

OUR SPORTS CLUB GOES ALL-IN.

Our work



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What is youth coaching?

The application of youth coaching in sport starts with understanding what coaching is, what it can look like, and what role coaching plays in sport.

While there is no fixed definition for the word, most definitions emphasise the use of a structured learning process meant to help individuals and teams reach their goals.

Coaching is a process in which the coach has structured and focused interactions with youth players and uses appropriate strategies, tools, and techniques in order to bring about desired and sustainable changes that benefit the youth player and have a positive influence on the team and the club.

The relationship between the coach and the youth player is central to the coaching process and results in a partnership where the needs of the youth player are addressed (Gregory & Levy, 2010). The coach remains involved with the youth player for an extended period of time and adapts the learning process to facilitate self-directed learning.

While coaching can take many forms, it is usually focused on building and strengthening skills using the following methods (Rush & Shelden, 2012):

- Active listening
- Joint planning to determine goals and expectations
- Observation
- Formulating exercises and staging interventions
- Reflection
- Giving feedback



Social skills amongst youth players

In the case of youth players, the teammates as well as the coaches and trainers influence the play-related and moral development of the youth player. In short, the way the coach manages the team partly determines the future social and technical skills of the youth players. This makes it extremely valuable for a coach to learn how to coach effectively.

The effective youth coach is able to:

- Make sport fun for all players
- Create an open and inclusive team environment in which all players feel seen
- Develop the mind, body, and moral character of the players by creating learning experiences
- Set mental, physical and moral goals for their players
- Give youth players autonomy and responsibility
- Connect success with reaching team and personal goals
- Build strong relationships with the network surrounding the youth players
- Be consistent, honest, and organised
- Celebrate mistakes as part of the development process



These objectives can be achieved by:

1. Placing the focus on development

Focus on learning and developing new skills. Every time youth players are evaluated based on their effort and personal growth, you stimulate a climate in which the players are motivated by their own development. In this climate, youth players gain more self-confidence and pleasure in sports. This is partly due to the fact that youth players with a focus on personal development experience much less pressure to be better than others. In addition, the focus on personal development ensures that youth players learn to understand the various components of a skill and they develop the ability to judge themselves better.

2. Providing room for their own contribution

Involve the youth players by letting them participate in the decision-making process when it comes to setting goals, exercises and social norms. In teams where youth players have responsibility, players score higher on self-confidence.

You can stimulate the autonomy of players by asking questions, helping players to reflect and initiating discussions among them.

3. Rewarding youth players

Reward growth and effort both on a personal level and on the team level. In doing so, make sure that, as a coach, you create balance within the team and try to distribute your positive attention evenly.



4. Working on social cohesion

In your training sessions, use various forms of training with sufficient attention to the cooperative learning environment. Let youth players solve challenges together and make sure the team composition is varied as much as possible. Have players cooperate with teammates who are less skilled, equally skilled, and more skilled than they are (emotionally or technically).

Another way to strengthen social cohesion is to use positive language during training sessions and matches. Here are some examples of positive language you can use as a coach in a team setting:

Problem solvers, Team Tigers, Everyone, The Team, Technical Geniuses, Hot Shots, Shooting Stars, etc.

For positive team behaviour, use an empowering form of positive feedback whenever possible, where you:

- Define concrete behaviour
- Emphasise the description
- Apply this to all players
- State the progression towards mastery
- Add a question to increase the awareness of the player

5. Evaluating performances

Give sufficient feedback on a personal and team level. Evaluate personal growth, development, effort, and the learning process itself. Take into account the average attention span of youth players: evaluations should ideally not take longer than 2-5 minutes.



6. Choosing the right moment

Youth players need time to reach their goals, and you need to give them sufficient space to do so. This means that, as a coach, you consciously choose the moment when you, together with the youth player, will evaluate their progress.

When it comes to the timing of feedback, it is preferable to give feedback soon after the event, making sure that you give evaluative feedback on a personal level outside the hearing of teammates and that the feedback is specific and constructive.

7. Personalising

The youth players in your team are usually in different stages of development. This means that within a team you may find huge differences in the mastery of physical tasks and/or in emotional development. These differences arise from the progression of maturity and the different development in certain areas, which can be child-related (e.g. due to the degree of experience) but can also arise from the presence of physical or learning limitations.

It is therefore important to be aware of these differences and to look critically at whether exercises are inclusive in character (feasible for everyone). It is up to the coach and/or trainer to look for possible adaptations to make an exercise inclusive in character.

