap heat, wear gloves and a hat to reduce heat loss).

Alternative venues (for example, indoors) and activities should also be considered, where required, to ensure the safety and wellbeing of participants.

Long breaks will cause the body to cool down, so participants should be encouraged to wear adequate warm clothing, and coaches should plan training sessions to avoid long breaks. Another warm-up period may be needed if long rest periods cannot be avoided.

## Individual needs

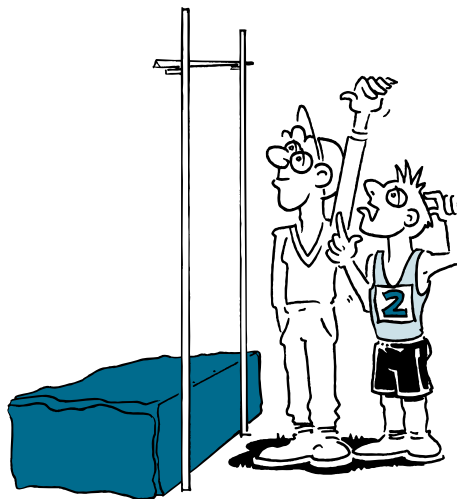
Being inclusive is a fundamental requirement of being a good coach. There are a few specific safety considerations of which coaches should be aware when working with participants with a disability. The individual's preferences should be discussed.





### TIPS FOR COACHES TO CATER FOR INDIVIDUAL NEEDS

- Ensure that all participants are aware of the different movement and sensory capabilities of everyone in the group
- Make sure that the playing or practice area is free from clutter and slippery surfaces are dried, covered or demarcated
- Some people may be vulnerable to physical contact due to variations in mobility, balance and reaction time
- Consider the safety of participants who have sensory impairments. Will they respond to all visual or verbal instructions or see/hear an alarm in an emergency?
- Agree on an emergency procedure that all participants understand and to which everyone can respond. This may include a specific evacuation plan for people who have mobility impairments
- If people get onto the floor to participate (for example, in a stretching session) use mats for them to sit or lie on



It is important to involve everyone in the group regarding proposed modifications or alterations to the way that the session is run. There is no point in making changes specific to individuals if these have significance or implications for everyone else.

#### Good coaching practices checklist

Checklists are terrific tools that help make more complex tasks less daunting. The following good practice checklist has been designed as a starting point for risk-management assessments. Coaches can use the checklist below in conjunction with the risk-management planning template on page 50.

Program	Yes	No
<i>Planning</i>		
Do you supervise participants at all times?		
Do you modify activities when mismatches in ability cannot be corrected easily?		
Do you modify the activity and/or the equipment to cater for individual needs, especially with juniors and participants with a disability?		
Do you plan for when a new participant joins your activity at any time?		
Do you plan for when a participant returns from injury or illness?		
Do you plan for progressing to the next drill or teaching a new skill?		
Do you keep written records of your planning for statute periods?		
Do your plans fit in with the philosophy of the club?		
Do you protect your organisation's intellectual property?		
Do you coach in a community where you need to consider cultural differences?		
Do you communicate your plans and advise of risks effectively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• with participants?</li> <li>• with their parents/guardians?</li> <li>• with your peers, employer or others?</li> </ul>		
<i>Instruction</i>		
Does your session include reasonable progressions?		
Does your session include techniques, tactics and rules in accordance with expected methods in your sport and the development level of the participants?		
Do you deviate from your plans?		
Do you provide instruction regarding the safety of the activity?		
Do you explain the risks?		
Do you explain the risks simply, in more than one way, and confirm that the risks are understood by the participants and others?		
Do you keep up to date with current coaching techniques?		
Do you coach so that your supervisor/mentor can see and hear your instructions to the participants?		
<i>Matching participants</i>		
Do you consider participants' ages?		
Do you consider participants' sizes?		
Do you consider participants' physical and psychological abilities?		
Do you consider participants' technical abilities?		
Do you consider participants' wellness?		
Do you consider participants' individual differences?		
Are you especially prudent with matching young participants?		
<b>Personnel</b>		
<i>Injury and illness</i>		
Do you know how to determine whether an illness or injury to a participant is sufficient to stop their participation?		

Do you ensure that an injured participant is ready to return to play following an injury or illness?		
Do you know what infectious diseases you need to consider, especially for contact sports?		
<i>Medical information</i>		
Do you include emergency contact details in this information?		
Do you ask for medical conditions to be advised?		
Do you record when injuries occur?		
<i>Child protection</i>		
Do you communicate appropriately with participants?		
Do you ensure that any physical contact is in the open and appropriate?		
Do you transport participants appropriately?		
Do you follow legislative procedures for working with participants and managing alleged abuse?		
<b>Environment</b>		
<i>Safe environment</i>		
Do you note and remedy hazardous conditions through regular inspections of the environment?		
Do you monitor the environment for change and advise participants if it becomes hazardous?		
Do you take responsibility for peripheral areas to the training environment (warm-up, training, change rooms, equipment stores, car park, etc.)?		
Do you foresee potentially dangerous situations and are you ready to help prevent them from occurring?		
Do you ensure that climate conditions do not adversely affect the health of participants (heat, cold, wind, etc.)?		
<i>Communicating information about risks</i>		
Do you ensure that risks are sign posted?		
Do you give precise rules for using the facility, personal equipment, etc.?		
Do you enforce the rules?		
Do you coach in an environment that accepts the decisions made by coaches?		
<i>Equipment</i>		
Do you inspect equipment regularly?		
Do you remove broken or worn equipment?		
Do you advise management when broken or worn equipment needs repair?		
Do you provide equipment appropriate for the age and ability level of participants?		
Do you explain how to use the equipment?		
Do you teach participants how to fit, use and inspect their personal equipment?		
Do you only allow qualified personnel to fit, install, adjust and repair equipment?		
Do you store equipment appropriately?		
Do you ensure safety equipment is worn?		
Do you ensure the equipment is hygienically cleaned (if required in your sport)?		

## Insurance for coaches

All coaches, including beginner coaches, should ensure they are covered by insurance. In terms of risk management, insurance is intended to provide a financial safety net only when other risk-management strategies fail.

Insurance cover is no excuse for the coach to neglect their legal duty. Providing a safe environment and instruction is a legal duty. If the coach fails to undertake their duty, insurance cover can assist with a claim, but will not be a defence.

The insurance industry is very dynamic, and insurance brokers and underwriters from different companies will name their insurance schemes diversely. There are three main types of insurance that coaches should be covered by:

- personal accident
- public liability
- professional indemnity.

If the coach is expected to make decisions on behalf of club management about the business of the organisation in addition to their coaching duties, they should also consider directors and officers insurance.

### Personal accident insurance

Personal accident insurance is paid if injury and a loss occurs to the coach. It is not dependent on negligence or a breach of duty of care being proven. Personal accident insurance policies protect members while participating in their sport. For example, if the coach broke their arm while coaching, the policy will pay as per the premium guidelines. The coach would not have to instigate a legal claim to have the policy paid.

Policies will usually define the term 'member'.

Be aware that workers' compensation legislation exists and this can have an impact on personal accident insurance. If an accident occurs while a coach is undertaking 'employment duties' then personal accident insurance may not be called on.

Workers' compensation is legislated by the states and territories and is known by different names in each state. 'Employment duties' are also defined differently in each state and coaches should obtain independent advice as to what conditions apply.

### Public liability insurance

Public liability insurance covers liability resulting from the loss of or damage to property, or death or injury due to negligence. It does not include breach of professional duty.

Sporting organisations and coaches must use reasonable care and skill to ensure that people coming into or near their facility/program are not injured in any way. This duty extends to participants, spectators, tradespeople, visitors, etc. For example, a coach may have forgotten to secure access to an equipment storeroom and a participant's sibling enters the storeroom and is injured. The insurance that covers this incident is the public liability policy.

### Professional indemnity insurance

Professional indemnity insurance indemnifies the insured person against claims for compensation for breach of professional duty by reason of any negligence by way of act, advice, error or omission.

This insurance supports the coach if they have given an instruction that a participant acts on and is injured or if the coach failed to give an instruction and a participant is injured. Coaches who ignore participants who are 'breaking the rules' are at risk of litigation if someone is hurt as a result of the breach of the rules and they failed to stop the activity. If the injured person lodges a legal claim some time after the original incident, the coach will need to still be insured at the time the claim is made for the professional indemnity cover, or have made individual arrangements with their insurer.

It is very important that coaches notify the insurer of any impending claim as soon as it becomes evident that an incident may lead to an insurance claim, as often with professional indemnity insurance 'claims made' rules apply. Coaches must advise their insurer as soon as they become aware of an incident that may lead to a claim, within the policy period. 'Claims made' policies mean that the coach has to be insured at the time the claim is made rather than at the time the incident occurs. This is a very important distinction.

Insurance policy wording should be read very carefully, as often territorial or statute periods apply. For example, if a coach is travelling overseas with a participant, they should not assume that personal accident insurance will cover them beyond Australia. It is important to read the fine print.

Every insurance contract is subject to the principle of good faith. Coaches are required to act with honourable intent. Failure to do so may permit the insurer to refuse to pay a claim or to cancel the policy. By acting appropriately and following the good practice guidelines discussed earlier in the chapter, coaches can avoid being in this situation.

## Legislation and compliance regulations

The Coach's Code of Behaviour (see Chapter 1) is a useful guide to behaviours expected of coaches. The code is a 'rule of thumb' on behaviours associated with concepts of responsibility, trust, competence, respect, safety, honesty, professionalism, equity and sportsmanship.

The intent of legislation is to establish rules that society reasonably expects to be followed to ensure safety and to protect everyone's rights. These rules are enforceable by the courts. Some legislation that federal and state parliaments make can affect how coaches undertake their role. This legislation includes:

### **Privacy Act 1988**

The *Privacy Act* defines what is personal information, what can be collected, terms for use and disclosure. In summary the *Privacy Act* protects participant's 'sensitive information'. This includes information or an opinion about participants':

- racial or ethnic origin
- political opinions
- membership of a political association
- religious beliefs or affiliations
- philosophical beliefs
- membership of a professional or trade association
- membership of a trade union
- sexual preferences or practices
- criminal record.

Some state legislation also regulates how health and medical history records can be used. Coaches should confirm with their sporting organisation whether the *Privacy Act* applies.

**Discrimination Act 1991**

Under anti-discrimination legislation, you must:

- not discriminate or harass others on the grounds of race, colour or nationality; sex or gender; sexual or transgender orientation; pregnancy; marital or parental status; religious or political beliefs; social origin; age; or physical, mental or psychological disability
- be sensitive to how your behaviour is or might be received by others.

**What discrimination is not unlawful?**

A good example of discrimination that is not unlawful in sport relates to team selection.

If a coach has more participants than they can fit into a team, they can choose among the available participants based on relevant criteria. Coaches choose who will be in the starting team and what positions they will play, to arrive at the best possible team.

For junior sport, coaches have the additional responsibility to ensure fair participation. Those choices should be based on relevant criteria such as ability, attitude, effort and attendance at practice. It is good practice to use a selection policy that details the criteria for participant selection to help the coach make these decisions. These are all fair and legitimate criteria to apply to team selection.

**What is unlawful discrimination?**

Equal opportunity laws make discrimination on various levels unlawful. These include any discrimination about:

- race
- age
- gender
- religion
- marital status
- sexuality
- disability
- pregnancy.

**Disability Discrimination Act 1992**

Legislation concerning the rights of people with disabilities was introduced in 1992.

Among other basic human rights, the *Disability Discrimination Act* affects the provision of goods and services, which has implications for the coach. The Act is essentially in place to ensure equal opportunity.

Discrimination can be direct or indirect:

- Direct discrimination occurs when a person is treated less favourably than someone in similar circumstances who does not have a disability.
- Indirect discrimination occurs when a condition or requirement such as a physical barrier, policy, procedure, practice or selection/admission criteria prevents a person with a disability from having the same opportunities as others, and that condition or requirement is unreasonable in the circumstances.

An important aspect of this is that it is irrelevant whether or not the discrimination is intentional or not.

However, this does not mean that all people with disabilities need to be included all of the time. It is not discriminatory to exclude a person with a disability from an activity if their skill level is below that of the others in the same activity. For example, it is not discriminatory to disallow a person in a wheelchair to play A-grade volleyball if they are not able to match the skills of their peers.

The legislation is about common sense, so it should not be a burden. By taking note of the good practice guidelines that have been discussed throughout this chapter, coaches can ensure that they abide by the legislation.

## CASE STUDY

Sophie was upset when her friend Claire was 'not allowed' to join her sporting club. Sophie's coach had insisted that Claire's mother should take Claire to a club 'who catered for participants with Down Syndrome'.

In this scenario, Sophie's coach discriminated against Claire. Coaches should be aware of their legal and social responsibilities to ensure participants with a disability have the same opportunities as others.

This situation teaches coaches to:

- apply some inclusive techniques to coaching practice that will provide opportunities for participants with a disability
- find out more about the individual and their ability level, and consider all the possible options that are available to include participants with a disability
- know about legislation that affects your coaching, such as the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*.



## Sex Discrimination Act 1984

Society is no longer tolerant of discrimination based on sex. Discrimination in this context means treating someone unfairly because of their sex or because a woman is pregnant, potentially pregnant or breastfeeding. Like the legislation relating to disability discrimination, unlawful discrimination based on a person's sex may be direct or indirect.

The law recognises and prohibits sexual harassment. Sexual harassment is not limited to touching. It can include suggestive remarks or gestures, rude jokes, giving of inappropriate gifts and other behaviour. Your club's or sporting body's code of ethics should provide more guidance in this area.

## Harassment

Harassment occurs when offensive, abusive, belittling or threatening behaviour is directed at a person or persons because of a particular characteristic of that person or persons. The behaviour must be unwelcome and the sort of behaviour a reasonable person would recognise as unwelcome. Member protection policies provide guidelines on acceptable standards of behaviour.



### Child-protection legislation

Child participants have a fundamental right to be safe from any form of abuse while involved in sport or associated activities. This is a legal requirement as well as a moral obligation. Child protection requires a commitment from all levels in sport (including coaches) to ensure sporting environments are safe for all child participants. This includes an awareness of the requirements and risks, a commitment to practices that minimise the risks of coaching, and the ability to appropriately respond to incidents of child abuse.

Child abuse is illegal in all states and territories of Australia, with each having their own laws that cover the reporting and investigation of cases of child abuse.

Most of the legislation has a similar framework and involves checking someone's suitability to work with children. It is a formal process of checks that is designed to make sport safer for children by helping to prevent unsuitable people from working with children.

For further information on child protection, go to the Australian Sports Commission website ([www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics](http://www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/ethics)) and the Play by the Rules website ([www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)).

For further information on national/state legislation acts and regulations, go to the Australian Legal Information Institute website ([www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au)).

### Minor incident-management procedures

The risk of injury is an inherent part of most sports. Coaches have a responsibility to manage that risk and keep it to a minimum, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The coach's duty is to manage any injuries that do occur, and know how to render emergency assistance.

Coaches who undertake specific first aid training are more likely to be able to manage an emergency situation. Coaches must ensure that the emergency assistance provided precludes any further damage. Coaches should facilitate the emergency care and follow the initial first aid procedures outlined further in the chapter. Once initial first aid is administered, the coach's role is to advise the participant to seek further medical advice. Without medical training coaches should not offer a 'medical opinion'. Statistics show that more than 50 per cent of injured participants receive inadequate first aid, causing an increase in the time required before returning to sport.

When an injury occurs, there are many decisions to be made. The most important of these for the coach is whether the participant should continue with the activity or not. Coaches should always err on the side of caution, as resuming participation may cause further damage to an injury.

There are two regimes of first aid for an injured participant. These are for the unconscious and the conscious participant.

#### Unconscious participants

If the participant is unconscious, it is a life-threatening situation. The coach must respond immediately, as the participant may need resuscitation. Resuscitation should be performed by someone with first aid training, so it is good practice for all coaches to undertake this training.



There are a number of organisations who provide first aid training. Sports Medicine Australia offers a range of first aid training programs specifically designed for coaches and trainers. For further information, go to [www.sma.org.au](http://www.sma.org.au).

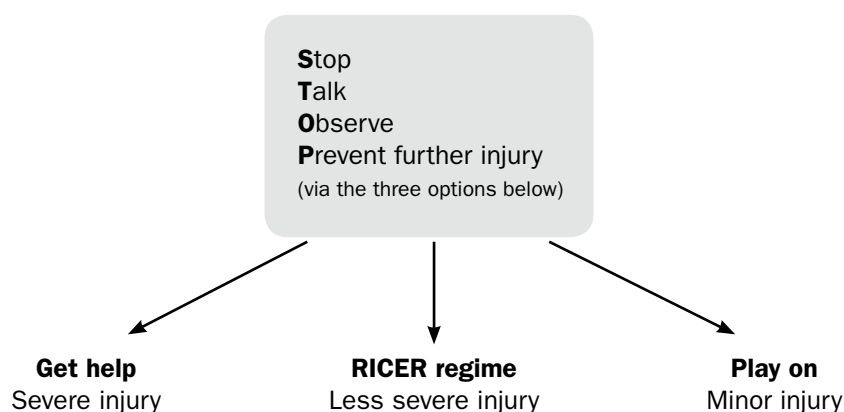
The coach's immediate actions to manage an unconscious participant are critical. Coaches should:

- have access to a telephone to contact an ambulance
- have access to the participant's medical history
- know how to access first aid equipment (blankets, first aid kit, ice, etc.)
- ideally, be able to administer basic first aid to prevent further injury.

### Conscious participant

Coaches with no formal first aid training **must** as a minimum know how to render basic emergency care. With all sports injuries it is important to have a set procedure to follow. The following STOP procedure allows the coach to assess whether the injury seems severe and to determine whether the participant should continue with the activity.

#### The STOP procedure



### Stop

Stop the participant from continuing with the activity and, if necessary, stop the activity. Remember, when an injury occurs, the most important individual is the injured person. The coach's reaction at this time should be calm and controlled, as this will assist in the injured participant's ability to help the coach assess and manage the situation. Panic is no answer in a crisis situation.

### Talk

Talk to the injured participant. Ask questions such as, 'Can you talk?', 'How did it happen?' and 'Where does it hurt?'

The coach should listen carefully to the answers to these questions, paying particular attention to the participant's anxiety levels. Remember, remain calm, no matter how severe the injury is. This is a good time to give a few words of encouragement. Keep it simple, positive and reassuring. Try to ensure the participant does not do anything to further complicate the injury, while at the same time reassuring the participant.

### Observe

While talking to the participant, observe the:

- participant's personality:
  - is it normal?
  - is the participant distressed?
- injury site:
  - is there any swelling?
  - is it red?
  - is there any difference when compared to the other side/limb?
  - is there any deformity?
  - is it bleeding?

