

Tools for a healthy training environment

TEAM RULES

Team rules are the agreed upon principles governing the team's behaviour, both collectively and individually. Rules recognize the coach's role in modelling and upholding the expected behaviours. All members of the team (coach and participants alike) should be aware of the consequences for breaking those rules.

How do the team rules contribute to a psychologically safe environment?

- Team rules provide boundaries and contribute to the team's expectations of each other. There's a general understanding of how to conduct oneself in the team environment.
- When rules promote respect and trust, they encourage a psychologically safe environment.

How do you develop team rules?

- When determining the team rules, begin by asking yourself these questions:
 - How much input will participants have in setting the rules?
 - What consequences are in place to keep us accountable?
 - What does accountability mean to me? How do I define it? How do the participants define it?
- If you're developing the rules together, do so in a group discussion at the first team meeting. Be open to the fact that as time goes on (example: later on in the season) you may need to adjust certain rules or add new ones. Developing team rules is an ongoing process.



How are team rules communicated, reinforced and applied?

- There are many ways to do this. Try different methods and find one that works best for you and your team.
- For example, you may decide to record the team rules and consequences on a piece of paper and have everyone sign it. If someone breaks a rule, you can refer back to that signed agreement.

What are important elements to remember?

- Establish team rules at the very beginning of the season.
- Have a list of your own rules, but be open to adding some rules from participants.
- Ask participants to contribute their own rules as this encourages them to take ownership and responsibility.
- Ensure everyone understands the criteria of the rules and their consequences. Be sure that everyone also understands the positive impact to the environment when those rules are upheld.

CORE VALUES

Within this context, core values are those that reflect a coach's purpose and that coach's reason for coaching. Think of core values as the essence of who you are as a coach (Gilbert, 2017).

How do core values contribute to a psychologically safe environment?

- Understanding your own values and how they interact with the team's values allows you to build a consistent environment.
- Your behaviours and actions should exemplify your core values. Participants are watching your every move. For example, if respect is 1 of your core values, demonstrate respect when you speak to participants, officials, parents and opposite teams, even when you disagree with them.
- By being consistent with your behaviour, you add to the trust bank and maintain a psychologically safe environment.

How do you develop core values?

- Incorporate your coaching core values into your overall coaching philosophy.
- Some coaches develop these core values based on their own values, while other coaches work with their team to develop their values for the season. For example, the Canadian Women's Soccer team adapting a line of the national anthem from "we see thee rise" to "together we rise" to show their core value of putting the team first.



How are core values communicated, reinforced and applied?

- Communicate your core values to participants and their parents (when applicable). You may want to have a relevant paragraph or small speech on hand for sharing your coaching philosophy with them.
 - Record participants' core values and display the document where everyone can see it. What are important elements to remember?
 - Take time to write down your core values and reflect on how your behaviour is essential to understanding who you are.
 - Ask yourself how you want to behave and how you'll know you're behaving that way. Create criteria for yourself.
- Your values may shift and change throughout your coaching career, especially as your knowledge develops as you gain experience. Revisit and reflect upon your values regularly.
 - When reflecting, ask yourself the following questions:
 - When do I feel most happy? What was I doing, who was I with and what made me happy in that moment?
 - When do I feel proud? Why did I feel this way? Did others share in my pride? Who were they?
 - When do I feel fulfilled? What happened to make me feel this way? What meaning did I take away from this experience? What other factors may have contributed to this feeling?

EXPECTATIONS

Expectations are the specific, observable behaviours that both the coach and the participants should exhibit. While core values are intrinsic, expectations are the specific actions that you're willing to do.

How do expectations contribute to a psychologically safe environment?

- Much like team rules, when you communicate expectations, it places everyone on the same page and informs everyone how they'll interact with each other.
- A common expectation in a sports environment is accountability. Be aware that everyone may have a different definition of what accountability means. So, while it's important to communicate expectations, it's also equally essential to define what those expectations mean.

How do you develop expectations?

- Begin by reviewing the core values and team rules and ensure there is clear criteria for both of them.
- Establish expectations during the pre-season time and include participants' input.

How are expectations communicated, reinforced and applied?

- Each time an expectation is determined, ask participants for examples to show they understand what is being asked of them.
- Observe participants' behaviours, attitudes and actions. If they don't meet the agreed upon expectations, provide feedback to get the participants back on track.
- Likewise, if you don't meet a participant's expectations, be open to feedback.

What are important elements to remember?

- Ask yourself, "What do I want participants to do and how will I know they're behaving in a way that upholds those expectations?"
- Discuss the topic of expectations with other coaches and parents. What behaviours do they see you and the participants exhibiting?



ROUTINES

Routines are a series of actions a participant or coach performs to prepare for competition or practice. Routines aid participants and coaches in getting to their ideal performance state.

How do routines contribute to a psychologically safe environment?

- When done well, routines can help participants and coaches raise or lower their energy levels and lower stress levels. For example, if a participant is unapproachable after a loss, provide a routine to get them back to a more approachable state of mind. Conversely, if a participant needs a way to channel their stress to perform well in a competition, come up with a routine that will best get them energized and focused.

How do you develop routines?

- One method is to keep a journal about what helps and hinders your mental state in a competition and in practice. Encourage participants to do the same. Journaling encourages self-awareness and will help to identify which routines (or elements from routines) are most helpful.

How are routines communicated, reinforced and applied?

- If a participant doesn't have a routine (or has an ineffective one), suggest a routine that may work better for them. Keep in mind that good routines are developed over time and are based on the individual. Revisit your routines regularly and assess their effectiveness.

What are important elements to remember?

- Start a journal and document how you prepare for competitions, games or practices. Ask participants to do the same. Share with each other what you've learned.



SPEAKING FOR YOURSELF

State what you've observed or heard in a straightforward way:

(To the parent of a player) "You and Jamie left right after the game last night and Jamie missed the team's evaluation of the game. Jamie told me tonight that it was because you are unhappy with his playing time."

State your opinion, beliefs, and feelings about the facts:

"I think it's important that everyone attends team meetings. It's the time when players can bring up anything they're unhappy about to the team and the team can find a way to solve the problem together."

Share what's beneath your conclusions:

"I've learned through experience that athletes are able to resolve their differences among themselves when given support and some skills. The team decided at the beginning of the season how they were going to practice and play. This has worked well since I've been coaching this team. I am disappointed you may see things differently."

Then ask how the other person sees it:

"I'd like to hear what you're thinking."

"I need to hear your point of view so we can figure out a win-win solution."

Tips

Use 'I' language to help others understand that you are speaking from your point of view.

Don't exaggerate.

Stay away from saying something like "Parents always think they know better than their children" or "I'm the professional here." Statements like this will guarantee a defensive or perhaps hostile reaction.



EIGHT TIPS OF EFFECTIVE LISTENING

1. Explore feeling before facts
 - “What I am hearing you say is...”
 - “It sounds like you’re feeling...”
2. Be empathetic and non-judgmental
 - Values the person speaking and what they are saying
 - Accepts the speaker’s feelings
 - Does not make judgments
3. When defensive, ask a question
 - “Where does that come from?”
 - “Say some more.”
4. Use eye contact and listening body language
 - Looks directly at the person speaking
 - Occasionally nods the head slowly to show understanding
5. Provide encouragement
 - “I see what you mean.”
6. Listen attentively
 - Remains silent when the person is speaking
 - Gives the speaker complete attention
7. Tell back
 - “What I heard you say was...”
 - “It seems that you...”
8. Ask questions to get more information
 - “Are you saying that ...?”
 - “Do you mean that ...?”
 - “Are we talking about ...?”