At a higher level, the personalisation of exercises also has an effect on the composition of your training sessions, since it is important to include exercises that are tailored to personal and team goals.

Given the diversity in our society, it is also valuable for many coaches to apply personalisation on a cultural level, whereby the coach or trainer uses the cultural characteristics, experiences and perspectives of players for development purposes, for example by differentiating instruction on this basis.



Planning and preparing

Planning and preparing coaching sessions are very important and allow coaches to develop more quickly. A coach spends on average 20 minutes a week planning their training sessions and needs about 10 minutes for preparation for each training session.

Writing down the training plans provides a basis for revision and evaluation and is therefore always recommended. It is easier for other coaches to think along with a coach if they have a tangible overview of how the training sessions are put together. The training plans also give the trainers and parents more insight into the learning process.

Start by drawing up a monthly or quarterly plan describing which goals are central and which milestones will be celebrated and evaluated.

Focus on tactical and social skills. The monthly plan can be translated into 4 weekly plans in which the training sessions are elaborated.

When designing the training sessions, it is important to consider:

- The skills of the youth players in attendance
- The required materials
- The required space
- The required time per exercise (including preparation and potential debriefings)
- The waiting time for the youth players per exercise
- The goal per exercise
- The overarching learning goal for the team
- The individual learning goals of the youth players
- The connection of the lessons from the training with previous and future training sessions



Habits of a successful youth coach

In addition to the technical and tactical elements in a training session, the effective coach or trainer determines per monthly training plan which inclusive skill they want to focus on.

The coach/trainer then selects various exercises in which the skill can be incorporated and makes the necessary adjustments to the programme. From the All-in skills exercises for youth players, the coach/trainer selects one exercise per training week that will be used in a complementary way.

Training inclusive skills:

1. Choose an inclusive skill
2. Per training session, select at least one exercise with which to link the skill
3. Weave the skill into the exercise

The structure of the lesson to which the inclusive skill is linked works the same as a regular exercise:

1. Pitch
2. Reinforce
3. Transfer

The pitch is kept short and does not exceed two minutes. There should be room after the pitch for discussion and questions regarding the definition of the skill or the application of the relevant skill in the sport. The coach then explains the exercise, after which they ask the team how they think the skill relates to the exercise and whether they can give examples.



During the exercise, the coach/trainer focuses on two aspects.

1. Instructing around the technique and 2. Giving positive feedback to players who demonstrate the chosen skill. In both cases, it is important not to speak in general terms, but to make it as specific and tangible as possible. For example, not: well done! But rather: Johnny, good run.

At the end of the exercises, the coach/trainer reflects on the exercise with the team. The coach asks specific questions so that the players analyse the exercise and link moments to the skill. The coach then draws parallels with the application of the skill in daily life. Preferably, the coach does this by asking the team questions about how the skill can be applied in daily life and encouraging them to apply it. The application can be stimulated by asking players to share during the following training session how they applied the skill in their daily life and how they experienced this application.

This follow-up can be held before the warm-up of the training or during the cool-down period.



What can you do during your training sessions?

Welcome the players and facilitate introductions

A good start is half the work - this statement also applies to the start of the sports season. One way to get off to a good start is by giving the youth players a warm welcome as soon as they step onto the field for the first time.

Ask the players to introduce themselves to each other and help them with this where necessary. Also allow them to introduce their parents/carers - as coach, you will also build a relationship with them.

For multilingual players, it is valuable to experience that this aspect of their identity is also embraced in the team. Ask new youth players to teach you (and the team) how to say a few words in their mother tongue or second language and use this knowledge during the season. This stimulates the connection with their cultural heritage and contributes to the self-confidence of the player.

Example:

“Hi everyone! I am - your name - and I am very happy to welcome you to our team! All the trainers and coaches have been looking forward to our meeting today. We think that you will all enjoy being part of the team. It’s going to be a fun and enjoyable season during which you will learn a lot, have the opportunity to improve and develop new skills but most importantly, I think you will make new friends as well.”

Another way to welcome new players is by standing on the side of the field at the beginning of the training session and welcoming each player individually.



Explaining the “why”

Youth players find it very difficult to make connections. Therefore, always explain the underlying reason for an exercise or rule. For example: "This exercise helps you to...". By making this a routine, you help them develop self-discipline and stimulate intrinsically motivated commitment.

This also applies to naming the consequences of certain behaviour. Always explain what specific behaviour you see or see coming and state what the consequences are and why. This gives children the choice to continue the behaviour or not. If a youth player continues the behaviour, he or she consciously chooses for the consequence. It is important that the consequence is actually carried out in order to maintain social standards.