If the answer to any of the above questions is yes, trained first aid support should be sought. Remember that the coach should err on the side of caution. Some participant's motivation to 'play on' can over-ride common sense.

### Prevent further injury

As the diagram on page 64 shows, there are three avenues for the coach. These, in order of injury severity, are:

#### 1 *Do not move the participant — get professional help*

If the injury appears to be serious, the participant should be comforted until someone with first aid training arrives (for example, a qualified first aider, ambulance officer, doctor). Keep spectators far away.

Comments should be encouraging, positive and aimed at keeping the participant calm. The coach should advise the participant what will happen next without giving them any further reason for concern.

#### 2 *RICER/no HARM*

The first 48 hours are vital in the effective management of any soft tissue injury. Effective management of injuries in the first 48 hours can reduce the time spent on the sidelines for a significant period.

The immediate management should follow the RICER regime. This regime is used for ligament sprains, muscle strains and muscle haematomas (corks), in fact any bumps or bruises that occur in sport.

#### 3 *Play on*

Participants who have only sustained bumps or bruises generally only need a few words of support and encouragement for them to continue participating.

**RICER principles**

	How	Why
<b>R</b> Rest the participant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Remove the participant from the competition area using an appropriate method of transport to prevent further damage</li> <li>Place the participant in a comfortable position, preferably lying down</li> <li>The injured part should be immobilised and supported</li> </ul>	Further activity will increase bleeding and damage
<b>I</b> Ice applied to the injury	<p>The conventional methods are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>crushed ice in a wet towel/plastic bag</li> <li>immersion in icy water</li> <li>commercial cold pack wrapped in a wet towel</li> <li>cold water from a tap is better than nothing.</li> </ul> <p>Apply for 20 minutes every two hours for the first 48 hours</p> <p><i>Caution:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do not apply ice directly to skin as ice burns can occur</li> <li>Do not apply ice to people who are sensitive to cold or have circulatory problems</li> </ul>	Ice decreases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>swelling</li> <li>muscle spasm</li> <li>secondary damage to the injured area</li> </ul>
<b>C</b> Compression applied to the injured area	Apply a firm, elastic, compression bandage over a large area covering the injured part, as well as above and below the injury	Compression reduces: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>swelling and bleeding</li> <li>provides support for the injured part</li> </ul>
<b>E</b> Elevate the injured area	Raise the injured area above the level of the heart whenever possible	Elevation decreases: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>bleeding</li> <li>swelling</li> <li>pain.</li> </ul>
<b>R</b> Refer and record	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer to an appropriate health care professional for definitive diagnosis and continuing management</li> <li>Record your observations, assessment and initial management before referral — send a copy of your records, with the participant, to the health care professional</li> </ul>	To obtain an accurate, definitive diagnosis and for continuing management (including anti-inflammatory medication) and prescription of a rehabilitation program

In the first 48–72 hours with injuries of this kind, the HARM factors should be avoided.

NO

<b>H</b>	Heat	such as a sauna, spa, hot water bottle, hot shower or bath, hot liniment rubs, etc. as these will increase bleeding
<b>A</b>	Alcohol	increases swelling
<b>R</b>	Running	or exercising too soon can make the injury worse
<b>M</b>	Massage	or the use of heat rubs increases swelling and bleeding

### Injury report

Coaches should record details of any injury to a participant and any treatment administered. This information should be available to the parents/guardian of young participants or carers of participants with a disability so that they can monitor the participant.

Coaches are expected to document injuries. A sample injury report form is included on the next page. The injury report may also be useful to the coach in future risk-management planning.



Injury reports may contain private details and coaches are advised to ensure that they manage these records complying with the *Privacy Act 1988* and any additional legislation that is associated in particular with health records.

### Illness, medical conditions and participation

During times of illness, a participant's body can be particularly vulnerable, with the risk of damage to organs being high. When ill or feverish, the participant should not take part in sporting activities.

A number of conditions may prevent participation temporarily. These include:

- chronic infections
- cardiovascular abnormalities, for example valve disorders
- musculoskeletal problems, such as active joint disorders and arthritis
- medical conditions, such as diabetes, epilepsy and asthma.

These conditions should not prevent participation permanently if treatment is available to allow sports involvement. All coaches should err on the side of caution with participants who have a known medical condition. Coaches should first ask the participant regarding what they can and cannot do, and then seek professional guidance to ensure provision of an appropriate training program.

## Summary

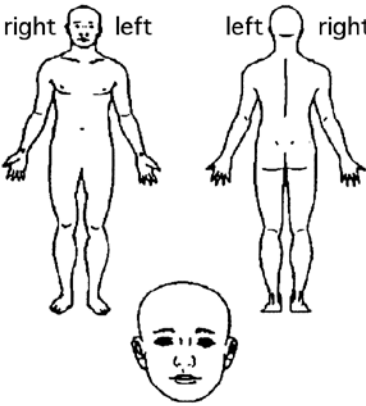
Managing risks associated with coaching is all about planning. Planning helps to keep everyone safe. Plan for the activity, the equipment to be used, how you will supervise and who will participate.

Make use of the tools provided throughout the chapter to help you manage risks associated with coaching:

- risk-management planning template
- good coaching practice checklist
- injury report form
- medical history form (on pages 70–1).

Plan for 'brain storming' risks across all of the areas discussed in this chapter and do not assume that risk management is someone else's responsibility!

## Injury report form

Injury details: This report reflects an accurate record of the injured person's reported symptoms of injury		
Name of person injured:	DOB (Day/Month/Year):     /     /	
Date when injury occurred:     /     /	Date when injury is evident:     /     /	
Person injured: <input type="checkbox"/> Athlete <input type="checkbox"/> Coach <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	Gender: <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> F	
Supervising coach: _____ (Signature)	Witness: _____ (Signature)	
First aid provided by: _____ (Signature)	Time of first aid:     :	Initial treatment: <input type="checkbox"/> No treatment required <input type="checkbox"/> CPR <input type="checkbox"/> RICER <input type="checkbox"/> Crutches <input type="checkbox"/> Sling/splint <input type="checkbox"/> Dressing <input type="checkbox"/> Strapping <input type="checkbox"/> Massage <input type="checkbox"/> Stretching
Nature of injury: <input type="checkbox"/> New injury <input type="checkbox"/> Aggravated injury <input type="checkbox"/> Recurrent injury <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
Did the injury occur during: <input type="checkbox"/> Training <input type="checkbox"/> Event <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
Symptoms of injury:		
<input type="checkbox"/> Blisters	<input type="checkbox"/> Inflammation/swelling	<input type="checkbox"/> Spinal injury
<input type="checkbox"/> Bleeding nose	<input type="checkbox"/> Cramp	<input type="checkbox"/> Cardiac problem
<input type="checkbox"/> Bruising/contusion	<input type="checkbox"/> Suspected bone fracture/break	<input type="checkbox"/> Electrical shock
<input type="checkbox"/> Cut	<input type="checkbox"/> Dislocation	<input type="checkbox"/> Burn
<input type="checkbox"/> Graze/abrasion	<input type="checkbox"/> Concussion/head injury	<input type="checkbox"/> Insect bite/sting
<input type="checkbox"/> Sprain	<input type="checkbox"/> Loss of consciousness	<input type="checkbox"/> Poisoning
<input type="checkbox"/> Strain	<input type="checkbox"/> Respiratory problem	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Body part injured:	How did the injury occur?	
	<input type="checkbox"/> Collision with a fixed object <input type="checkbox"/> Overbalance <input type="checkbox"/> Collision/contact with another person <input type="checkbox"/> Overstretch <input type="checkbox"/> Fall from height/awkward landing <input type="checkbox"/> Slip/trip <input type="checkbox"/> Fall/stumble on same level <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	
	Extra detail regarding how the injury occurred:	
Was protective equipment worn on the injured body part? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No		
Follow up action: <input type="checkbox"/> None <input type="checkbox"/> Medical practitioner/physiotherapist <input type="checkbox"/> Hospital <input type="checkbox"/> Ambulance <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____		
Signature of person completing form:		Date:     /     /

Note: Coaches without medical training should refer all medical decisions to appropriately qualified persons. Do not attempt to 'diagnose' an injury. Users of this form are advised that medical information should be treated confidentially. In some states, additional legislation affects the management of health records. See [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au) for further information.

## References and further reading

Australian Sports Commission website ([www.ausport.gov.au](http://www.ausport.gov.au)).

ECPAT Australia 2004, *Choose with Care: building child safe organisations kit*, ECPAT Australia.

Gymnastics Australia, *Managing the Risks of Coaching* ([www.gymnastics.org.au](http://www.gymnastics.org.au)).

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Sports Medicine Australia 1998, *How to become a SportSafe Club*, Sports Medicine Australia, Canberra.

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VIC Sport website ([www.vicsport.asn.au](http://www.vicsport.asn.au)).

Western Australian Government 2003, *Can You Risk It?: an introduction to risk management for community organisations* ([www.dsr.wa.gov.au/assets/files/Organisational\\_Development/Can\\_You\\_Risk\\_It\\_Web.pdf](http://www.dsr.wa.gov.au/assets/files/Organisational_Development/Can_You_Risk_It_Web.pdf)).



**Medical history form****PERSONAL DETAILS**

---

First name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: h \_\_\_\_\_ w \_\_\_\_\_ mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Sex: M F (please circle) Date of birth: \_\_\_\_\_

**EMERGENCY CONTACT**

---

First name: \_\_\_\_\_ Last name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Tel: h \_\_\_\_\_ w \_\_\_\_\_ mobile: \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship: \_\_\_\_\_

**HEALTH CARE DETAILS**

---

Doctor's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Dentist's name: \_\_\_\_\_ Tel: \_\_\_\_\_

Medicare number: \_\_\_\_\_

**MEDICAL DETAILS**

---

Blood group: \_\_\_\_\_ Do you object to transfusions? yes / no (please circle)

Have you received a medical clearance from your doctor? yes / no (please circle)

Do you have any allergies? yes / no (please circle)

If yes, please list: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please list any medical conditions that you have (for example, asthma, diabetes, epilepsy):

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Please list any regular medications you require (include dosage):

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---

#### **SPORTS INJURY DETAILS**

Please list any current or recurring injuries:

---

---

---

---

Do you suffer from recurring pain in any joint when playing sport? yes / no (please circle)

If yes, please provide details:

---

Do you wear protective equipment? (for example, mouthguard, head gear)  
yes / no (please circle)

If yes, please provide details:

---

Do you require specific taping/padding for a previous injury? yes / no (please circle)

If yes, please provide details:

---

Have you ever had a head, neck or spinal injury? yes / no (please circle)

If yes, please provide details:

---

To the best of my knowledge, all information contained on this form is correct

(if under 18 please have a parent or guardian sign)

Signature:

---

Date:

---

Note: Users of this form are advised that medical information should be treated confidentially.  
In some states, additional legislation affects the management of health records.  
See [www.austlii.edu.au](http://www.austlii.edu.au) for further information.



## CHAPTER 4

# COACHING COMMUNICATION

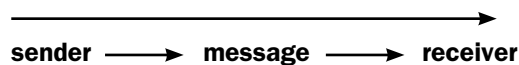
Good communication skills are essential for coaches. A coach may possess all the technical knowledge and skills of a particular sport, but without the ability to communicate this information, it is of little use. Different communication techniques and strategies will suit different groups of people and these skills can be practised and enhanced in the same way that technical skills can be.

Effective communication helps to ensure that the correct message is delivered and received. Good communication can:

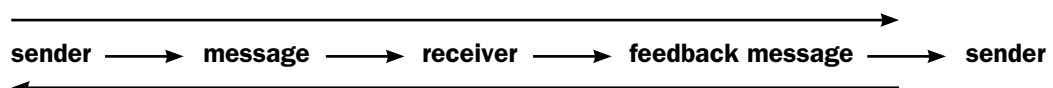
- help create a positive team culture and sense of belonging
- promote the development of skills
- make coaching more efficient and effective
- maximise enjoyment for all.

Communication is the process of sending and receiving messages or information from one person to another (or group of people).

One-way communication can be used effectively when giving directions or instructions or when making statements:



Two-way communication, with continuous feedback, is desirable when trying to gain or to gauge understanding, or when trying to solve a problem. Two-way communication is the most common and natural form of interpersonal communication:



The features of one and two-way communication are:

- One-way communication takes considerably less time, as the sender is not immediately reliant on feedback.
- Two-way communication is more accurate. Feedback allows the sender to refine the message for the receiver so that it becomes more precise.
- Receivers are more confident of themselves and their judgment in two-way communication. Being able to ask questions for clarification or to be able to give one's own opinion increases the value brought to the communication.
- Senders can feel attacked in two-way communication because receivers are able to call attention to lack of clarity, ambiguities or errors.

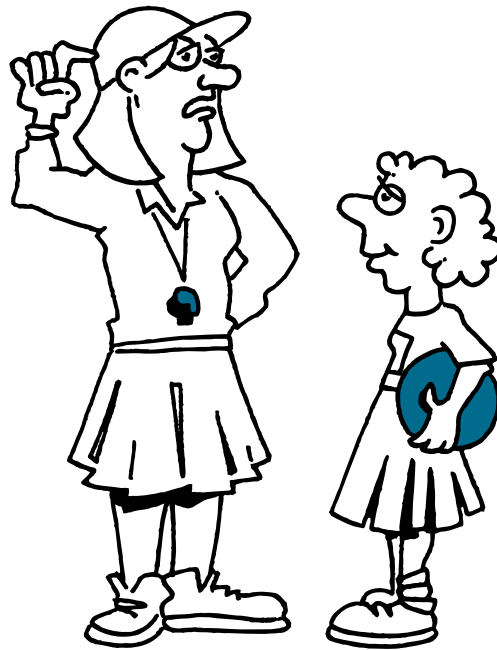


Communication needs to be a partnership between coach and participant to succeed. It involves not only the intended message that is **sent**, but how the intended message is **received** and **interpreted**. Communication can break down at any of these stages, for example, when:

- the coach sends the information
- the participant receives the information
- the participant interprets the information.

Communication can include:

- instruction
- presentations
- demonstrations
- discipline
- conversations
- phone calls
- body language
- posture
- facial expressions
- eye contact
- tone of voice
- volume of voice
- rate of speech
- text messages
- email
- manual manipulation
- modelling
- questions
- motivation
- feedback.



## Barriers to effective communication

There are a number of barriers to effective communication that can be experienced in all settings. Those barriers include situations where people:

- have different perceptions of words and actions
- filter information and only hear what they want to hear
- use jargon, ensuring no common language is being spoken
- do not respond to questions
- judge others by determining a response before reviewing evidence
- look for personal agendas by attempting to read the other person's mind
- allow emotions to blur the message
- ask antagonising questions
- assume the 'I'm right' position and not be open to other views.

## Types of communication

There are two main types of communication:

- verbal — what you say (or write)
- non-verbal — how you say it.

Communication is most effective when verbal and non-verbal complement each other.

### Verbal communication: 'the spoken word'

When coaching, verbal communication is usually the most commonly used method of communication. It is used to direct play, manage teams, organise drills, provide feedback, instruct participants, question participants and to check for understanding.

Verbal communication has two levels of interpretation:

- what the speaker thinks they are saying
- what the listener thinks is being said.

The more similar these two messages, the better the communication. To increase the chance of the correct message being passed on, the speaker should think clearly about what they want to say before they say it.

### Non-verbal communication: 'the unspoken word'

Most of the meaning given to words comes not from the words themselves, but the non-verbal factors, such as facial expressions, tone, body language, etc. Non-verbal communication can complement a verbal message and may even substitute a verbal message. A coach may only need a slight nod or raised eyebrow to tell the participant all they need to know.

It is important to remember that there can be cultural considerations with regard to non-verbal communication. For example, eye contact varies among different groups of people, but in traditional Indigenous communities, looking someone in the eye, particularly elders, is extremely rude and disrespectful. This may mean that some younger participants may not look a coach in the eye. Rather than not paying attention, they may simply be showing respect for the coach's position.

If non-verbal cues match or complement the spoken word, then communication can be more effective. If, however, the non-verbal message conflicts with what is said, the message will be confusing. For example, if a coach tells the participants they have done a great job and then lets their shoulders slump and sighs heavily, the participants are more likely to get the message that the coach is not really happy with them.



There are four main areas of non-verbal communication:

Visual	This includes all aspects of body language, such as posture, gestures, facial expressions and eye contact
Touch	Touch can be a very effective way of imparting meaning. For example, a pat on the back or hand on the shoulder, or using manual manipulation (physically guiding a participant through a movement) as a teaching skill  <b>Note:</b> Caution must be taken with physical contact. Every participant will feel comfortable with different amounts of physical contact and this should be respected. A good rule of thumb is to only use physical contact if it is essential for teaching and make sure to ask the participant if they are comfortable with it
Voice expression	A phrase often used is 'it's not what you say, but how you say it'. The tone of voice, rate of speech and volume of voice can dramatically change what is being said. For example, saying 'no', can express fear, doubt, amazement, sarcasm or anger. How something is said can also gain attention, maintain interest or emphasise points
Role model	This area covers the other things a coach can do to communicate with participants, that is, arriving at training on time and being dressed for action. Making the effort to do these things communicates to the participants that the coach is interested in what they are doing

Skilled coaches will use non-verbal communication to improve their coaching effectiveness. SOLVER is a checklist to help coaches with their non-verbal communication in a positive manner:

**S**quarely face the participant and move to their height level.

**O**pen posture. Crossed arms or legs put up a barrier and suggest an unwillingness to listen.

**L**ean slightly forward. Again this demonstrates interest and shows that the coach is listening.

**V**erbal comments are relevant and also support what the participant is saying.

**E**ye contact should be made and maintained, without overdoing it.

**R**elax. Be comfortable and show it.

## Providing demonstrations

Demonstrations are most effective when the non-verbal communication supports and is consistent with the verbal communication. Coaches use this all the time, often without thinking about it, for example when a coach is calling a group of participants in, they also indicate with their hands.

These actions become even more significant when explaining a more complex skill or idea. Consider these ways a coach could emphasise, support and reinforce their demonstrations:

- when a coach wants an explosive jump they could raise their voice on the word 'jump' and indicate an explosive movement with their hands and body
- when a coach needs a considered and technical movement, they could lower and slow their voice and make their body actions very precise.



## Active listening

An important skill for coaches to master is 'active listening'. This is when the coach concentrates completely on what the participant is saying, both in their actions and words. This can be one of the hardest skills for a coach, as they feel it is their job to direct and will often want to interrupt or solve the problem.

There are many advantages to a coach listening actively to participants, such as:

- it shows interest and fosters a positive environment
- it reduces the chance of being misunderstood (more efficient)
- it encourages further communication
- the participant is more likely to listen to the coach if the coach listens to them
- the coach can learn from the participant.