Giving positive feedback

Most youth players are not aware of their own development. Coaches and trainers have a better view of their progression and can help youth players with recognising and acknowledging personal growth by giving them positive feedback.

Positive feedback can be given on the basis of an improved skill or on the basis of effort shown. This not only shows the appreciation a youth player needs but also ensures that the youth player remains focused on personal growth.



There are 100 different ways to say “well done”

Positive feedback is one of the most valuable instruments you possess as a coach or trainer. If players believe that they can do something, they will often achieve it. Below is a list of general positivity, and don't forget: the more specific you make a compliment, the more effective it is!

- You have really outdone yourself with (...)!
- You have worked incredibly hard on (...)!
- How happy I am about your efforts today
- Congratulations on (...)
- Well done
- Fantastic
- Your parents will be proud!
- How nicely done
- Good work
- Very good, would you like to show the rest of the team?
- Thank you for (describe the behaviour)
- That is an interesting point
- You can do it!
- Nice going!
- You're on the right track!
- That is great work!
- Keep up the good work!
- I'm proud of you!
- Keep it up!
- Wow!
- That looks very good already
- I'm happy to see that...
- You've worked so hard!
- I saw that (behaviour/action) has improved a lot!
- Much better!
- What a pleasure to be able to coach you!
- How cleverly done!
- Well spotted!
- I can see that you've worked hard on (...)
- Look, now you've got it!
- Yes, that's it!
- Well solved!
- How well you saw that!
- That is going in the right direction!
- You gave 100%, really great!
- What a brilliant action!
- You solved it so well, my compliments!
- I saw that you used technique x each time. Very well done!



Providing technical instructions and challenge

Older youth players judge the involvement of their coaches and trainers partly on the extent to which they manage to keep the training challenging and make room for technical instructions on a personal level.

Setting personal goals

Training goals are important and are directly connected with the goals for the match. Setting these goals contributes to the players focusing on their own skills and personal development. We always advise that the players should be allowed to set the growth goals themselves. In this way, youth players experience more autonomy and their intrinsic motivation increases. Trainers and coaches can help with translating these personal goals to learning strategies for the training sessions and with creating a reward system for when goals are achieved.

For individual players, it is nice to have a long-term goal and a number of short-term goals that are linked with it.

A short-term goal could be: Throw 200 extra free throws in a week and record these throws (basketball), or: visualise taking the perfect penalty corner every night (hockey), or: shoot 10 times into the top corner of the goal during every training session with your eyes closed from the spot to improve your muscle memory (football).

A long-term goal could be: Improving the free throw success rate to 75% this season (basketball).



If, as a coach, you do not use individual meetings between player and coach, you can ask the parents to set personal development goals with their child. It is important that these goals are written down, are formulated SMART and are divided into a long-term goal and a number of short-term goals that the players THEMSELVES have chosen.

Furthermore, ask them to set positive goals by describing desired behaviour. This helps youth players to maintain a positive mindset.

The goals are handed over to you as the coach so that you can check their formulation and feasibility. After agreement, the coach gives the youth player the original or a copy of their goals. The player can stick this sheet on their door at home (or hang it on the fridge).

It is valuable for the players to share their personal goals with the rest of the team so that the players can help each other achieve them.



Setting team goals

Team goals are constructed in a similar way, but it goes without saying that setting the team goals is a group process in which every team member should be present. It is important that all players in the team can unambiguously explain the group goals.

Coaches and trainers can choose - with teams that have been playing together longer - to start with a discussion of the results of the previous season, discussing the strengths and weaknesses of the team and the desired changes. The team then decides together on the goals for that year (or season). All team goals must be formulated in SMART terms: Specific, Measurable, Acceptable, Realistic and Time-bound.

If a team has the objective to develop more game insight (we want to learn to stand in the right place), that is the objective that also deserves the focus during training. It is up to the coach and trainer to translate each team objective into exercises and to connect measurable points to them: How does your team/players know if they are improving?

Into which segments (sub-goals) can the goal be divided and which learning strategies apply? What data does the team link to the sub-goals?

If a team has the goal of increasing its ball possession to 50%, it is important to plan the exercises accordingly during the training sessions. Also include the team in the explanation of why you divide certain goals into segments. This will give them a better understanding and appreciation of the complexity of some tasks. Assess the progress together with the team. Are they satisfied? Then choose a new goal together and celebrate the achievement of your current goal!