### CASE STUDY

John is a university student and a keen triathlete. John is late again to training on Thursday. He wants to talk to his coach, Andrea. Andrea is already behind in the swim training session and is not keen to disrupt her session. She is tempted to tell John to jump in and catch up, but she decides to listen.

As it turns out, the reason John is always late on Thursdays is that his boss has been pressuring him to give up triathlon because he thinks it's affecting his part-time work. His boss is finding ways to delay John to pressure him to make a decision. By taking the time to listen to John's dilemma, Andrea understands the problem and can help John to work on a solution. It could also be the one thing that stops John dropping out of triathlon.

Here are four simple steps to improve active listening:

- **Stop** — what you are doing and pay attention to what the participant is saying. This may be difficult in a coaching situation with other things going on, but paying attention, even briefly, lets the participant know that they are important. Do not interrupt.
- **Look** — get eye contact with the participant by being at their level and facing them. Show interest in your body language and look for non-verbal cues the participant might be giving out.
- **Listen** — focus your attention on what the participant is saying by listening to their words and the emotion in what they are saying. Use non-verbal cues such as nodding, smiling or frowning, appropriate to the context of the message. Support this with encouraging words such as 'uh-hum', 'I see', 'really' to show you are focused on what the participant is saying.
- **Respond** — restate what the participant has said, in your own words (paraphrasing). This shows you have been listening, checks that you did understand and can summarise what was talked about. Remain neutral and supportive. Use open questions to prompt the participant for more information if needed.

### LISTENING TIPS FOR COACHES

- Listen attentively — gestures and facial expressions can convey that the coach is attentive, for example, a nod of the head, maintaining eye contact, and not being distracted by whatever else is going on in the vicinity
- Listen reflectively — repeat what was said. By restating in ordinary speech what was said, the coach is able to check that the content of the communication was understood
- Avoid emotional responses
- Do not interrupt

## Using questions

Questions are a great way to get more information from the participants and to show interest in what they do. A good way to do this is to use open questions that encourage a response and allow some freedom for the participant in how they would like to answer them. They generally require more than a 'yes' or 'no' answer and often start with 'how' or 'what'. Closed questions are the opposite, requiring a simple 'yes' or 'no' answer and are useful when the coach needs quick simple answers.

### CASE STUDY

Josef is the coach of an under-18 lacrosse team. A new attack play failed miserably in a game and Josef wants to know what the team thought of it and why it failed. Josef starts by asking a closed question 'Did you like the new attack play?' However, this receives a short and negative response, which does not provide Josef with much information. By asking an open question 'What do you think were the problems with the new attack play?' the participants are more reflective in their responses and provide an insight into the play that the coach had not thought of.

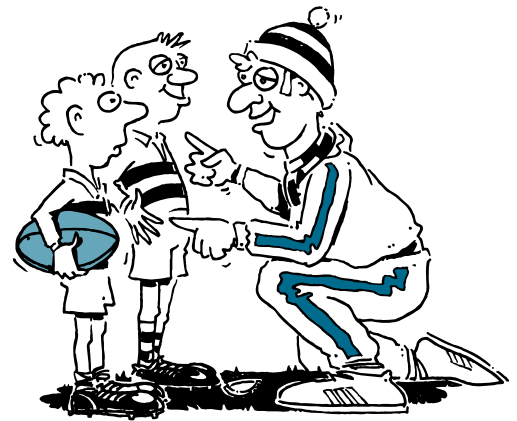
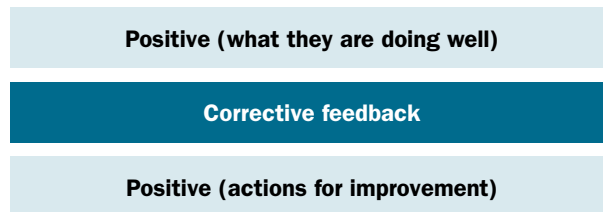


Questions are also an excellent way to check for understanding and minimise the chance of misunderstanding. Coaches can ask participants to explain a drill that has just been explained or if they understood an instruction.

## Providing feedback

The ability to provide effective feedback is an important tool for coaches to have. Effective feedback can result in dramatic improvements in confidence, comprehension, awareness and skill. Poorly provided feedback can alienate, discourage and bring about a decrease in skill level. This is not to say that constructive or negative feedback is bad, in fact it is generally an essential component of coaching.

A good method for feedback, particularly with beginners, is to use the sandwich technique. Layer the corrective piece of feedback with a positive comment either side. An example of this could be 'Great positioning, remember to keep your eyes ahead, keep up the effort!'



Effective feedback can be general or specific, and should be:

- positive, constructive and corrective
- clear and concise
- delivered as soon as possible after the action for which it is being provided.

## Including everyone

Often an activity or process will break down simply because the participants could not see, hear or understand what was being explained. Some of the things a coach should consider when working with a new group include:

- Environment
  - Can all the participants see and hear you?
  - Are there any distractions in the background?
- Physical
  - Do all the participants have good vision and hearing?
- Intellectual
  - Can all the participants understand what you are saying?
  - How long can the participants pay attention?
- Background
  - Do all the participants speak English?
  - Are there terms you use that might be specific to your region?
  - For example, the word 'football' can mean different things in different regions.
  - Could there be specific cultural considerations?

### TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH ABORIGINAL OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITIES

- Keep in mind that English may be a second language
- Receive the message without making value judgments
- Avoid sending mixed messages. When people hear conflicting messages, they become sceptical and confused, not only about other people's personal agendas, but also about their reliability. They do not know which message, if any, to believe
- Watch for signs of 'losing people' throughout the communication process. Check, in a way that does not challenge or threaten anyone, if people are feeling lost
- If people are angry, acknowledge it. Explore what is behind the anger. It may be from frustration
- Always respect the local laws and customs

## CASE STUDY

Ethan has just moved to an Indigenous community and is coaching the junior football team. The team is competing in a regional competition and Ethan is delighted to notice that Ben, in particular, is a real star. Ethan praises Ben's skills and starts using him to demonstrate many of the skills and activities. However, after a couple of weeks Ben's performance starts dropping rapidly and he is often late for training. Ethan cannot understand what has happened.

In some Indigenous groups, being singled out and identified as being better than others can be very embarrassing (sometimes called a 'shame job') and can result in an athlete under-playing their skills or giving up a sport. Being able to 'read' a situation such as this and being sensitive to the different cultural needs of individuals and groups will improve a coach's effectiveness.



The good communication principles discussed so far apply to all participants regardless of age, skill or ability. However, there are some additional considerations to take into account for participants with specific needs. Learning to vary communication techniques to suit participants with different needs will improve the coach's communication skills.

## TIPS FOR COMMUNICATING WITH A PARTICIPANT WITH A DISABILITY

- If a conversation lasts more than a few minutes, consider sitting down or kneeling to get yourself on the same level as a person in a wheelchair
- For participants who are deaf or hard of hearing, secure their attention before talking to them. Consider using a visual clue, such as a wave or a tap on the shoulder to gain attention
- Develop a few basic signs for key instructions and questions
- During competition, signs such as a flag wave or tap on the shoulder may be required if the participant is unable to hear a whistle or starter's gun
- Position yourself so that the participant can observe your lips and hands when demonstrating techniques
- Identify yourself and introduce a participant with a vision impairment to others present
- Orientate participants with a vision impairment to the space in which you are working together
- Give feedback on the progress of an activity or game that may be naturally observed by people with normal vision
- Use audible signals where necessary to ascertain direction or distance
- Be specific in feedback. Acknowledgments must be spontaneous and immediate for some participants with an intellectual disability

- Speak directly to the participant, not through a third person
- Use demonstrations and/or written communication when needed
- Check that the participant has understood the instructions

**Note:** Coaches do not need to protect participants with a disability from failure, give unearned praise or lower their expectations and standards for behaviour. Participants with a disability are no more courageous than any other participant who works hard to achieve a goal. In turn, a participant with a disability must accept the risks, challenges, discipline, repetition and frustration that are part of being a competitive athlete.

## Communicating with difficult people

The nature of sport means that coaches will have to communicate with a wide variety of people in many different situations. These situations can be particularly challenging and difficult when there are competitive situations such as team or position selection and when parents are involved. Coaches need to be able to think quickly and call on their skills in communication to manage these situations.

### CASE STUDY

Jenny is coaching an under-eight team and the game is tied with a few minutes to go. Jenny calls for a regular substitution that includes Andrew, one of the strongest players in the team. Andrew's mother objects and starts yelling at the coach saying he should stay on.

This situation is made more difficult by the public nature of the verbal attack and the immediacy of the problem. How Jenny responds could diffuse or inflame the situation. She could try calmly stating that equal playing time for all players is club policy for under-eight teams and she would be happy to discuss it after the game.

When a difficult situation does arise, coaches should try to move away from the public arena. For example, the coach may suggest waiting until the game has finished or make a time to discuss the issue or complaint. Once removed from the situation the coach can listen to the problem and employ the active listening skills discussed earlier to work on a solution.

However, it is not always possible to postpone the discussion and there are some general tips coaches can consider when dealing with difficult, angry or aggressive people:

- try to stay calm and distance yourself personally from the issue
- keep your voice quiet and calm, this may encourage the other person to do the same
- do not argue back or trade insults (no matter how unreasonable they seem)
- try to see past the emotions to define the actual problem and work at addressing this
- use active listening skills to address the problem.

Being a coach does not mean you should have to put up with verbal abuse any more than physical abuse.

## Self-reflection

Good communication is an essential component of good coaching. It is the information link between coach and participant that pulls together all aspects of coaching. Improving your communication skills will improve your coaching effectiveness.

Use the following checklist to reflect on your communication when coaching.

	Mostly	Sometimes	Never
I usually think through what I am going to say before I say it.			
I am aware of my non- verbal communication.			
I communicate at a level appropriate to my participants.			
I listen attentively to a participant without my mind wandering.			
I question participants to check that they understand.			
I 'pick up' how a participant is feeling through their non-verbal communication.			
I ask for input from the participants in training and games.			
I use positive and effective feedback.			

Below are some other activities coaches can use to reflect on their communication skills:

- Consider if there are any areas you would like to improve on. Choose one and concentrate on this area next time you are coaching. Get a coaching peer to watch you and give feedback, or video tape a session for self-evaluation.
- Next time a participant wants to talk to you, practise your active listening. Stop what you are doing (even if it is just for a minute) and listen to them. Try to pick up the emotion of what they are saying not just the words. Notice how the participant reacts to this attention.
- Next time you are watching a sport, focus on what the coach is doing. You do not actually need to be able to hear what they are saying to see how they communicate. Watch their eyes, expression and subtle gestures they use during the game. Watch the reactions from the participants and take notes on what you observe.

## A final word

Participants all respond differently to various forms of communication. Some will find visual cues most effective, others respond to verbal cues and others to touch. Using a number of forms of communication will not only maintain a group's interest, but increases the chance of finding a communication 'trigger' that works for each individual participant. Experienced coaches will know intuitively what forms of communication work best with particular participants.

Communication is also more effective when a coach encourages open communication and welcomes input from the participants. This involves establishing an environment of mutual trust and respect between the participant and coach.

## Summary

- Communication in coaching is a two-way process.
- Use clear and consistent messages to help to avoid miscommunication.
- Remember the importance and impact of non-verbal communication.
- Use open questions to glean more information from the participants.
- Use 'sandwiched' feedback to complement your coaching.
- Use 'active listening' to show interest in the participants and gain valuable information.
- Ensure that your communication methods are inclusive of everyone (for example, participants with a disability, people from other cultures).
- When dealing with a difficult person, try to stay calm, actively listen, and try to address the problem behind the emotion.

## References and further reading

Australian Sports Commission 2000, *Opening Doors: getting people with a disability involved in sport and recreation*, ASC, Canberra.

Australian Sports Commission Coaching website ([www.ausport.gov.au/coach](http://www.ausport.gov.au/coach)).

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## CHAPTER 5

# DEVELOPING SPORTS SKILLS

The learning of sports skills requires the participant to solve a motor problem in a defined period of time, under pressure from opposition, relying on sensory information. For example, a table tennis player must quickly decide when to attack and when to defend depending on the location of the ball and the opposition and the game score.

In some sport situations, what is occurring in the contest is constantly changing. Team-mates and the opposition are constantly moving, which means that the participant must be aware of where others are around them. For example, in a game of basketball, players are moving around on the court, requiring visual monitoring. For beginners, this is often difficult because a great deal of their attention is focused on controlling the ball.

In other situations in sport, what is happening in the environment is static. For example, hitting a tee shot in golf requires the golfer to focus on a cue to initiate the swing and where the ball should land. There is less emphasis on the interaction between the environment and the movement to be performed. Participating in a competition situation requires not only the physical movements but also the capability to pay attention to the environmental information.

The quality and the quantity of practice is a significant factor in terms of shaping an individual's level of sporting performance. To move from the beginning stages of performance to the elite level requires hours of practice. It requires a command of fundamental movement patterns and simple and complex skills performed in a variety of competitive environments. Through hours of practice (preferably through games), the participant learns to perform the correct skill in the right place at the right time.

Recognising the stage of learning each participant is at and modifying practices to suit each participant will provide fun and rewarding outcomes for the participant. Therefore, the coach has a significant role in helping participants to learn sport skills.

### CASE STUDY

As a cricketer, Jane scored most of her runs through the leg side. Whenever the ball was pitched outside the off stump she was not able to hit the ball to score runs. In consultation with her coach Alison, it was decided that it was necessary for her to learn to play the cover drive. Alison understood that Jane enjoyed receiving positive feedback and enjoyed measuring her skill improvement. Alison set up two cones about eight metres apart at a distance of about 15 metres from the batting stumps. A cricket ball was placed on the batting cone that enabled Jane to step towards the ball and hit it into the gap between the two cones. She attempted ten shots and successfully hit the ball through the two cones with some power on two occasions. Alison then demonstrated the cover drive as Jane observed from a variety of angles.



Jane returned to the batting cone and repeated the task of hitting the ball off the cone through the gap 15 metres away with some power. Alison positively reinforced her after each shot. Jane was able to associate the outcome of the shot with the feedback from the coach, the sound that the ball made when it hit the bat and the feeling that was generated in certain muscles in her body. Alison then suggested to Jane that she should have ten further attempts at the initial task. On this occasion Jane achieved a score of eight.

At the next coaching session Jane was further challenged by Alison who threw the ball underarm, allowing her to play the cover drive through the same target area. This time Jane scored five. Alison provided feedback about the placement of her left foot and then continued to underarm throw the ball, which permitted Jane to focus on the left foot. Alison continually identified the correct aspects of the stroke, which made Jane feel good and encouraged her to keep practising.

Over successive weeks Alison placed the skill of hitting a cover drive into more game-like situations. Jane had to hit the ball, thrown underarm by the coach, through a gap that was protected by a fielder. After ten attempts Jane switched roles with the fielder. Jane enjoyed competitive scenarios such as this because it was just like a game situation, it was fun and added variety to training. This challenged Alison to prepare more of these kinds of games for training, which complemented the net practice. Alison realised that learning occurs as a result of the instructional process, specific practice and feedback.

## Stages of learning

All participants proceed through various stages of learning as they practise skills. Participants move through these stages at varying rates and when new techniques are introduced they may regress from a later stage to an earlier stage. The coach's responsibility is to assess each participant's current stage and develop appropriate practices so that each participant is motivated and challenged. The stages of learning may be considered on a continuum as the participant improves due to effective practice strategies and feedback.

### The early stage

In this stage the participant typically thinks about the action that needs to be performed to achieve the intended result. Often the participant internally or externally verbalises what is required in an effort to perform the correct movement pattern.

Athlete characteristics	Suggestions/recommendations
Tries to understand what is required	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a clear demonstration and explanation of the movement so that the participant has something to copy, for example, 'Watch the demonstration carefully and tell me what you noticed about the movement. Now show me'</li> <li>• Limit the amount of information you provide, for example, 'During the demonstration just watch the length of the back swing'</li> <li>• For a participant with an intellectual disability, or very young participants, you may need to ensure that they are positioned to avoid distractions</li> </ul>
Usually highly motivated	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the participant practise the movement immediately, for example, 'Now you've seen the demonstration, go and practise the throwing action with your partner'</li> <li>• Provide lots of opportunities for practice</li> </ul>

Athlete characteristics	Suggestions/recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be enthusiastic and positively reinforce the correct aspects of the movement, for example, 'Alan you really kept your head down. Well done'</li> <li>• Praise effort, for example, 'Pam you made a terrific attempt to follow through towards the target'</li> <li>• Keep practice time on specific activities short to avoid concentration loss and boredom</li> <li>• Shorter more frequent coaching sessions are beneficial especially for participants who have short concentration spans</li> </ul>
Parts of the movement are missing, particularly the preparation and follow through	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use cue words, for example, 'When serving, pretend to scratch your back with the head of the racquet'</li> <li>• Focus on the components that are missing, for example, 'Keep the backswing the same but this time see if you can finish with your hands above your head'</li> <li>• Ask the question 'What can the coach do to give the participant the best chance of performing the skill?' For a vision impaired participant this may result from bouncing the ball (provides an auditory cue)</li> </ul>
Rhythm coordination and control are not evident	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the movement is complex, teach the components that are linked, for example, 'During the over arm stroke, let's just focus on your arm action and your breathing'</li> <li>• Identify aspects that are performed correctly, for example, 'The timing of your breathing and your arm action is good'</li> <li>• For some participants with a vision impairment, it might help to let the participant feel the coach perform the movement (noting the Code of Behaviour information regarding physical contact)</li> </ul>
Movements do not use all the necessary body parts. That is, some body parts are stiff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use imagery to encourage the participant to use all body parts, for example, 'Throw the ball as far as you can, pretending you are a floppy-floppy scarecrow moving all your body parts'</li> <li>• Use reinforcement to maintain the participant's positive feelings about the movement, for example, 'Your shoulder and wrist are nice and loose, now focus on your upper body as you throw'</li> </ul>
Performance is inconsistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have the participants score each throw out of ten, for example, 'My second throw was worth seven because I used my upper body and the ball went further'</li> <li>• Have the participant practise the same skill to try to improve consistency in the performance, for example, in lawn bowls 'Try to roll the jack within 20 centimetres of a spot eight times out of ten'</li> <li>• As soon as possible have the participant practise under variable conditions, for example, in lawn bowls 'Roll the jack to a mark 25 metres away, followed by a roll to 28 metres and then to a mark 23 metres away'</li> </ul>

### The intermediate stage

During this stage the component parts of the skill are refined and modified as the participant associates their actions with movement results.

Athlete characteristics	Suggestions/recommendations
The participant learns to detect and correct their own performance errors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask the participants to evaluate their own performance, for example, 'What did you do well in that shot? How could you be more effective if you played that shot again?'</li> <li>Video the performance and ask the participant to evaluate their own performance, for example, 'What did you do well and what do you need to do differently?'</li> <li>Have the participants practise in pairs using a checklist to compare their movements to the criteria on the checklist</li> </ul>
While the overall movement produces reasonable results, some components are performed incorrectly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ask questions of the participant, for example, 'What did you do well in that turn? What do you need to do differently on the next turn?'</li> <li>Use reinforcement to maintain the participant's positive feelings about the performance of the skill, for example, 'The ball was dropped at waist height which was great. Next time run straight towards the target'</li> <li>Use modified games to practise the movements, for example, 'Use bounce passes only in this game of keepings off'</li> </ul>
Performance of the movement becomes more consistent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use a checklist to confirm the consistency of the individual movement components</li> <li>Measure the progress of the results of the movement outcome, for example, 'You scored six out of ten baskets that time, see if you can improve on that score this time'</li> <li>Have the participant practise under variable conditions, for example, play a game that requires kicking the ball to team-mates who lead from different distances or angles, with little or no pressure</li> <li>Have the participant randomly practise a number of skills, for example, 'Try to run and get in front, receive a pass and shoot for goal on the run'</li> </ul>

### The final stage

During this stage the participant automatically performs the movement at a high level of performance. Participants are able to unconsciously perform skills under pressure. Performance becomes more consistent and, importantly, skill errors are often identified by the participant.

Athlete characteristics	Suggestions/recommendations
Automated performance of the skill	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Challenge the participant to process other information while performing the skill, for example, 'As the fullback you have to quickly pass the ball to the best option'</li> <li>Attempt to apply distractions to the participant as the participant performs the movement, for example, 'While you are taking a shot at goal the defender is going to attempt to wave their arms to distract you'</li> <li>Develop a pre-shot routine that permits the participant to develop an automatic response</li> <li>Structure practise scenarios that are game specific, for example, 'While you are batting in the nets you are to try to score four runs from every six deliveries'</li> </ul>

Athlete characteristics	Suggestions/recommendations
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use questions to have the participant reflect on their own performance, for example, 'How would you defend that situation differently next time?'</li> <li>• Develop the participant's capacity for self-analysis</li> <li>• Have the participants practise under random and variable conditions, for example, play a game that requires shots at goal from different positions, such as four attackers against two defenders</li> <li>• Set achievable, measurable and realistic goals</li> </ul>
Often when modifications are made to technique there is a decrement in performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alert the participant that performance may deteriorate for a period of time</li> <li>• Be patient and continue to encourage the participant</li> <li>• Record progress</li> </ul>
Participants are challenged by solving 'higher order' motor problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structure activities to replicate more complex motor problems, for example, a cricket coach wishes to teach the concept of running fast between wickets and turning quickly for a second run especially when the ball is hit to a less-skilful fielder</li> </ul>

## The learning style of the participant

Participants gather and store information through their senses. Participants use the following senses to obtain and remember knowledge:

- visual
- auditory
- kinaesthetic
- tactile
- olfactory.

Each person has a sensory strength that may be different to other people. Some people rely on vision to take in and store information whereas others may rely on their kinaesthetic sense.

It is important for the coach to identify the sensory preferences of individuals and match their coaching style to these. Identifying preferences could be achieved by asking the participants or by using a valid and reliable measure such as a learning styles preference questionnaire.

When the coach communicates with a participant, they should take into account the participant's sensory preference. The coach is encouraged to communicate with the participants using a range of approaches, for example, they should present the information visually, verbally and kinaesthetically.



Learning style preference	Tips for the coach
The participant would prefer to receive and store information visually	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide demonstrations, diagrams, models, videos or DVDs of the skill or tactics</li> <li>• Ask the participant to watch their own performance on video and compare with the 'ideal'</li> <li>• Feedback should be visual and check for understanding</li> </ul>
The participant would prefer to receive and store information using the auditory sense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide clear verbal instructions and explanations of the skill or strategy</li> <li>• Ask the participant if they could hear the sound of the movement and compare it with the sound required in the 'ideal' movement</li> <li>• Give feedback verbally to these participants and check for understanding</li> </ul>
The participant would prefer to receive and store information kinaesthetically	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ask the participant to close their eyes and concentrate on the movement as they perform</li> <li>• Ask the participant to feel the movement and compare these feelings with the 'ideal' movement</li> </ul>
The participant is unsure of their sensory preference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide a demonstration, an explanation and ask the participant to feel the movement</li> <li>• Provide feedback visually and verbally</li> </ul>
The participant who does not seem to respond to instructions or seems inattentive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide demonstrations, or diagrams or models of what is required and ask the participant what is required in the situation</li> </ul>

The examples provided above are particularly relevant if the coach is working with participants with a sensory disability, such as deaf or vision-impaired participants.

## Conducting a coaching session

### CASE STUDY

Stephanie arrived early at training armed with her coaching plan for the session and a happy disposition. She was looking forward to training and planning for this session had begun immediately after the completion of the game. During that game review, which was conducted after the cool-down, the participants discussed the components of play that were performed well and also suggested aspects of performance that needed attention. Some individuals expressed a concern that their skills broke down under pressure. Stephanie had noticed that Teagan needed to practise her technique in dribbling, while Andrea needed to work on some basic trapping. The goalkeeper, who had saved a couple of hard shots on goal, needed to practise remaining balanced, especially on her right-hand side.

After a dynamic warm-up the team played a game of forwards against backs in half the field. Stephanie froze the game at various times to highlight the components of the game that had been identified during the game review. The team replayed those passages of play until the athletes understood what was occurring and why certain things were done in certain ways. Later in the season Stephanie plans to develop a game plan, but for this group of beginners she wants to spend time observing them to determine how they naturally played.



The group was divided into four. Group 1 played a dribbling game. Group 2 played a trapping game. Group 3 undertook a fitness circuit. The goalkeepers worked in a separate group. The instructions for each group were written on cards and then progressed by adding opposition, or by adding the element of accuracy or the element of time. Stephanie's roles were to ensure that safety issues were taken into account and to offer positive feedback and encouragement as she moved from one group to another.



After each participant had the opportunity to practise these fundamental components of the game the team returned to a conditioned game. To score, any player had to dribble the ball over the goal line. After ten minutes Stephanie changed the condition of scoring so the ball had to be trapped by the player over the goal line.

At the end of this game the team cooled down and reviewed what had been achieved. Stephanie asked the players whether or not they felt more confident in performing as a team and as individuals. The best at training award (a yellow top to be worn at the next training session) was presented to Julia as her efforts to quickly trap and pass the ball under pressure from her opponent were terrific.

Conducting a coaching session to help participants learn basic skills and tactics requires the coach to consider a number of factors, including:

- selecting basic techniques, skills and tactics for beginner participants to learn
- breaking techniques and skills into parts, and providing key coaching/safety points
- allowing adequate time for practice and observing participants' performance
- progressing the activity in a sequential manner
- ensuring that the session is fun and provides variety.

### **Selecting basic techniques, skills and tactics for beginner participants to learn**

The techniques, skills and tactics for beginner participants to learn can be determined in a number of ways:

#### ***A textbook approach***

Many sport-specific coaching manuals will tell the coach the sequence in which the basic techniques or foundation movement patterns should be taught before more complex movement patterns are introduced. Within most sports, it is well documented as to what to teach when, how and in what order. Note that there may be up to three years difference in the developmental age of participants, and therefore this may significantly influence the time taken to learn each technique or skill. Participants within one group may be at different developmental stages, and coaches should take this into consideration.

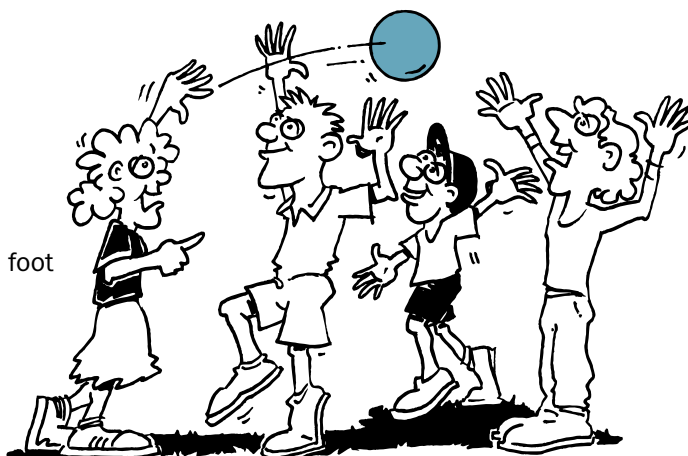
#### ***A task-analysis approach***

This approach requires the coach to analyse all the skills and tactics that are involved in the sport. This would include positional roles within a team game, and the nature and sequence of tasks in an individual competition. Imagine you have no prior knowledge of the sport and

you observe all that takes place by all the participants. The following batting example from the game of cricket provides the coach with some guidelines for conducting a task analysis in sport:

Batters:

- bat in pairs
- hit the ball along the ground off the front foot or back foot
- run quickly between the wickets for one run or multiple runs
- slide bat over the batting crease when there is a chance of a run out
- let the ball go
- avoid short-pitched deliveries
- communicate with the other batter
- take guard
- stand still waiting for the bowler
- back up at the non-strikers end
- hit the ball in the air off the front and back foot
- at times play defensively
- at times attack certain bowlers
- hit the ball into the gaps
- hit the ball to the non-dominant side of the fielder
- hit the ball hard/soft
- bat for a long period of time.



Many of these physical tasks are influenced by the physiological and psychological capacity of the batter. For example, to bat for a long period of time requires a certain level of physical and mental fitness (concentration). Decision-making is another component of these physical tasks that contributes to effective performance. Deciding when to run between wickets, when to avoid or when to play a short-pitched delivery, or deciding when to hit the ball hard off the back foot along the ground are tasks that need to be learned. A similar analysis would be performed for bowling, fielding and wicket-keeping. The role of the coach is to establish practice conditions that help the learning of these skills. By doing this, the coach will find it easier to develop small games to reflect these techniques and skills, and therefore provide a good learning environment.

### *An individual needs approach*

On occasions a participant will approach the coach and ask for specific advice in terms of skill improvement. On other occasions the coach may recommend to a participant that a modification is required. The reasoning and advantages for this advice need to be succinctly presented to the participant. In both these scenarios the coach would then observe the participant in the performance situation, preferably under competition conditions, and discuss the reasons why the participant or coach believes there is a need for the skill to be modified. The use of video at all stages during this process is helpful.



### CASE STUDY

Philippe has set up a tennis activity involving four players in a doubles practice. One player uses a wheelchair and has limited upper-body rotation. The players begin to 'hit up', and clearly the person in a wheelchair is not included and remains at the back of the court, failing to retrieve any ball that is hit their way.

Philippe observes what is happening and applies questions, such as 'Can we change the rules to help the wheelchair user retrieve the ball', or they may ask the wheelchair user 'What type of racquet is best for you to use?'.

Players may suggest modifications such as the wheelchair user covering the front of the court and playing a blocking role, requiring less rotation and sideways movement. They may also suggest that the wheelchair user is allowed two bounces of the ball before striking. The wheelchair user may, in turn, experiment with lighter racquets and/or strapping to assist with grip. Philippe is able to find inclusive solutions that are applied by the players, not imposed by the coach. This creates a very empowering and inclusive situation all round.

#### *A competition review approach*

After competition the coach and the participant/s review what went well during competition, what areas could be improved and what may be the focus of the next training session. The use of video in this approach could be used to improve the quality of the evaluation, especially for visual learners.

#### **Breaking techniques and skills into parts, and providing key coaching/safety points**

Often there is a need to break a skill into parts because it is complex or the participant has difficulty understanding what is required. If the coach breaks the skill into parts and these are taught separately it is important to practise the whole skill as soon as possible. The whole-part-whole method is one approach the coach could employ. Using this method, a golf coach would allow the participant to practise the golf swing after a demonstration/explanation. The coach would then teach a specific part of the swing depending on the error that is made by the beginner.

The participant would practise that part and then return to the whole skill. This sequence would be repeated until the swing is learned. At various stages in this process, key coaching/safety points are highlighted.

A second approach is the repetitive-part method. In teaching the freestyle stroke in swimming, the leg action may be taught first. The leg action and the arm action are then combined. Breathing is combined with the leg and the arm action. The swimmer then practises the complete stroke. It is apparent that the coach requires an understanding and knowledge of the underlying skill components, the coaching points for each of these skill components and safety factors associated with these skills.

#### **Allowing adequate time for practice and observing participants' performance**

Practice is the most important factor influencing how well a participant learns a technique, skill or a tactic. 'Perfect practice, with feedback, makes perfect'. The length of training sessions depends on a number of factors including the learning stage of the participant, the interest of the participant, the age of the participant, the quality of the practice session, and the frequency of the training sessions. In the coaching session it is important to prepare a plan for the sequence of activities that will take place. The amount of practice time and the amount of rest within a training session needs to reflect the age of the participants and the energy requirements of the practices. The ratio between the amount of practice and rest might reflect the ratio that is required in competition.

### **Progressing the activity in a sequential manner**

Gentile (2000) proposed a method of classifying motor skills that has the advantage of allowing coaches to sequentially progress skill development from a closed to an open performance environment. This permits the participant to practise in situations where the environmental factors are kept constant, then later practising where the environmental factors are changing. For example, teaching a child to catch begins with the coach lobbing the ball underarm to the child at a constant trajectory and speed, then progressing to catching when the ball is thrown at varying trajectories and speeds. The learner progresses to catching the ball on the move, which then leads to the learner attempting to catch the ball when it is thrown by a team-mate in a two versus one game.

A model for developing an activity in a sequential manner is:

- perform the activity without opposition
- perform the activity with passive opposition
- perform the activity with more active opposition
- perform the activity without opposition with time and/or accuracy demands
- perform the activity with time/accuracy demands with passive opposition
- perform the activity with time/accuracy demands with active opposition.

### **Ensuring that the session is fun and provides variety**

It is essential that the coach plans for fun and variety by writing these as objectives for the training session. One important way that the coach may achieve fun throughout the session is to take a positive approach to coaching. The coach who takes this approach constantly communicates a warm, friendly and compassionate manner and treats participants in the same way that they would like to be treated. Keeping friends together in group activities or games or during drills enhances the fun and enjoyment factor.

Beginner participants especially like the idea of variety in the training session. Variety may be introduced by starting the training sessions in different ways, providing challenges in solving competition-related problems, having a guest coach take the training session, going to a different venue or doing cross-training. Practise as many skills of the sport as possible within a coaching session.



## Summary

Coaches should keep the following points in mind to assist them to help participants learn:

- analyse your sport to determine the requirements that will bring enjoyment to the participants
- cater for individual differences in terms of the learning stage and the learning style of each participant
- treat participants with a disability no differently from other participants
- thoroughly prepare for each coaching session and competition
- include basic skills and tactics in every coaching session
- teach skills and tactics using sequential development, breaking the skill into parts if required
- allow adequate time to practise in a positive environment.

## References and further reading

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## CHAPTER 6

# GAME SENSE

### What is game sense?

Game sense is an approach to coaching that uses games and game-like activities as the focus of the practice session. Game sense uses an athlete-centred approach to coaching, where participants have the opportunity to respond to challenges through activity, solve problems and contribute to what is done in a session. This approach allows participants to determine the best way to achieve success.

This approach to coaching is 'game centred' rather than 'technique centred'. While most traditional coaching sessions have focused on the practise of techniques, the game sense session focuses on the game. It focuses on learning 'why' before 'how'.

In the past, technique has often been over-emphasised within practice sessions. While technique is an important part of the overall skill, it is often taught in isolation and out of context, without requiring participants to think and apply the techniques to the situations required in the game. By using a game sense approach, participants are challenged to think about what they are actually doing, and why. Participants learn to use the appropriate technique at the right time and place, in the pressure situation of a game.

#### Definition of a game

Games that are used in game sense can take a variety of shapes and forms. A game has:

- rules
- an area to play in
- objectives
- opponents.

A game should display all of these elements, even though each element may vary from the 'real' game (for example, number of players, size and shape of the playing area, how participants score or 'win' the game).

### Why use game sense?

The fact that games are fun and motivating is probably the best reason for coaches to adopt game sense, but there are a number of other good reasons for using this approach.

An analogy would be 'you can't go near the water until you've learnt to swim'. Learning the technique of how to swim away from water does not make a lot of sense; 'perfect technique' learned away from water is not necessarily replicated once in the water.

By focusing primarily on technique, the coach risks alienating those who will never develop perfect technique. Game sense allows players of all abilities to participate, enjoy and contribute to the game.

Other reasons for using game sense include:

- Participants learn to solve problems that arise in a game through tactical awareness and understanding. Skills are developed in a more meaningful environment.



- A fun environment engages participants, increases motivation levels and encourages continued involvement.
- It encourages simple modifications (easier or harder) to accommodate varying ability levels and therefore maximises inclusion and challenge.
- It assists the beginner coach, who often has limited technical knowledge of a sport. For these coaches it is more appropriate to set challenges for participants through games rather than conduct technique-based sessions that are based on unsound techniques due to lack of technical knowledge.
- Group management is often easier if the participants are having fun. Teaching space, equipment and time can be used more efficiently.
- Coach talk and intervention is kept to a minimum. The coach challenges participants to find solutions, rather than providing all the answers. Cooperation between the coach and the participants is increased due to the participant involvement.
- The coach can look for the positive responses from participants and use them as role models for the other participants.

## The coach's role in game sense

The role that the coach takes in the game sense approach is somewhat different to the 'traditional' coach role. The coach acts as a facilitator, creating situations where participants have to find solutions for themselves. This is done by designing activities and games that progressively challenge participants to develop an understanding of the strategies, skills and rules required to succeed in games.

The coach guides rather than directs participants in their understanding and playing of the game, that is, 'the guide on the side, not the sage on the stage'. The coach may ask questions to reinforce understanding, however, a physical response is the most desirable feedback. Setting a challenge by changing a condition of the game such as how a goal is scored, or where the goals are located, can also be used instead of a verbal question.



This role may be unfamiliar, as coaches may feel some pressure to be the 'font of all knowledge' to the participants. However, if the aim is to develop independent thinking and self-reliance in the participants, there is a need for a slightly different approach.

This change in role should not be interpreted as a lesser role for the coach. In fact, it can require better planning of activities and organisation on the part of the coach to achieve this role.

### TIPS FOR THE COACH USING A GAME SENSE APPROACH

- Feel relaxed about 'stepping back' and not over coaching
- Provide feedback when it will really count, and not on every occasion
- Provide challenges for participants and involve them in solving problems and setting directions
- Pay particular attention to what participants enjoy. Ask participants for feedback

### Observing

The skills of organising participants into groups, briefly explaining the activity and getting things started are all required within a game sense session. However, once the game is in progress the coach needs to think carefully about how they further develop the situation. Observing the activity to see how effectively the participants are solving the problems that the game has posed is the first step. If better or alternative solutions can be found, it is the coach's task to guide the participants to discover these.