As with individual goals, team goals are regularly evaluated together and adjusted if necessary. Adjusting or changing goals is sometimes necessary and it is up to the coach to guide the team in this. For example, it is a valuable lesson to learn that adjusting does not mean that the team has failed.



Evaluating goals

It is important to set aside different times in the season to help players evaluate their goals. Some seasons offer more room for one-on-one conversations than others. In the latter case, a coach can ask guardians or parents to help youth players with these evaluations.

An important evaluation moment is at the end of the season. At the end of the year, coaches go over how youth players have experienced their personal development. If necessary, a coach can also give tips so that a youth player can still work on certain aspects their technique that are connected with their personal goal in the off-season.

Regarding the team goals, the coach can ask the following questions after each game: Which ideas and actions helped us get closer to our goal? What can we improve on last week's process?



Stimulating cooperative learning

Cooperative learning stimulates the group cohesion, increases the autonomy of the youth players and improves learning ability. There are very many cooperative techniques available for a coach or trainer to use.

Before a match or training session, you as the coach can already work on the basis of the expected team composition. Divide the team into three groups: attack, midfield and defence. Let each group discuss the tactics for the relevant section among themselves, but link them to the team goal. What possibilities are there? And how are they going to implement them?

Once all groups have arrived at a plan of action, it is up to each group to explain their approach to the rest of the team. The aim is for the team members to look together at how the various tactics can be combined.

Furthermore, try to limit exercises involving exclusion. These are exercises in which a player who is failing something or who cannot keep up with the level is taken out of the game. The players with the greatest need for development are generally excluded quickly, which has a negative impact on their self-confidence and can also encourage competitive behaviour.

A final low-threshold way to stimulate cooperative behaviour is to do team exercises in smaller groups. This minimises the chance of excluding an individual because their technical skills are less developed or because a player does not fit in as well in the group.



Also coach on an emotional level

Parents, peers, and coaches can support youth players in the development of their emotion regulation. Guide the youth players in discovering the different strategies they can use when overwhelmed by an emotion. Do the youth players already have a broad understanding of the available strategies? Then the guidance lies in helping them explore the strategies so that they can determine which strategies suit them. In the final phase, the coach's guidance lies in actually using the strategies before a youth player is overwhelmed by the emotion.

If there are interpersonal conflicts, it is important to show the youth players, through their own behaviour, how situations can be de-escalated and how one can offer comfort. This helps the players involved to handle conflicts.

Putting fair play first

Fair play is a core value in sport. Youth players - particularly in the youngest age group - must learn to grasp the essence of fair play and how to apply the principles that flow from it to their own lives.

This lesson is particularly valuable for youth players who come from situations where there was abuse or social inequality. Their construct of integrity, honesty and morality has been distorted by these experiences. These youth players need to give new meaning to these words and the coach plays an important role in this process.



What can you do after training sessions?

Positive feedback from team members

Give the youth players the room to compliment one another and to give feedback on the best actions of their teammates. In this way, you focus the attention of the players on the strengths of their teammates. At the same time, you satisfy your players' need to be seen and appreciated.

You can make this exercise easier for younger players by pairing them up with another player before the start of training (or a match). The idea here is that they focus on the player they are paired with and watch their best actions/reactions. After the training, the pairs come together and share what they have seen of each other.

Examples:

“I saw Mark give Jonah a hand after he fell, and I thought that was very nice of him” or “Isma reacted very quickly during the exercises, which looked really good.”

Positive feedback for older youth players

Older youth players (12+) find it easier to maintain an overview than younger players. This routine is a good continuation of the previous routine for younger youth players, especially in teams where the players already know one another a little better.

On the basis of three different positive basic phrases, players give a so-called shout-out to one or more of their teammates at the end of a training session (or match).

1. I found it very good how...
2. I noticed that...
3. I would like to give a shout-out to...

Use this approach to thank players for their contributions, to compliment them on their good efforts, and to motivate them. By ending the training session in such a way, the players go home on a positive note.



What can you do during matches?

Observe

Once your team and players have set goals, it is equally important to establish a routine for measuring and observing these goals during matches. As coach, you can ask a parent or substitute player to measure the goal. Do make sure, though, that the parent or substitute player knows exactly how they can do the measuring. Involving substitute players in this process not only ensures that they stay involved in the game, but also that they can practise and improve their feedback skills.