The ability of the coach to use questions in order to help the participants focus on key aspects is paramount. The coach may stop the game, pose a number of questions, allow the participants time to consider these (often by means of a team talk), then restart the game. At times, however, the coach may choose not to stop the game, but may talk to individuals who need assistance while the game is in progress.

Once the coach is satisfied that the outcomes of the game are being achieved, new challenges can be introduced to extend the concepts being developed. This could be undertaken for the whole team or for individuals within the group.

### Technique coaching

Although the tactical aspects are being emphasised in the game sense approach, the technical movement patterns that may assist a person to better perform a skill can still be emphasised. Techniques are gradually introduced as the need for them is established. For example, in tennis the technique of executing a drop shot would more readily be learned after the participant had established when to use the shot (that is, when their opponent is at the back of the court).

As a guide, the following model for learning techniques can be used:

- Participants are introduced to a game requiring skills that are both tactical (what to do) and technical (how to do it).
- Participants play the game and as a result, the technical and tactical skills required become clear. This is important so that participants can appreciate why a particular technique is valuable.
- The coach observes the participants in action and if necessary, intervenes to assist participants with technical skills on an individual basis.
- Participants again practise the skills in conditions that relate to the game.

### CASE STUDY

Taryn coaches young participants (under eights), and game concepts such as 'defence', 'offence', 'finding space' and 'invasion' are challenging for them. By breaking down the key game concepts, she finds she has more success. For example, when teaching the concept of intercepting a pass, Taryn says things such as 'Peter is going to stand between Jess and Melanie and he is going to try and steal the ball as Jess and Melanie pass it between them'. After allowing some play she guides Peter to strategies that will increase his chance of intercepting the ball.

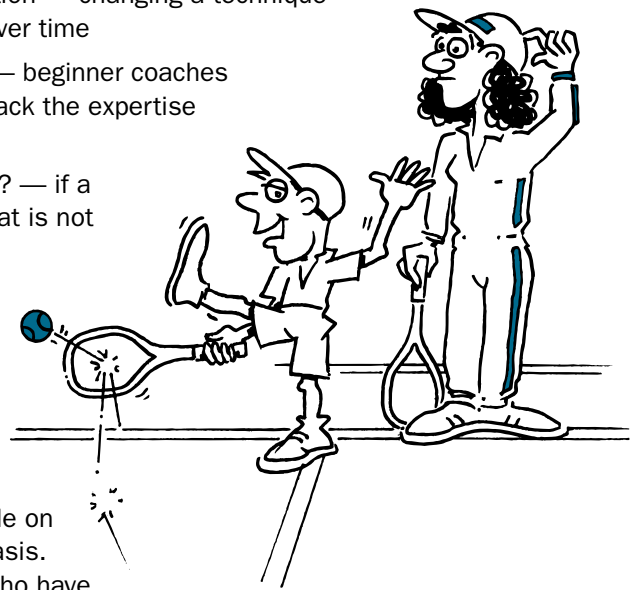


### Correcting technique

Should a coach attempt to change a participant's natural style to one that is perceived as being more efficient? Most coaches have experienced the frustration of trying to change a participant's technique, only to see them revert back to their old style under pressure.

Before attempting to change a participant's technique, the coach should consider the following:

- participant confidence and physical readiness — this could be influenced by a variety of factors such as self-esteem, the participant's perception of their own ability and their age or stage of development
- the time available to the coach to make a correction — changing a technique does not happen overnight; it requires practise over time
- the ability of the coach to correct the technique — beginner coaches should be wary of trying to correct errors if they lack the expertise to solve them
- will the change in technique affect the end result? — if a participant is having success with a technique that is not out of the textbook, then seriously consider whether there really is a need to change it. The exception to this is if the unusual technique is unsafe
- whether the participant has a disability that may mean they need to use a technique that is not 'textbook' but is suited to the individual.



Modifications to technique should preferably be made on an individualised basis, rather than a whole-group basis. The coach should work with one or two individuals who have requested, or believe they are ready to make, an adjustment to a technique.

### TIPS FOR PROVIDING CORRECTIONS

- Use participant role models, individuals and smaller groups to highlight either tactical aspects or technique
- Let the kids play before intervening with coaching tips
- Once an activity is in play, take individuals or small groups who may need some specific guidance (discrete coaching) to one side
- Observe, observe, observe ... avoid over-coaching

### Structuring a game sense session

If the session is well constructed the coach will not hear 'When can we play the game?' That is because participants will have a chance to get into the game-related activities early and often. Game sense emphasises:

- games before drills and skills
- high-activity levels that are disguised within fun and challenging activities.

When using game sense, it is important for the coach to know when and how to CHANGE IT:

**Coaching style**, for example, demonstrations or use of questions, role models and verbal instructions

**How to score/win**

**Area**, for example, size, shape or surface of the playing environment

**Number of participants**

**Game rules**, for example, number of bounces or passes

**Equipment**, for example, softer or larger balls, or lighter, smaller bats/racquets

**Inclusion**, for example, everyone has to touch the ball before the team can score

**Time**, for example, 'How many ... in 30 seconds?'

This approach is used for modifying the activity for inclusion, challenge and skill development. CHANGE IT is used if participants are not successful in achieving the objective of the game, or are achieving it too easily and motivation is waning.

When using the game sense approach, a practice session might be structured as follows:

- 1 warm-up
- 2 game sense game
- 3 possible coach intervention to clarify or emphasise challenges
- 4 return to game
- 5 possible CHANGE IT modifications
- 6 progression of game
- 7 repeat steps 2–6
- 8 cool-down.

## Using questions and challenges

Questioning is a powerful method of encouraging participants to analyse their actions, both individually and as a team. The coach's role is to assist participants to solve problems, rather than solving the problems for them.

Questions and challenges can:

- help participants to understand the tactics of the game
- contribute to an inclusive session
- encourage participants to come up with alternative rules and ways of playing
- encourage participants to come up with their own solutions to challenges the coach has set (independent thought).

The answer to many of the questions and challenges will be through a demonstration of activity. The challenge is at its best when the answer can be translated into action, rather than words.

Effective phrasing of questions can also help to guide the participant to an answer, in the event that they are struggling with an activity. Questions can still be used even if the coach is not confident of the right answer. Challenging participants to find out for themselves is an approach the coach should not be afraid of using.

## CASE STUDY

Arjun coaches a group of under-14 squash players. He finds that by including challenges within each activity he can promote learning. Some of the types of challenges he uses regularly include simple ones, such as the first player to score five points using a drop shot, or more complex ones such as 'You are down by three points, and it's your serve. Where is the best place to serve against a slower opponent?'. Arjun has found that the challenges will also create a bit of healthy competition among the players in his group, and they enjoy the extra challenge that this creates.

### Types of questions/challenges

Using questions and/or setting challenges is something that requires practise by any coach. By getting to know the group, the coach will be able to determine what sorts of questions and challenges are appropriate. Age, experience and ability level of the participants will affect the complexity of the questions used. It is often useful to list some possible questions/challenges prior to the practice session.

The coach should ask questions/set challenges that are open-ended, rather than closed. Closed questions only need a 'yes' or 'no' answer and do not challenge the participant to think about a solution. Examples of open-ended questions include:

- 'Where is the best place to hit the ball?'
- 'Which is the best option to pass to?'
- 'How can you make it more difficult for your opponent to score?'
- 'When is the best time to attack?'
- 'What is the most effective type of defence for this situation?'
- 'If your opponent uses a blocking shot, what will you do?'
- 'Is it better to pass or run with the ball in this situation?'
- 'How can you assist your team-mate?'
- 'How can you tell if the long shot is worth the risk?'

Questions/challenges will generally relate to a particular tactical aspect. As a rough guide, questions can relate to tactics as follows:

Time	Question about timing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When will you ... (run, pass, shoot, etc.)? Why?</li> </ul>
Space	Questions about where to move: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where will you move to? Why?</li> <li>• Where will you aim? Why?</li> </ul>
Risk	Questions about choosing options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which option will you take to pass? Why?</li> <li>• Which option will you take to go long/short? Why?</li> <li>• Will you run or stay? Why?</li> <li>• Will you attack or defend? Why?</li> </ul>

When asking a question or setting a challenge, the coach should give the participant or group time to think and respond (do not answer the question for them!). Remember that by asking a question, the coach is not necessarily seeking a verbal response from the participant/s. At times the coach may pose a question that they want answered by the participant's actions in the game. The coach should make it clear to the participants what sort of response they are seeking. In many situations, there may be more than one right answer to the problem. Usually the answer will depend on the circumstances of the situation.

### When to ask questions and set challenges

Although there is no definitive answer to this, the following can be used as a guide:

- Start the game with some general challenges to the participants. For example, 'I want you to work out the best way to defend this situation' or 'See if you can score more than five goals in the next two minutes.'
- The coach may have an opportunity to question individual/s during the game. For example, 'Sally, which person do you think is the best option to pass to?'
- Natural breaks in the play are the best times to do this. If possible, the coach should tie positive feedback to the participant into this. For example, 'Good shot John, now where is the best spot to move to next?'
- The game should be played uninterrupted as long as possible. This gives participants the chance to settle into the game, and gives the coach the opportunity to observe the participants.
- During breaks to rotate participants may be the best time to speak to the group. Re-stating the original question/challenge in a different way might be necessary if the participants have not achieved the desired outcomes. The coach should check that the participants have understood the outcome they want them to try and achieve.
- If the game is working well, it may be time to take the next step and add an additional challenge to the game. If it is not working well, the game can be modified or simplified.
- The coach should not be concerned if some participants are responding as though tactically aware and others are not. Individual readiness should be considered. The coach may want to devise different challenges for different participants to cater for this.



### Sports suited to game sense

There are some sports that are particularly suited to using games — team sports especially are the obvious ones. However, most sports require some degree of tactical thinking, even those sports where technique and physical capacities are usually considered paramount. For example, a sport such as triathlon requires race strategies and the ability to respond to a competitor's tactics.





Those sports that are particularly suited to using the game sense approach include:

Invasion games	Striking and fielding games	Net and court games	Target games
Australian football Basketball Gridiron Handball Hockey Ice hockey Lacrosse Netball Polo Polocrosse Rugby league Rugby union Football Touch football Water polo	Baseball Cricket Indoor cricket Softball	Badminton Squash Tennis Table tennis Volleyball	Archery Billiards and snooker Bocce Bowls Croquet Darts Golf Tenpin bowling

## Common tactical aspects

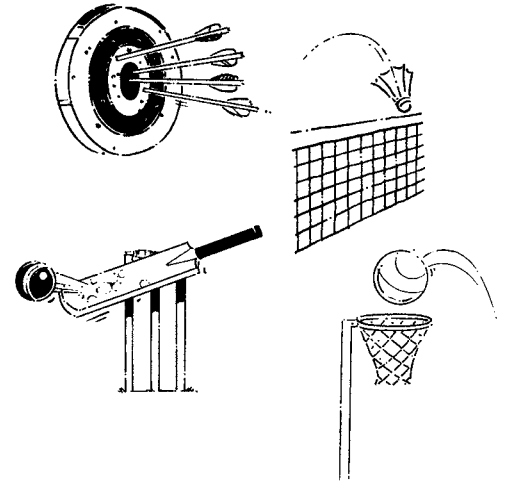
There are many common tactical aspects across all the categories of sports. Listed below are some examples of the tactical aspects that can be emphasised, and questions that the coach may wish to pose in relation to these aspects.

Tactical aspects	Challenges
Deception	‘How can you make your opponent go to their left?’
Risk	‘How can you tell if the long shot is worth the risk in this situation?’
Shot selection and placement in relation to opponent/s	‘Your opponent is close to the net, what could you do?’
Time	‘How can you give yourself time to recover from the last shot?’
Stage of the game (time remaining)	‘You are two points down in the closing stages of the game. How will you attack the next play?’
Space (creating or limiting space)	‘Where are the best spaces to run to receive the ball? How will this impact on where your team-mates go?’
Decision-making	‘Should you go for the target, or try to block your opponent’s ball?’
Anticipation	‘What is the most likely response from your opponent in this situation?’
Field setting	‘Where are the best spots to field against a left hander?’
Defensive patterns	‘Do you think you should use a zone defence or double-team the key scorer? Why?’
Regaining possession	‘How can you regain possession after a turnover?’
Minimising angles of attack	‘How can you reduce the angle for the attacker moving towards the goal?’
Attacking and scoring	‘Would it be better to use the width of the field, or try to penetrate the line? Why?’
Keeping possession	‘Should you evade your opponent or pass the ball? Why?’



## Modifying games

The CHANGE IT approach gives a guide as to the types of modifications that can be used by the coach. Modification is often used to exaggerate certain aspects of the game in order to guide participants towards specific outcomes (tactical or skill). For example, to emphasise the front and back spaces of the court in badminton, the court can be modified to be long and thin. The participants will gain an understanding of how and when to use particular shots (drop shot and overhead shot) to move their opponent to the front and back spaces of the court to win a point.



For each of the four categories of games, the following modifications may be useful:

Invasion	Striking and fielding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weight, size and shape of equipment</li> <li>Adjust scoring targets and points system</li> <li>Game rules (for example, time allowed in possession, areas allowed in, types of passes and movements)</li> <li>Size and dimensions of playing areas</li> <li>Length of game, for example, 30–60 seconds</li> <li>Roles and number of team-mates or opponents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Size of the bats and balls used</li> <li>Size and dimensions of playing field</li> <li>Hitting and delivery mechanisms (for example, pitcher can be cooperative or competitive, or use a tee)</li> <li>Number of participants on each team</li> <li>Change rules to allow greater time to hit and field the ball</li> <li>Scoring systems (for example, bonus points for particular plays)</li> </ul>
Net and court	Target
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weight and/or size of the ball</li> <li>Shape and/or size of the bat</li> <li>Size and dimensions of the court space</li> <li>Net height</li> <li>Modify rules (for example, to allow more bounces before ball is returned)</li> <li>Number of team-mates or opponents</li> <li>Throw and catch ball rather than hit</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Distance to the target</li> <li>Size of the target</li> <li>Position of target</li> <li>Weight and/or size of the projectile</li> <li>Use a scaled/bonus scoring system</li> <li>Number of turns/shots</li> </ul>

## Inclusion within game sense

A real challenge for many coaches is how to include people with a disability within team games where the majority of the participants do not have a disability. Below are some suggestions for including participants with a disability:

### Invasion games

- Abilities can be matched up to balance the game, for example, use zones to divide the playing area and try to match players' abilities within each zone.
- Allocate specific roles to certain players, for example, as a link player who cannot be challenged but must pass within a certain time limit or distance travelled with the ball.



- Some players, who may be unable to fully participate in an invasion game, can ‘convert’ scores by performing a task relevant to their abilities (for example, rolling a ball down a ramp to knock over a skittle). They can perform this role for both teams, gaining an extra point for the scoring team if successful.

### *Striking and fielding games*

- Enable some players to strike the ball from a tee
- Use a slower-moving ball to aid the fielding team
- Shorten the wicket or distance between bases for some players
- Create alternative tasks for batters for whom running to bases or between wickets is not an option, for example, they must hit the ball to a certain target area to be awarded a run

### *Net and court games*

- Modify the court area, for example, players who have mobility impairments defend a smaller area
- Have some players positioned outside the court area (for example, in volleyball) whose responsibility is to keep the ball in play. Balls going out of court are played back in to maintain rallies
- Play with a lower net or no net
- Use slower-moving balls or shuttles

## **CASE STUDY**

Shelley is a keen sporting participant but finds that because she uses a wheelchair, she is often left out of team sport activities at school. Shelley and her friends often find ways to successfully include Shelley during playground games at lunchtime and they decide to suggest some of these the next time there are team-sport activities being run.

During a game of football, Shelley and her friends suggest to the coach that they play on the basketball court, which is hard and flat, rather than on the grass. They also suggest that Shelley be allowed to use her hands to shoot for goal, rather than kicking the ball. With these simple changes, Shelley is able to participate in the game with her friends.

## **How to develop games**

Below are some steps to follow when developing new games:

### **Step 1: select the tactical aspect/s to be emphasised**

For example: decision-making, deception, risk, time, shot selection and placement, spatial awareness, anticipation, attacking and defending patterns, field setting

### **Step 2: determine what will be the main problem/challenge for the participants to solve**

For example: keeping possession of the ball for a certain period of time, positioning of fielders in the final stage of the game, keeping your opponent away from the centre of the field/court

**Step 3: devise a simple game that will develop the above aspects**

The coach may like to modify an existing game that is used within their sport. Also consider the following aspects:

- catering for all the individuals — provide some choices in equipment and skill execution
- ensuring that the game encourages maximum participation
- where to place the game within the training session (depending on its difficulty or complexity).

**Step 4: develop some rules for the game**

The participants can often determine these and this reinforces the concept that ‘rules’ make the game better. Some examples of rules include:

- How do participants score goals or gain points?
- How does the game start and re-start after scoring?
- How does the ball move?
- How do the participants move?
- What are the boundaries?
- Are any safety rules needed?

**Step 5: devise one progression to make the game more complex**

This may involve changing the above rules, or adding additional problems or challenges. Remember the CHANGE IT modifications, such as:

- positioning of goalposts (and number of goalposts per team)
- equipment to be used
- number of passes or shots allowed
- number of players in attack and defence
- scoring system, including penalty or bonus points for particular plays
- time allowed
- specific roles for participants (for example, goalkeeper).

**Step 6: design some questions and challenges to ask the participants (to promote thinking and problem solving)**

For example:

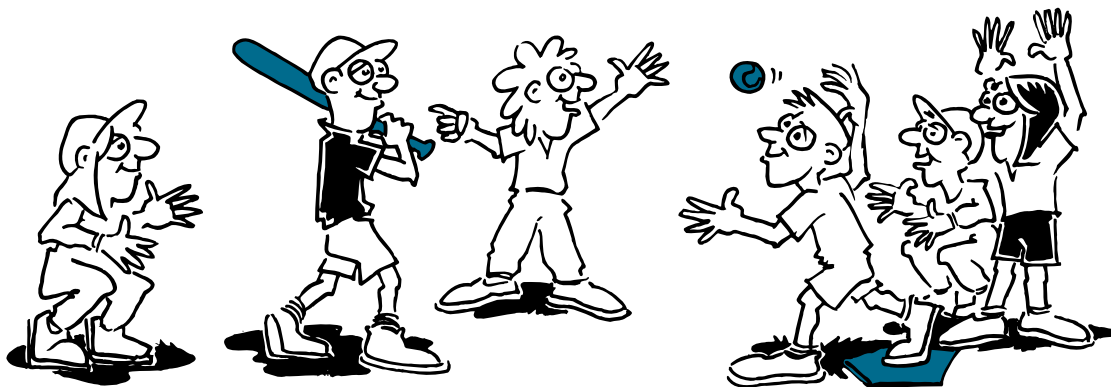
- ‘Where is the best spot to hit the ball?’
- ‘What is the best way to defend this situation?’
- ‘Is it better to pass or run with the ball in this situation? Why?’