Examples of how to measure team goals:

- Ball possession can be measured by looking at how many minutes each team was in possession of the ball
- Shots on goal can be counted (for as well as against)
- Time when the ball has been in the team's own penalty area
- Time when the ball has been in the opposition's half
- Number of sporting actions (complimenting, helping someone up, etc.)
- Number of successful clearances
- Number of successful attacks (reaching the opposition's penalty area)
- Number of shots on goal
- Amount of fun (ask the players to rate this on a scale of 1 - 10 during half-time and/or at the end of the match)

Examples of how to measure personal goals:

- Ball control (number of successful dodges or number of times the player played a perfect pass to another)
- Play insight (number of successful touches on the ball)
- Play insight goalkeepers (number of times that the goalkeeper was standing in the right place)
- Ball control goalkeepers (number of saves by the goalkeeper)



What can you do after matches?

Feedback from the coach/trainer

At the end of each match, coaches and parents can give feedback relating to the team goals and personal goals. What is incredibly important here is that the feedback is concrete (mention the moment and the action) and based on something under the player's control, such as: behaviour, attitude, effort, or concentration.

It is great if the parents/guardians of each player can inquire about the progress of the match by asking questions that are in line with the goals. In this way, parents reinforce the coaches' philosophy and help their child to focus on personal growth.

Examples:

- What did you learn today?
- What was your goal today?
- How did it go with achieving your goal today?
- What was the best part of today's match/training session?

Team evaluation

After every match, the team gets together. Not only to have a drink with each other and the opponent, but also to discuss how the match went (when their memory is still fresh). What went well? What needs attention?

We often have the tendency to give little attention to “what needs attention?” when we win and too much attention to this question when we lose. In each match, there are things that could have gone better and things that went well.

A healthy balance in the attention paid to both facets after each match ensures balance in the team.



Start with what went well in the match and indicate that, having discussed the positives, it is time to discuss what we still need to work on as a team. Did we defend well? Did we play well together? Were we in shape (did we keep up our game pace the whole match?)?

If a team has lost, you can ask them the following question: Why are we better as a result of having lost today? This helps youth players realise that while the result of the match cannot be changed, they can influence the result of the next match by preparing.

For example, a team may conclude that they have learned that if they do not stay in their positions, gaps will appear in the defence and the opposing team will get more chances. And they can therefore focus on keeping their spots better during training. Or, for example, that if they want to play with as much energy in the second half as they did in the first, it is important to work on their fitness.



Coaching traumatised and vulnerable children

Sometimes coaches are confronted with children who are already carrying baggage. Children who find themselves in difficult situations or who have just come out of a difficult situation require an extra careful approach. The techniques below are specifically geared toward these children but are always used team-wide.

Coaching in pairs

If it is established that there is a vulnerable child in the team, then coaching in pairs is strongly advised. This gives the coaches more room to do one-to-one work. This is particularly valuable if a child has difficulty with their emotion regulation.

A predictable programme

Vulnerable children often need something to hold on to. By having a fixed structure in the programme, children know better what is coming at them. Also build in a fixed ratio of high intensity and rest, as this helps children to regulate their own energy.

Draw up a clear team agreement

Drawing up an agreement provides both peace for the child and peace for the team. Everyone in the team is aware of the expectations and consequences regarding commitment and behaviour.

If there is evidence of transgressive behaviour, you can call in the parents/carers and any emergency services to put protective measures in place.



Create service and leadership opportunities

Vulnerable children deserve to be valued. Therefore, offer them the opportunity to support other children, the team or the club. With older children, you can, for example, ask them to support the youth training sessions. This will boost their self-confidence and encourage socially desirable behaviour. With younger children, you can ask them to help carry, set up and/or clear away materials. For all ages, you can give them the responsibility of leading the warming up or cooling down.

Place additional focus on personal growth

A positive learning environment is especially important for a vulnerable child. By allowing the child to focus on concrete personal learning goals (focused on the task), you help the child to rebuild self-confidence and the child also experiences control.

Be aware of the effect that your words may have on yourself and the child

Children who come from a stressful environment are very sensitive to word and deed. It is therefore extremely important to be aware of how you communicate with them.

With vulnerable children, we sometimes tend to focus on the things that are “wrong”, but it is much nicer to ask what is “right”.

Sometimes children are labelled as bad. Children's behaviour may be challenging, but the child is not bad. Or we tend to say: there we go again - instead of looking at the underlying reason for the behaviour.



Vulnerable children sometimes also talk negatively about themselves. You can often hear such children say things like: "I am a loser, no one is interested in me." As a coach, you can respond to this with positive thoughts: "You strike me as someone who tries very hard. Who wouldn't want someone like that on the team?"