## Progression of games

Progression is an important concept in any type of coaching session. When using the game sense approach, the principle of moving from simple challenges to progressively more complex ones should be followed and should be based on participant responses.

To achieve this:

- use games that allow ample time to make decisions early in the session. Progress to games that reduce the time available for reaction



- when first introducing a tactical problem, choose techniques that the participants can easily control (for example, underhand throw). Progress to more difficult techniques when the tactical problem has been accomplished
- progress from a relatively closed environment to a more open one, for example:
  - stationary targets → moving targets
  - few rules → many rules
  - one opponent → more than one
  - one team-mate → more than one
  - separate court areas → shared space
  - one simple movement → movements in combinations.

### TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING A GAME SENSE APPROACH WITH CHILDREN

Let them play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most children find 'skills and drills' boring. Play a game — now!</li> </ul>
Inclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use the many CHANGE IT options to modify the activity to suit varying ability levels</li> <li>• There are many different variations of game rules, playing area and equipment to tailor activities to include all children</li> </ul>
Improving skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing the fundamental skills is important</li> <li>• Prepare to conduct a 'discrete' coaching session off to the side on an 'as needs' basis</li> <li>• 'Freeze-frame' the action using participant role models to highlight skill and tactical coaching points. Ask, 'Do you know what you are looking for?'</li> </ul>
It's not working!	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sometimes the best of plans do not translate into workable sessions. Be prepared to CHANGE IT. Plan for the unexpected:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– if it is not working, have an alternative</li> <li>– try conducting the same activity in smaller groups</li> <li>– is the activity too easy/hard?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

## Summary

- Game sense is an approach to coaching that uses games as the focus of the coaching session. Participants use the appropriate technique at the right time and place in the pressure situations of a game.
- The emphasis with the game sense approach is on the participants making decisions within the game, rather than the coach telling the participants where to run and where to pass. The coach becomes a facilitator, creating situations where participants have to find solutions for themselves. The participants 'learn from the game'.
- The game sense approach attempts to address the problem of technique practices that bear little resemblance to what actually happens in a game. Game sense teaches skills that participants will use in a game, and in the context that they will use them.
- The coach should set challenges and ask questions that are open-ended and that generally relate to a particular tactical aspect, such as time, space and risk.
- Challenging participants to discover solutions for themselves is a great approach to learning. The challenges can be simple or more complex.

## References and further reading

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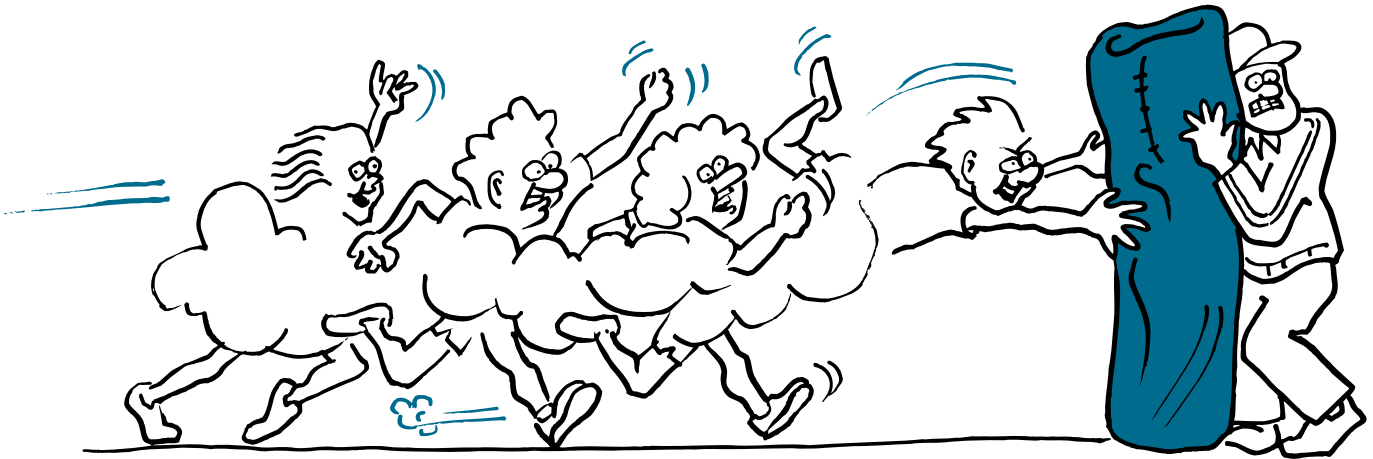


## CHAPTER 7

# GROUP MANAGEMENT

### CASE STUDY

Greg arrived at the rugby fields ready to coach the local under-14 club rugby team. He had volunteered to coach the team and despite having never coached a team before Greg was quite excited about the challenge. After consulting with some of his experienced rugby friends he spent considerable time planning a detailed and comprehensive program. With the program in hand Greg was confident the first session would go well. Unfortunately what followed was a disaster. The players would not respond to direction, two individuals started fighting, balls were being thrown randomly around the area, one individual was in tears because he was laughed at when attempting one of Greg's training drills and Greg could not hear himself speak over the constant rude interruptions from the players.



This chapter is designed to provide coaches such as Greg with quality group-management skills. The use of group-management skills not only helps the coach to enjoy coaching but also provides the opportunity for individuals to benefit from their participation in sport.

The aspects of group management that can enhance the sport experience for both coach and participant include:

- engaging the participant
- establishing formations and routines
- catering for individual differences
- incorporating minor/modified games
- encouraging self-management
- managing behaviour.



## Engaging the participant

### CASE STUDY

Susan wanted to engage the interest and rekindle the enthusiasm of her intermediate diving squad. The girls had been participating in diving for five years and were beginning to lose interest. Susan contacted two of her friends who had recently finished competing for Australia in the Olympic Games and asked them if they would perform a demonstration for her diving squad and follow up with two weeks of coaching. The young divers were enthralled by the demonstration and noticeably motivated by the opportunity to work with their idols.

Providing quality demonstrations is one of many strategies used to engage sport participants. The following are some of the more successful strategies that can be used to engage participants.

#### Voice and expression

It is interesting to observe the impact particular communicators have on their respective audiences. The Wiggles seem to use their voice and expression to cast a spell over the three to eight-year-olds in their audience. A late night current affairs presenter connects with their audience using empathetic and often dramatic intonation. Varying voice quality and volume to suit the situation is a trademark of effective coaches.

#### Eye contact

Whether working with a group or an individual, the ability to maintain eye contact can personalise an interaction. Making eye contact gives the impression of confidence, helps to add expression to the message and enables the coach to assess the attitude of the players.

#### Signal for attention

There are many ways to capture the attention of a group. Whatever the method, more often than not, it should be loud, different, pleasant and gain attention. Some coaches use a whistle and others use a variety of commands. Ironically it is possible to gain attention by being quiet. This usually happens when players are expecting noise and it does not happen, or when the participants have a routine that involves a briefing from the coach. At a coach briefing, the coach can use silence to create a mood of suspense and intrigue.

#### Ask questions

Soliciting a response from participants using questioning and discussion techniques shifts the focus from the coach to the participant. The participant assumes some responsibility for their participation and becomes more involved in the learning process. It is recommended that young participants, and some participants with a disability, be asked questions that the coach knows they can answer. More difficult and complex questions should be reserved for mature participants.

### Praise and compliment

Sincere and equitable praise and compliments to the team and individuals can be delivered in a variety of ways. The coach can comment, place good results on the notice board, send emails, applaud, give rewards and provide leadership opportunities to support the participants.

### CASE STUDY

Mark was watching his new under-10 football team arrive at training. Not knowing the individuals, he was interested to observe their behaviour before commencing the training session. He noticed one individual was continually seeking the attention of others by 'big noting' and disrupting their independent play. He also overheard this individual make some rude comments to a nearby parent. However he did observe the same individual kick the ball with good balance and excellent vision. Mark called the players over and as soon as they arrived, before the 'attention seeker' had time to display his repertoire of 'look at me' skills, Mark commented on how impressed he was with what he had seen when he arrived. He made particular mention of the excellent kicking skills of the attention-seeking individual and asked him to demonstrate. Mark then used the player to help him with a range of tasks throughout the session. Apart from a few digressions the attention-seeking behaviour ceased.



### Quality instructions

Combining brief clear instructions with video demonstrations and meaningful anecdotes enables the coach to maintain the interest of participants. Most sport participants choose to learn by doing. If participants need to absorb vital information then a concise message, that enables the participant to visualise the intent of the message, will reduce loss of concentration and level of frustration.

One of the most difficult coaching behaviours to adopt is to limit instructions to one or two key points and then inject the players back into activity. The coach often has a wealth of knowledge and can feel compelled to pass it on to the players in one session. If this is a problem then one solution is to plan to deliver key messages across the entire program lasting several weeks. Knowing there is an opportunity to impart knowledge at a later date can help reduce the urge to be verbose.

### Notice board

An up-to-date and well-presented notice board and/or newsletter are vehicles for engaging participants when they are away from training and competition activities. They can connect each individual to their team and/or club/school and establish a sense of belonging. The notice board can include human interest information about members, be a display board for the training program (often used by swimming coaches), provide advice about upcoming events, display team lists and team/club rules and regulations.

## Establishing formations and routines

### CASE STUDY

Lyn used a circle formation to practise the set and dig skills with her under-16 volleyball team. By placing four to six players in a circle, Lyn was able to emulate the game situation. Players were instructed to 'keep the ball happy' by hitting it with set and/or dig shots consecutively into the air. While there were many hits and Lyn was pleased with the cooperation among players as they nominated the person in the best position to set or dig the ball, all players were only hitting the ball forward. There were no back sets. One of the players suggested someone be placed in the middle of the circle and that they be responsible for balls that came into the central zone and were only allowed to play back sets. Lyn was delighted with the number of opportunities to respond that the circle formation provided.

### Formations

Coaches strive to provide situations where participants can have maximum opportunities to practise at high rates of success in a safe environment. They also strive to position themselves so that they can readily observe each participant. This can be achieved using either a drills approach or game sense approach.

One of the most effective ways to manage the skill development of participants is to play modified games. Using small-sided games with rules that require players to focus on particular skills can result in improved skill as well as an understanding of how to apply those skills in competition. The game sense approach certainly complements the drills approach to coaching.

The following formations usually work for most coaches when managing a 'drills' approach to training activities. In each diagram the participant is 'x' and the coach is 'o'.

#### Lines

```
xxxxx
xxxxx  o
xxxxx
```

#### File

```
x x x x x
      o
x x x x x
```

#### Lines — end to end

```
xxxxx          xxxxx
      o
```

#### Squares

```
x      x      o      x      x
x      x      x      x      x
      x      x
      x      x
```

#### Grid

```
x      x      x      x      x
x      x      x      x      x
x      x      x      x      x
      o
```

#### Circle

```
      x
      x      x
o      x      x
      x      x
      x
```

### Safety

Safe activities are often the result of the use of effective formations. It is not possible to prescribe the exact dimensions of each formation for each sport. Formation dimensions depend on the purpose of the activity, the skill level of participants, the dynamics of the group, the number of participants and the available equipment and area in which to play. Through trial and error coaches will discover the best arrangement to provide a low-risk environment for each participant. The examples on the previous page have been proven to offer safe options for the management of sport groups.

To maintain the integrity of a formation, particularly when introduced for the first time, it is recommended that coaches use markers to define the formation. Care should be taken to ensure that the markers are not going to hinder performance by distracting the participant or causing an injury.



### Challenge

Once a formation has been adopted it can be modified to increase the level of skill or to adjust the intensity of competition among individuals.

## CASE STUDY

When he reduced the area of the squares in a grid formation Larry found that the two-on-two modified game of 'keepings off' became more intense and that it was easier for the less-speedy players to gain possession of the ball. When Larry significantly increased the size of the squares, the players had to run further and it had a noticeable effect on the training of their aerobic fitness.

### Routines

A coach needs time to manage unpredictable events such as a parent issue, faulty equipment and an injury. The coach also needs time to offer feedback and support to individual participants. By establishing routines and giving the responsibility for routines to the participants, the coach can devote more time to nurturing the sport skill development of the players.

Warm-up and cool-down routines can sometimes be managed by the players. Players in younger teams can help to set up equipment. Older players can take responsibility for tactical responses during breaks in competition games against opposition teams.

Having consistent routines for moving between coach instruction and activity can greatly reduce management time. If the players know where to go, how quickly they need to be there and what behaviour is expected of them on arrival, then more time can be devoted to activity.

### TIPS FOR ESTABLISHING ROUTINES

- Set up areas of a facility for specific elements of the program (for example, nets for batting and bowling practice in cricket)
- Keep accurate records of participation and performance (for example, the track and field coach recording split times for an 800-metre runner)
- Identify which part of training is intense and serious and which part is more relaxed (for example, because the surf is good, the surf lifesaving coach lets his squad have 30 minutes to freely surf the waves then proceeds with some interval training focusing on entering and leaving the surf. The participants know that the coach always schedules 30 minutes of time for relaxed practice)
- Establish 'set up' and 'put away' systems for the equipment and facility (for example, rowing coaches require their rowers to not only set up their boats and place the coach's boat in the water, but they also must wash down the equipment before putting it away in the shed)

Coaches should be aware that the concept of time can be fairly flexible in some Indigenous communities (particularly remote) and many Indigenous children often do not wear a watch. A participant turning up late may not be a sign of disrespect or lack of commitment, but simply that the concept of structured time is less important. Some strategies that can be used to overcome this include:

- structuring training times around other activities (for example, training starts straight after school)
- helping to organise car pooling with other participants.

### CASE STUDY

Jill is a young softball coach working with a group of Indigenous athletes in the Northern Territory. She is finding it difficult to gain the attention of the participants at the beginning of a training session, as some of the participants constantly arrive late, and the rest of the participants just seem to want to spend time laughing and having fun. Jill wants the participants to do a 'proper' warm-up, and take the training sessions more seriously. She feels that the participants are showing her a lack of respect by laughing and mucking around at the start of training.

After attending a cultural awareness workshop, Jill realises that the approach she has been taking with the group needs to be changed. By using fun games as part of the warm-up, Jill discovers that the participants are able to channel their enthusiasm and desire to have fun, and she is able to run an effective warm-up. Jill has also found a strategy for increasing the level of respect shown to her by the participants, by involving one of the senior players (who has a high status level in the community) in a leadership role. Jill finds that her training sessions are gradually becoming more frequently attended by the players (and on time!) by changing her approach.

## Catering for individual differences

### Inclusion

There are many examples of clever modifications to rules, equipment and regulations that have allowed people with a disability to participate in sport, for example, the bowling ball ramp used in tenpin bowling to help control the delivery of the ball, the tie-down mechanism for wheelchair athletes to secure their chair to the shot-put circle when throwing, and the bell in the cricket ball for vision-impaired cricketers.

Levels of ability are a feature in sport. Occasionally a participant presents with an extreme lack of ability caused by a physical impairment that is not able to be compensated for using other personal attributes. It is important that all players be given every opportunity and encouragement to be included.

The introduction of classification systems has created a structure to allow participants with disabilities to compete against other participants with similar abilities. Classification systems are also common in able-bodied sport (for example, age groups, weight divisions, handicaps) to enable fairer competition.

### CASE STUDY

Erin is the coach of a netball squad and one of the players in the squad has a vision impairment. Erin has set up a 'piggy in the middle' activity in training that requires two players to retain possession from a third player without the third player intercepting or gaining possession of the ball. As Erin starts the session, she notices that the player with a vision impairment keeps dropping the ball and, as the single defensive player, cannot get close to touching or retrieving the ball.

Erin observes what is happening and asks the players, 'What can we do to give the person with vision impairment the best possible chance of catching the ball?' Some adaptations to the activity are suggested by the players that will help. These include using bounce passing only to slow the game down and provide the person with a vision impairment an auditory cue. The players also suggest trying a variety of balls — lighter, brighter and slower (partially deflated). Erin also tries changing the court lighting to provide better contrast.

### Specific groups

By using group-management skills, the coach can improve each participant's access to, and enjoyment of, their sport. At training the coach is able to:

- place individuals in groups of similar ability
- assign reliable and responsible individuals to help the younger or less-able players during training
- arrange for participants in ability groups to participate at different levels of the program.

It can be time consuming to organise a training program in which individual participants and groups of participants are working at different levels at the same time. However, from a management perspective, the benefits to the participant far outweigh the time and effort taken to prepare and organise the program.

**Be fair**

Group management should have as a focus providing each participant with:

- an equal opportunity to participate in practice and games
- consistent treatment in relation to feedback, rewards, discussion, application of rules and leadership opportunities
- a consistent coach attitude.



Keeping records of each participant's game time and interactions with the coach is an effective way to manage this critical role of the coach.

## Incorporating minor and modified games

**Game sense**

All training activities should directly emulate a part of the game. Players enjoy activities that not only emulate a part of the game but are in fact a 'minor' game. There are many examples of this: half-court basketball, corridor football, mini-golf, half-court tennis and end ball. Sports coaches are increasingly designing minor games to raise the players' understanding of a particular aspect of the game. Further information on using a game sense approach is contained in the previous chapter.

### CASE STUDY

Geoff coaches an under-12 Australian football team. He was convinced that the players were not reacting quickly enough to the flight of a ball kicked by another player. When he asked the players what they looked at when the ball was being kicked, they all said that they looked at the player kicking the ball. Geoff wanted them to look at the ball contacting the boot and to be familiar with the different flight resulting from different angles of ball drop and foot/body position at the time of contact. He introduced a game of 'force back'. The game involved pairs of players trying to force each other across the field by kicking the ball past their opponent. The opponent had to stop the ball either by marking it or trapping it on the ground. Geoff was delighted with the results as players intently watched their opponent's kicking foot throughout the game.

**Increase participation**

Long lines of participants waiting for a turn and 'adult' games with large playing areas and large numbers of players on each team, greatly reduce the opportunities for players to be actively involved. These approaches also reduce the level of enjoyment for many participants.

Using the formations mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, with several groups of players operating at the same time, requires planning and organisation. The extra effort results in better, more active and happier players. Another way to increase participation is to use a game sense approach. An example of this is two-versus-two basketball. The coach wants to focus on goal shooting and increasing each participant's opportunities to shoot. The squad is divided into simultaneous games of two-versus-two basketball using each end of the court and the three-point lines as the boundary for the modified two-versus-two court. Players enjoy the opportunity to have many more shots at goal and experiment with ways to beat their opponents.



Many sports have modified their games to increase participation and cater for the abilities of younger participants and athletes with a disability. One of the key modifications has been to reduce the numbers of players in each team without disturbing the essential ingredients of the sport.

Wheelchair basketball is a modified game that has been developed to cater for a specific population. Some other sports, such as football and baseball, allow a percentage of older, less-capable players to play in younger age divisions to ensure that they continue in the sport.

## Encouraging self-management

Teaching players to manage themselves greatly reduces a coach's need to manage. Examples of ways to improve a participant's ability to self-manage include:

- setting challenges that require participants to develop a skill and/or strategy to solve a problem
- discussing with participants the effects of poor individual behaviour
- ensuring players understand the connection between behaviour and the consequences of that behaviour
- requiring players, who make a mistake or fail to follow a team plan, to do work to compensate for the negative effect they have had on the team performance
- acknowledging players who go out of their way to assist with management, organisation and planning tasks
- asking players to explain the outcomes of their execution of skills.

Some tasks that players can perform to practise self-management include:

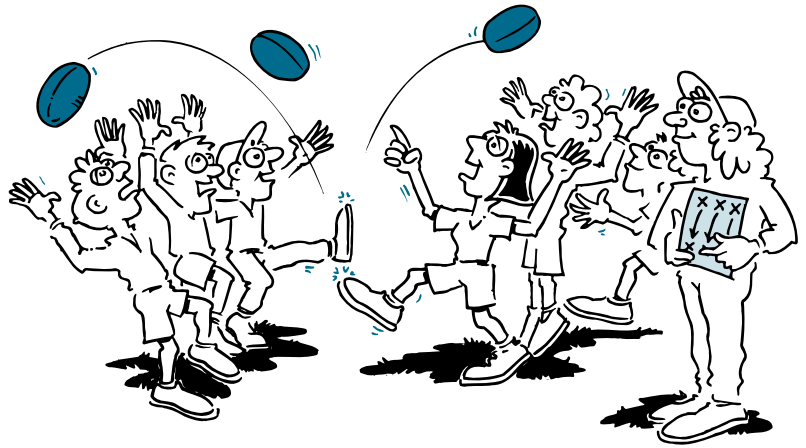
- taking responsibility for captaining segments of the team on game day (for example, a backs captain, forwards captain, a freestyle leader, a relay captain)
- organising the club presentation night
- planning specific training segments
- coordinating transport to events.

## Managing behaviour

Guidelines for reducing the likelihood of typical behaviour problems include:

- establish a code of behaviour at the first training session. Involve participants in the process of formulating the behaviour code. Develop clear expectations regarding attendance, punctuality and training standards. Explain the reasons for each rule and agree on consequences for breaking them. Avoid punitive consequences, rather require the offender to compensate and/or retribute the situation caused by the poor behaviour
- inform administrators and parents of the codes of behaviour and consequences that will be applied
- deal with the behaviour by focusing on the behaviour and not the individual participant as a person. Do not publicly insult or embarrass the participant
- avoid punishing a group for the poor behaviour of one participant
- take a firm, fair and consistent approach to managing behaviour. Apply consequences quickly and fairly. It may be necessary to exclude an individual from an activity. The exclusion should be brief and the coach should take time to discuss the incident privately with the individual while they are excluded

- avoid using punishments such as running laps or push-ups. If you intend to use running or push-ups to improve fitness, then they will have a negative stigma because they have been used as a punishment. Also they are monotonous and have little value as one-off exercises
- use rewards, praise and acknowledgment to reinforce desired behaviours
- develop programs that have fun, variety, high rates of activity, high rates of participation and opportunities for friends to interact.



On occasions, a coach may need to manage extreme behaviour. In the case of extreme behaviour, the type of management required is usually determined by whether or not the behaviour of a particular participant or group of participants will significantly disrupt and/or possibly harm other participants. If it is likely that other participants will be harmed or significantly disrupted, then the coach should exclude the offending participant/s from the program. Unless a qualified counsellor, the coach is limited to supporting the poorly behaved individual by helping them to seek professional help. Extreme behaviour of this type should not be tolerated in sporting programs.

## Summary

Group management encompasses:

- engaging the participant — employing interactive strategies that motivate the participant to respond
- establishing formations and routines — organising activities in such a way that participants have optimal opportunities to participate successfully
- catering for individual differences — developing programs that facilitate the simultaneous participation of athletes with various levels of ability and varying physical, social and mental capacities
- incorporating modified and minor games — using a game sense approach to develop the application of skills in the game situation and to increase participation in game situations
- encouraging self-management — applying behaviour-management strategies that result in the participant taking responsibility for their behaviour.

The style used to implement these strategies will vary greatly among sports and across maturity levels of participants. Taking the time to acquire these coaching skills will eventually free the coach to focus on the primary task of enhancing the learning of each participant.

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## CHAPTER 8

# ATHLETE DEVELOPMENT

### The stages of life span development: childhood, adolescence and ageing processes

All people go through the same stages of development in an identical order, but differences in the timing and magnitude of changes create many challenges to the coaching of participants. A number of definitions are available for different stages of the life span. Table 8.1 shows an example of how stages of life span development can be classified.

**Table 8.1: Stages of the life span**

Approximate age (years)	Life span stage	Relevance to physical activity
0 to 1.9	Infancy	Energy expenditure through independent walking begins
2 to 4	Toddler	Free play and imitation
5 to 9	Early to mid-childhood	Can be introduced to many sports and activities
10 to 14	Late childhood/early adolescence	Continued diversity of activity and positive environments
15 to 19	Late adolescence	Specialisation in some sports
20 to 35	Young adulthood	Peak physical function
36 to 45	Young middle age	Family, work, potential for body fat increases
46 to 65	Later middle age	Menopause may alter training responses
66 to 75	Early old age	Increased activity with retirement
76 to 85	Middle old age	Health concerns

The first few years of life should provide children with movement opportunities, outdoor play, imitation of others' activity and creativity in movement.

Activity during the early years of schooling should remain exploratory and extensive. Most of the fundamental motor skills (for example, run, jump and hop) are mastered during the early years of schooling.

By the middle years of primary school, children develop an understanding of rules, structure and participating with and against others. Sports and physical activities are sometimes introduced before mastery of physical, cognitive and social skills can be achieved. Sporting organisations with staged pathways into participation are likely to be more sustainable than those that impose too much too soon.

Adolescent sport can range from the most serious and structured, to the most recreational and spontaneous activities. Flexible and inclusive sporting opportunities are important at all ages, but are critical in preventing inactivity among young people.

Table 8.2 presents physical, cognitive, social and emotional characteristics of young people across the first two decades of life. It also suggests some of the implications for coaching.

Table 8.2: Characteristics of young people

Age group	Physical development	Cognitive (intellectual) development	Social development	Emotional development	Implication for coaching
Toddler to pre-school	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Steady gains in height and weight</li> <li>Language development can be encouraged through the use of movement words such as 'I'm moving backwards. Can you tell me which way you are moving?'</li> <li>Development of large muscle group movement, for example, walk, leap, run and jump</li> <li>Manipulative/ball-handling skills develop to the point of being able to track large soft objects such as beach balls or balloons and they can trap and kick larger sized balls</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Like to watch and imitate</li> <li>Highly imaginative in play</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Will initially like to play alone. The capacity to play in the company of others will gradually increase but may not necessarily occur interactively. Activity with parents is also important</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Move through a stage of developing trust and security to a stage of autonomy. Opportunities for creative and extensive play can significantly advance young people's autonomy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>This age group requires activity leadership rather than coaching</li> <li>Activities can be structured but should be mostly unstructured</li> <li>Structured physical activity includes games and activities that you direct or do with your toddler/pre-schooler</li> <li>Unstructured physical activity occurs through supervised free time for children to play actively on their own or with other children</li> <li>About twice as much unstructured activity should be available than structured activity. Opportunities for creative play should occur daily</li> </ul>

Age group	Physical development	Cognitive (Intellectual) development	Social development	Emotional development	Implication for coaching
5 to 9 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Development in vision, hearing, movement control and physical size</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing awareness of self and others</li> <li>Development of problem-solving skills</li> <li>Learn best by exploring</li> <li>Like repetition</li> <li>Like to understand how things work</li> <li>Will not initially have a strong sense of time</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin to play interactively with others — strong development of social skills</li> <li>Can understand a team concept and likes to belong</li> <li>Are empowered by choices</li> <li>Can understand rules and reasons for decisions when rules are violated if they are made clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Begin by thinking fairness happens when they get their way</li> <li>Can test boundaries</li> <li>Like feeling and seeing their own success and accomplishments</li> <li>Are curious and imaginative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide opportunities to develop a broad range of skills and movement patterns</li> <li>Teach and encourage cooperation and friendship</li> <li>Gradually increase movement spaces and time allocated to practise skills</li> <li>Strategically introduce new skills without overloading coaching cues.</li> <li>Communication should be kept simple and minimal</li> <li>Set up activities that allow participants to achieve success</li> <li>Explore, rotate and discuss leadership and cooperation</li> <li>Make them feel valued and help to develop a sense of belonging and fairness</li> <li>Use their imagination to make new drills or activities fun</li> <li>Establish and follow routines and responsibilities, for example, drink breaks, equipment care</li> </ul>

Age group	Physical development	Cognitive (intellectual) development	Social development	Emotional development	Implication for coaching
10 to 14 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peak growth time — may create an energy drain in older children and adolescents who train seriously in sport</li> <li>For children taking sports participation seriously, they can respond to strictly supervised and developmentally appropriate resistance training regimes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Capable of formal abstract thinking</li> <li>Improved concentration, memory and reliability</li> <li>Emerging sense of humour</li> <li>Interested in fairness and what others say about it</li> <li>Can seek increased opportunities to show responsibility and ownership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growing importance of friendship, peer approval and self-identity</li> <li>Seek recognition of competence</li> <li>Self-esteem is dependent on what others think and self-identity becomes more complex</li> <li>Can develop strong empathy with others</li> <li>Like others to know what is important to them</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationships and beliefs become increasingly important</li> <li>Enjoy a sense of belonging</li> <li>Self-identity is better defined</li> <li>Enjoy being empowered by their own thoughts, decisions and accomplishments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Incorporate fundamental skill with increasing concentration and intensity</li> <li>Schedule and teach recovery and rest</li> <li>Avoid being overly outcome focused</li> <li>Facilitate team or group approaches to winning and losing</li> <li>Plan diversity of training and days off for 'serious participants'</li> <li>Continue to encourage broad participation even within the one sport</li> <li>Be prepared to accept discussion on important issues</li> <li>Teach about reflecting on inappropriate behaviour and remaining positive</li> <li>Encourage, support and facilitate a growing sense of community, for example, volunteer support opportunities</li> <li>Provide peer interaction and social opportunities for group members</li> <li>Share planning and re-planning</li> <li>Comment positively on their importance to you and their strengths</li> </ul>

Age group	Physical development	Cognitive (Intellectual) development	Social development	Emotional development	Implication for coaching
15 to 18 years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Growth in weight and height continuing in boys and slowing in girls</li> <li>Relatively high levels of testosterone in males can support muscle strength and power gains</li> <li>Late developers can come into a 'catch up' phase</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Can learn from mistakes</li> <li>Continuing awareness of strategies and consequences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continued need for peer approval</li> <li>Enjoy belonging and social identity</li> <li>Establish sexual identity</li> <li>Willing to experiment with different roles and responsibilities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enjoy being part of decision-making</li> <li>Maturing ability to discuss, challenge and understand feelings of others</li> <li>Strengthening sense of self-awareness</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Optimal time to begin specialist training in many sports for participants showing a serious commitment. Nevertheless, growth, family and education constraints should prevent an adult load being imposed on a young body (but this may be dependent on the activity)</li> <li>Some participants want only to take part for recreation while others are keen to show a serious effort. Sporting opportunities need to reflect diverse motivations of young people</li> <li>Consider setting individual effort-based goals for early and late developers to decrease a focus on winning and losing</li> </ul>





### Pubertal growth

Every person experiences the same phases of growth, in an identical order. This means that every adult was an infant, toddler, young child and adolescent before becoming an adult. However, the timing and magnitude of growth and development presents many challenges to coaches. In the same squad of under 13-year-old males, there may be some boys who have completed puberty and others who have not commenced pubertal development.

Prior to puberty, growth is a steady increase of around five to six centimetres per year and about 2.5 kilograms per year. Pubertal growth usually begins at ten years in girls and 12 years in boys. Girls are normally two years in advance of boys in their maturation.

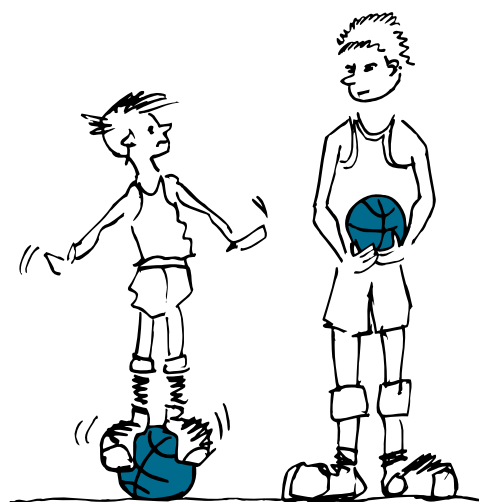
Growth at puberty is best demonstrated by 'peak height velocity' or the year in which the fastest height gains are made. On average, young males can grow about ten centimetres and females about eight centimetres in this year of most rapid growth.

Fat gains differ between boys and girls at puberty, with more fat being gained in girls than boys. The maturation of reproductive organs results in increases in fat tissue around the hips in females during puberty. By 15 years of age, the average male has a body composition of around 15 per cent fat, but females have around 25 per cent fat. Girls who remain active during puberty have a better chance of managing body fat gains than those who do not. In contrast, some boys can remain lean through puberty, regardless of activity. Young females may find this phenomenon particularly unfair. Coaches need to remain supportive and focused on outcomes not involving body composition in young females.

Towards the end of puberty in girls (around 12 to 13 years of age), menarche or the onset of the first period occurs. Menstruation can be accompanied by abdominal discomfort and excess fluid storage in some young females.

During puberty an increased self-awareness emerges. As puberty can occur over a broad range of time in any one group of young people, the coach has to be especially tolerant and accepting of diversity. Coaches should also avoid making comparisons among participants who may be at totally different stages of development. An alternative strategy is to work on individual goals for achievement, using comparisons only to an individual's previous performances. Mutual respect, fairness, tolerance and empathy are characteristic of successful coaching with adolescents.

The consequences of early and late development differ between genders and among sports. Early maturing girls are disadvantaged in activities such as ballet, gymnastics and diving. Early maturation is not as noticeable for girls in less aesthetic-based team activities such as softball, football and netball. Early maturation advantages boys in activities requiring power and speed such as cycling, football and athletics. Late maturation can sometimes disadvantage boys more than girls



because size and power differences among stages of male maturity are more profound in popular team sports in Australia. A potential danger for early maturing boys is an over-exaggerated sense of superiority that is mostly due to pubertal advancement. The superiority however, may be short lived. When other boys catch up, accepting a different place in the 'pecking order' can become difficult for coaches to work through with late developers. Again, highlighting individual goals and avoiding comparison among participants is advisable to help support early and late developers.

**Table 8.3 Growth at puberty**

Males	Females
General age range = 11 to 15 years	General age range = 10 to 14 years
Size and shape characterised by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• significant and rapid height gains</li> <li>• shoulders and upper body broaden</li> <li>• arms and legs can grow faster and give the 'lanky' look.</li> </ul>	
Voice 'cracks' then deepens	Menstruation begins towards the end of puberty — the first period usually occurs between 11 and 13 years of age
Hair growth on arms, legs, chest and face	Gains of hair under arms and in pubic area
Skin changes can involve acne from more mature sweating patterns	Skin changes can involve acne from more mature sweating patterns
Changes in reproductive organs include larger penis and testicles as well as pubic hair development	Growth of breasts is among the first signs of puberty
Body composition changes show predominant increases in muscle weight	Body composition changes show predominant increases in fat gains, particularly around the hips

### Early specialisation

Most authorities on child development believe children should be discouraged from early specialisation in sport. Children should be generalists, not specialists. Most believe child health is better served by lots of opportunities for unstructured play, a diversity of experiences in structured, organised activity, and lots of opportunity for creativity in any activity.

There is limited evidence to show that children who specialise early will be more successful at sport. Adult ability is poorly predicted from child and early adolescent performances for the majority of young people. Many of the social and physical benefits that come from general activity during childhood are denied when children are isolated for specialisation in a sport from an early age.

Early specialisation may lead to unhealthy self-concept and burn-out. When young people decide not to commit to one specific sport, other activity options need to be available. The health and personal consequences of young people dropping out of sport or activity at an early age are immeasurable. The recommendation is to provide lots of unstructured activity, and empower young people by allowing them to learn through play.

Participation statistics in Australian sport and leisure activities are largely made up of recreational participants. Pathways for development need to include recreational streams from an early age. Coaching recreational participants can be challenging because of the range of skills and motivations represented in groups. The emphasis on participation, belonging, social benefits and personal effort may best support recreational participants at any age.

## CASE STUDY

Kim has been squad swimming since she was eight years of age. She is now 14 years old and training four mornings a week. Her coach, Brian, suggests they target next year's state championships because her times have steadily progressed and she did well at the school regional finals. Brian speaks with Kim about adding two after-school training sessions per week to her schedule. However, Kim is uncertain about whether to make this extra commitment. Her two best friends have dropped out of squad training in the past six months and the group of swimmers she is now training with are all older than her. In addition, her mother's new job means Kim will have to take public transport home from the afternoon sessions, which is a worry to Kim and her family.

Kim speaks with Brian about these issues, of which he was not aware. Brian suggests a number of strategies to assist, including:

- providing alternative training activities to the two after-school sessions
- re-organising the groupings of the training squads so that Kim is with other swimmers her own age
- targeting some regional events in the short term to see if Kim is happy with the new training arrangements, and to help her to decide if she wants to work towards the state championships.

## Ageing active populations

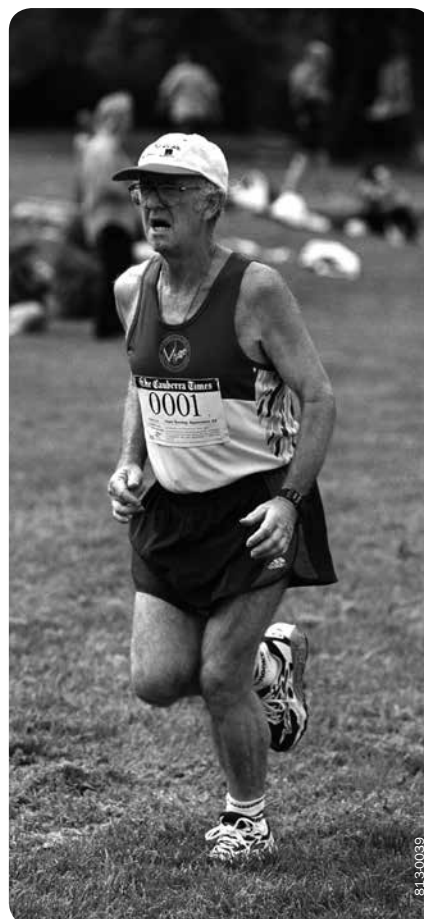
The health and wellbeing benefits to adults who make time for sport far outweigh the risks. Physical activity benefits are particularly important in light of ageing processes that include decreases in resting metabolism, losses of muscle mass, and lifestyle-related decreases in physical activity.

Functional performances of a well-trained 65-year-old can be greater than a sedentary 25-year-old for endurance, muscle strength and flexibility. Coaches therefore need to consider functional age rather than biological age.

### Endurance and ageing

Steady decreases in the rate of oxygen use during exercise occur between the ages of 25 and 65 years. Decreases in endurance performance are more rapid after 65 years, due mainly to decreases in activity. Increasing the amount of endurance or aerobic-based training can slow the decrease and prolong good health. Coaches of mature participants involved in endurance sports or aerobic-based activities should focus on cardiovascular and musculoskeletal health rather than placing a high priority on winning.

Musculoskeletal health can be improved with weight-bearing activity involving repeated loading on the body of two or more times body weight.



Compared with men of the same age, women are more susceptible to changes in bone mineral with age, largely due to decreases in the naturally occurring hormone estrogen at menopause and a generally lower intake of good-quality protein.

### **Strength and ageing**

Ageing processes show muscle strength peaks around 25 years and can be maintained through to 35 to 40 years. Decreases of 20 to 40 per cent of muscle mass are reported as a result of ageing among sedentary adults. Strength losses are mainly due to shrinking of Type II or fast-twitch fibres. Greater losses occur in the strength of arms than legs, because arms are used less. Depending on the condition the person is in when they start, improvements of 150 per cent in strength and 30 per cent in muscle area are possible within three to six months of resistance training.

The potential for strength gains from resistance training are available at any age and should be encouraged and supported.

### **Flexibility and ageing**

Elasticity of tendons, ligaments and joint capsules in adults generally decrease with ageing largely through lack of challenges in daily life. Flexibility in adults can be conserved or improved using gentle movement through range of motion. Warm water is good for flexibility activities for people with conditions such as arthritis or chronic back pain. Flexibility exercises are easily included in an exercise regime, but should not be the only component of activity offered.

### **Balance and ageing**

Balance activities are important for preventing falls. Integrating balance activities into coaching sessions appears to be important in the activities prescribed for older adults.

### **Designing activity programs for older adults**

Longer times for warm-up and recovery may assist in decreasing the risk of injury in adults who are not used to activity or in people who find activity difficult. For people with an articular disease (for example, arthritis), walking should replace jogging or water exercise. In older adults, environmental extremes are poorly tolerated and should also be avoided.

The most frequently prescribed types of exercise among older adults are aerobic activity, resistance training, and balance and flexibility. The range of program possibilities for ageing populations is endless. Resistance training may offer more potential for functional health than other types of training. Quality of life and wellbeing often accompany the physical benefits of activity programs in ageing populations.

## **CASE STUDY**

Steve has played competitive touch football for the past 15 years, and is passionate about the sport. However, since his fortieth birthday, he has become concerned that his performance is not what it used to be, and he has sustained a number of niggling injuries in recent months. He speaks with the coach about his concerns. The coach has a number of suggestions including:

- longer warm-up and cool-down periods for Steve
- ensuring that training activities for Steve are of a higher quality, but reduced quantity
- a greater emphasis on recovery activities such as massage, stretching, and hot and cold showers between training sessions and games.

## Including people with a disability

### Fitness levels

With the possible exception of deaf participants, the physical fitness status of people with disabilities has been found to be at a generally lower level than that of people who do not have disabilities. Research has also shown that, in general, the greater the severity of the impairment, the poorer the physical fitness of the participant is likely to be.

There can also be marked differences between the fitness levels and basic motor skills of people who have congenital impairments (born with an impairment) and those who acquire impairments due to accident or illness. People who have congenital impairments are often less fit, but this is due mainly to lack of opportunity to participate in physical activity rather than any specific physiological reason. This means that some participants will commence a sports program at an earlier entry point than participants who do not have impairments.



### TIPS FOR COACHES WORKING WITH PARTICIPANTS WITH LOW FITNESS LEVELS

- Build in frequent rest periods
- Provide alternatives that help participants to reduce the intensity of an activity, for example, by walking or moving slowly between exercise stations rather than running or hurrying
- Reduce weight-bearing or resistance in strength activities (for example, perform activities from a seated position)

Some participants may have medical conditions that may preclude their participation in certain activities. These could be temporary (due to injury or illness) or due to an existing, perhaps even congenital, condition. In all cases, the coach should consult with the participant, parents or carers, teachers or therapists, who may be able to provide background information and thereby help them to devise an appropriate training program.

Where there are reasons to avoid certain activities, or the coach is not sure following consultation, it is important to provide a positive alternative rather than simply exclude an individual. There are always ways to modify activities or schedules.

### Kinaesthetic awareness

Coaches should recognise that participants will develop body and spatial awareness at different rates. Programs and specific skill development should take this into account. For example, abstract concepts, such as weight transference or feeling a stretch, may not be within the experience of some participants. Give good visual demonstrations, or find a way of isolating the desired movement, for example, stretch from a position supported by the floor (for example, quadriceps stretch), rather than standing.



Ensure that participants who have specific sensory impairments have orientation time. For example, a participant who has a vision impairment should be encouraged to feel and handle equipment, and experience the layout of the area to be used.

A training program can be prepared by beginning with generalisation (skills, fitness, team approach), and then gradually specialising in training for the specific sport.

It is important to develop a training program to suit the participant's individual needs and focus on the participant's ability level. Remember, most participants can do most things most of the time.

## Activity in extreme heat and humidity

When left to their own choice, children and adolescents often do not drink adequately during sport. Poor hydration practices occur in any weather but young people may need extra support when conditions are unusually hot or humid. A hot or humid external environment does not preclude young people from physical activity. However, care and common sense must prevail.

### **Below are recommendations for managing hydration and activity in hot and humid conditions:**

- Where possible, land-based outdoor physical activity should be avoided in extremely hot conditions, particularly when radiant heat is at its peak.
- In areas where the weather is not hot and humid most of the year, consider altering competitions, training or events when the environmental temperature and humidity are 'locally excessive'.
- Organisers of activities conducted under hot conditions should provide sufficient shade and regular drinking opportunities when the activity cannot be cancelled or delayed. This is particularly critical for young people whose fitness and/or state of acclimatisation are uncertain or varied.
- The risks associated with activity in the heat for overweight children and adolescents should be understood by coaches. Fat tissue heats up sooner than muscle tissue and stays hot longer. Extra precautions to lessen the potential for heat gain are required (for example, lessen activity demands, decrease time of exposure, provide rest and shade, prolong recovery and always make drinks accessible).
- When the weather suddenly gets hotter or more humid, young people may take longer to acclimatise. It is recommended that the duration and intensity of exercise decrease during the first few weeks of hot and humid weather. Coaches should consider increased times for rest, using shaded areas, and increasing the number of mandatory drink breaks.
- Water is the preferred drink whenever young people are active. However, more fluid appears to be consumed by young people when the drinks offered are palatable to them. Therefore, a colder temperature of water or flavoured drinks may need to be considered if a young person is losing a lot of weight during activity.
- Young people should establish regular fluid replacement routines during training and competition. Regular and effective drinking practices should become habitual before, during and after activity. Individuals should monitor weight changes before and after sporting activity and know the amount of fluid they are likely to require.
- Appropriate clothing is recommended for young participants. Light-coloured and loosely woven fabrics may be the most appropriate clothing in the heat. This clothing should also protect the skin against permanent damage from the sun.



## Nutrition for active young people

People who are active and eat a variety of nutritious food tend to be healthier, live longer and are at less risk of developing lifestyle illnesses such as heart disease or diabetes. Eating a variety of foods each day will provide the range of nutrients that children and their families need. For balanced, healthy eating a coach should encourage children and their families to:

- eat the recommended amounts of the five food groups each day: vegetables, fruit, breads and cereals, meats (and their alternatives) and dairy
- eat plenty of plant foods (vegetables, legumes, fruit, bread, cereal, rice and pasta), moderate amounts of animal foods (milk, yoghurt, cheese, meat, fish, poultry and eggs), and small amounts of the extra foods (including oils, butter and margarines) in appropriate portions for each family member
- choose varieties of foods from within each of the five food groups from day to day, week to week and throughout different seasons
- choose low-salt foods and use sparingly
- drink plenty of water
- encourage set times for meals and limit the number of snacks to three per day
- avoid eating in front of the television and do not use food as a reward or comfort
- remember that breakfast is important. A breakfast including cereal, toast, fruit and dairy is a great start to the day
- essential nutrients in vegetables and fruits vary according to their colour. Turn a healthy snack into a colourful treat by mixing fruit and vegetables from each group:
  - green beans, snow peas, capsicum, celery, lettuce, grapes and apples
  - red and yellow capsicum, corn, carrots, apples, bananas and apricots
  - purple grapes, plums and berries.



## Young people and sport

### Is fun the most essential need in children's sport?

Most surveys of young people's participation in sport list fun as a major reason for participation. A fun environment includes elements such as positive feedback, feelings of identity, belonging, cooperation, achievement, friendship, respect, fair play and responsibilities. The support of the coach is pivotal to achieving these.

Most campaigns aiming to attract children to new activities promote the concept of fun. However, there may be less-skilled, less-experienced or less-motivated children for whom sport is not likely to be fun. For these children, it may be important to recognise effort and achievements. For less active, less-skilled or less-experienced children, tasks need to be kept extremely simple to ensure feelings of achievement and satisfaction.



### Do children play sport to improve skills?

Successful experiences in sport provide incentive to continue to participate in physical activity throughout life. Mastery of sports skills can build confidence and competence in young people. Mastery of fundamental motor skills between the early and middle years of primary school is important. Coaches who praise skill development can provide the positive reinforcement necessary to continue and improve.

### Do children play sport to get fit?

Although children may say they play sport to improve physical fitness, their understanding of fitness and what it takes to be fit is very different from adults. What many children are most likely saying is that it feels good to move and to be able to keep moving for hours on end. There is a big difference between what is required to make adults and children 'fit'. Children can perform well in cardiovascular stress tests without the rigorous training regimes needed by many adults to maintain their fitness.

### Can children play sport to manage their weight?

The alarming prevalence of obesity in young people has been highlighted in recent years. One of the best ways to prevent excessive weight gain in children is participation in sport and activity from a young age. However, parents who enrol their child in sport or other activity for one or two nights a week with the explicit goal of weight management are likely to be disappointed if this activity is the only strategy being used. Activity must include frequent opportunities for extended free play.



### CASE STUDY

Leah is a tall but overweight 12-year-old hockey player. She likes to play in the goals and is an extremely popular member of the team. Hockey is the only sport Leah plays and sometimes she finds it hard to keep up at training. Even though her team-mates are good friends to her, the opposition team and supporters frequently give Leah a hard time. She tries not to get upset but her parents tell the coach that this will be her last season.

Leah's coach is keen for her to continue in the sport, and spends some time with Leah and her parents discussing the situation. The coach offers to develop an individual fitness program for Leah to help her improve her stamina. They also discuss some nutritional strategies that might assist Leah to lose weight. The coach also decides to raise the issue of the comments made by the opposition teams and their supporters at the regular monthly meeting held with all the teams in the competition.

## Social benefits of young people's participation in sport

Young people can learn how to work together in a group and set about achieving group goals through playing sport. Coaches can work towards improved socialisation by strategies including:

- emphasising examples of supportive and positive behaviour among group members
- mixing roles and pairs of participants frequently
- encouraging a strong sense of belonging and inclusion.

Through sport, children and families can build and maintain strong friendships. Encouragement of social interaction within and outside of sport can contribute to the social benefits of sport.

Most team or group activities with children involve social interaction. Ideally, when groups of young people are active together, they share opportunities to engage positively with their peers and coaches. There is also scope to build a supportive atmosphere among children, family and spectators.

Social interaction in children's sport can lead to increases in personal confidence and self-awareness. The social environment in sport must be positive so that children can have the opportunity to stay happy and relaxed.

Many people believe sport has the added benefit of keeping adolescents engaged enough to limit anti-social behaviour. There is evidence of a lower prevalence of undesirable risk-taking behaviour and better nutrition in active youth compared to their less-active peers.

Positive sporting experiences can also help in the moral development of young people by building an understanding of empathy for others, social justice and shared success.

Building friendships, decision-making and problem-solving skills, team or group spirit, healthy relationships with adults and a strong sense of community through sport provide immeasurable social benefits to young people.

### **Health and socioeconomic status**

While it may seem a generalisation, research indicates that Indigenous Australians face a number of health and socioeconomic disadvantages. Indigenous Australians suffer a higher level of illness and infectious diseases, are more likely to live in crowded accommodation, are more likely to be long-term unemployed or low-income earners. Therefore, the coach should not assume that all participants have had a good night's sleep and a meal before training or games. This may be the reason for lethargic performance or lack of attention.

## **CASE STUDY**

Susan is the coach of a successful athletics squad in Perth. Susan works with several coaches in regional areas of Western Australia to identify talented Indigenous athletes. On several occasions, the more promising athletes have moved to Perth to train with Susan. However, the transition to city life and a more intense training schedule have often not been successful, and in most cases, the athletes have returned to their homes or have dropped out of Susan's squad within 12 months.

To help this situation, Susan has been working with a local Indigenous sport development officer to find out how she can create an environment for Indigenous athletes that will better suit their needs. Strategies that they have identified are:

- the need for a family support structure for athletes moving from regional areas to the city (that is, living arrangements with an extended family or friends)
- educating/supporting the parents and family left behind so that they know the athlete is being looked after and that the move will benefit the athlete's sporting career in the long run
- setting up a peer support system with successful Indigenous athletes in Perth from other sports

- ensuring that her training program incorporates lots of group sessions to enable interaction and support among the athletes
- meeting regularly with the athletes to discuss their training programs, personal needs and other lifestyle issues
- where an athlete does not wish to move to Perth, setting up a series of regular visits by Susan to the athlete in their home town, and/or visits by the athlete to Perth.

## The role of competition in children's sport

Popular sports and activities often involve some competitive experiences. The position statement from School Sport Australia states 'competition is neither inherently good nor bad. It is one of the conditions of sport at all levels of participation'. This suggests that a healthy sense of competition has the benefits of teaching children to participate, win and lose. However the extent to which competition is emphasised can cause problems.

### Competition without winning

Adolescent boys often rate 'winning' as a strong motivation for participating in sport or other activities. However younger children give winning a lower priority. Many children are not acutely aware of scores or results of activities. To avoid an over-emphasis on competition, adults should be encouraged to ask 'how did you enjoy it?' rather than 'who won?'

Junior sporting organisations that opt for competitions without finals demonstrate that winning is not the critical component of competition for young people. The focus can remain on positive experiences, such as achievement of physical, cognitive and social skills.

De-emphasising winning also permits coaches time to pay attention to fair play and equality. At least for children in their primary school years, if winning a trophy or competition is the major focus, then only the most skilled and most fit will benefit.

### Catering for young people with varying levels of ability

Being an inclusive coach requires an understanding of the differences in skill, motivation, ability and needs within any group of young people. Young people who begin playing a sport or who join a group later than others have fundamental rights to participation.

Strategies to help newer participants may include:

- before joining a group, hold a 'come and try day' for skill development with smaller numbers of children to allow a 'catch up'
- design some activities that allow each child to select their own starting level
- give some children the option to watch what is happening before they take part
- include short segments of one-to-one development within training sessions
- remind all members of the group about being supportive and understanding of other participants
- 'buddy' new members with children who are particularly good at including others
- give positive praise for efforts, regardless of the outcome
- avoid criticisms of poor beginners' skills.

Beginners need simple and limited cues regarding technique and a lot of opportunities for practice. The temptation to teach too much too soon results in 'over coaching' and denies participants opportunities to explore and consolidate skills.

For beginners, key words, rules and codes of practice should be slowly introduced. One or two words, and actions that represent them, give children opportunities to learn through hearing and sight. But most learning happens through doing. 'To hear is to forget, to see is to remember, but to do is to understand.'

When new children join a group, key issues that others may be familiar with should be re-explained by the coach. Regular opportunities for everyone to get a fair share of time to be active, regardless of ability, sets an important example of equality.

### Unmotivated participants

Regardless of the length of participation, any group can have some members who regularly do not want to be there. The unmotivated young participant is perhaps the most difficult for coaches. A range of reasons for the lack of motivation may exist. However, a positive, inclusive atmosphere should be offered to all young people. Allowing people to select, lead or change some of the components of training may provide a stronger sense of ownership and belonging. Suggestions of alternative squads, teams or groups could be made in private, or suggesting a short break away from training may also serve to refresh the spirit of young people who do not appear motivated on a regular basis.

#### The Greatest Gift

'Give kids a positive self-concept, treat them as though they are already what they hope to become, empower them to see their own competence, allow them to learn what they can be and they will feel at home in the world.'

David Gallahue 1996

## Summary

- Sporting performance changes with growth and development and is particularly diverse around the time of puberty.
- Early specialisation is not desirable. Children should be generalists rather than specialists.
- Talent identification testing remains imperfect with limited success from results of existing tests.
- The health benefits from weight-bearing physical activity such as endurance exercise and progressive resistance training in older adults can extend to quality of life and social health.
- Individual programming with careful progressions are essential for the sporting performance of participants with disabilities.
- Common sense and care are required to help the performance of young people being active in unusually hot and humid conditions.
- Advice on balanced nutrition is available for young people playing sport.
- Fitness and skills will improve with positive play and practice rather than with the rigid training regimes shown to be successful with adult and more professional athletes.
- Positive sporting experiences are only one of a number of strategies required to support weight management needs in young people.
- Social benefits of young people playing sport include friendship, leadership and cooperation.
- A de-emphasis on winning during competition for young people allows them to focus on other outcomes such as enjoyment, friendships, skill development and satisfaction.

## References and further reading

Canada's Physical Activity Guide for Children  
([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/child\\_youth/children/index.html](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/pau-uap/paguide/child_youth/children/index.html)).

Dietitians Association of Australia ([www.daa.asn.au](http://www.daa.asn.au)).

Healthy Active Living for Children and Youth  
([www.caringforkids.cps.ca](http://www.caringforkids.cps.ca)).

National Association for Sport and Physical Activity 2002, *Active Start: a statement of physical activity guidelines for children from birth to five years*  
([www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=toddlers.html](http://www.aahperd.org/naspe/template.cfm?template=toddlers.html)).

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