As a coach, you are not trained to provide assistance. Ask for support from your club if a child shows signs of or talks about:

- Abuse (in any form)
- Self-harm
- Suicidal thoughts
- Alcohol or drug use
- Persistent transgressive behaviour



Possible signs of child abuse

Below is a list of worrying signs that you, as a coach, should be alert to:

- Sudden changes in behaviour or personality
- Becoming increasingly withdrawn
- Coming across as nervous and tense
- Uncharacteristic and increasingly aggressive behaviour
- Poorly developed social skills and few or no friends
- Poor relationship with parents/carers
- Knowledge of adult matters that are not age-appropriate
- Running away or not wanting to go home
- Always wearing clothing that covers the whole body
- Difficulty with physical contact/frightened reaction to physical contact
- Reducing or restricting movements when the parents/carers are around (wanting to make themselves invisible)
- Poor personal care (long-term)
- Parents or caregivers offer no assistance with medical or physical problems that are brought to their attention
- Parents or caregivers speak very negatively about the child
- The child often has inexplicable injuries/wounds
- The child mistreats animals
- The child has difficulty walking or sitting
- The child tells about frequent nightmares
- The child displays inappropriate, bizarre, and sexual behaviour
- The child lapses into childish behaviour (peeing in trousers, defecating, sucking thumbs, clear regression in language use)

These signs do not always mean that a child is being abused. There may also be another situation or development that is influencing their behaviour. In case of one or more of these signs, always report the behaviour to the confidential advisor at the club.



React with compassion when emotions run high

As a coach of a traumatised child, you will undoubtedly have to deal with inappropriate and transgressive behaviour that is connected to the traumatic experience. It is not easy for every coach to deal with this. Yet there are a few tips that can help:

1. Stay calm and separate your team from you and the emotional child.
2. Pay attention to your body language. Keep at least 50cm distance between you and the child and preferably do not stand directly in front of or behind the child, as this can be experienced as threatening.
3. Speak in a calm and low tone. The louder the child, the softer you need to talk. The child will often go along with your energy.
4. Give the child time to calm down if they are very agitated. Sometimes children need little time for this, other times it takes longer.
5. Help the child with recognising and naming their emotions.
6. Use reflective questions to give the child more insight into what is going on inside them.
7. Describe what signals you see from the child: clenched fists, panting, wobbling, arms at the side, etc.
8. Clearly and concretely describe what you expect from the child, but avoid coercive language.
9. Ask the child what they think they need at that moment. If the child cannot come up with an answer, you can give them three options. However, do not solve it for the child, as they carry the responsibility.
10. As soon as the situation has calmed down, speak to the child one on one about what happened. Give them a chance to tell their side of the story and then give a summary.
11. Always explain to children that the emotions they experience are normal and understandable.
12. Support children in learning to recognise and respond to triggers for their behaviour (strategies to regain composure).
13. Fun comes first!



De-escalation techniques for coaches, trainers and game supervisors

Emotion regulation can sometimes be challenging for both children and adults. As a coach, trainer, referee, or game facilitator, it is nice to have tools to normalise or de-escalate a situation quickly. This chapter is intended as a tool for anyone who has to deal with such a situation.

If you are dealing with vulnerable children in your team, we refer you to the section: Coaching traumatised and vulnerable children. This describes a more structural form of coaching for this target group. In both cases, we recommend practising these techniques so that going through the steps is automatic and natural.

Recognising the signs

To be able to intervene at the right moment, it is important to recognise the signs of aggression. Players (and bystanders) use specific body language when emotions which may lead to aggression are running high.

Below we will briefly discuss the signs that you should act on immediately in order to prevent escalation. These signs often show up in clusters, which means that you will always observe several signals simultaneously:

- Tightening the jaws and curling down the corners of the mouth
- Flaring the nostrils
- Fixing the gaze on another, possibly in combination with a narrowing of the eyes
- Bringing the chest to the chin
- Crossing the arms with balled fists
- Spreading the arms wide
- Pointing a finger at another
- Rubbing the upper legs (while seated), with palms facing down



- Increasing the distance between the legs (standing with legs wide apart)
- Sudden cessation of movement and tensing of the body
- Inflating the chest
- Rapid and shallow breathing
- Standing in the personal space of another and/or touching the belongings or body of another during a negatively charged moment
- Adopting the fighting stance in which the player places his dominant leg and shoulder back so that only his side is exposed to the other.

Preventative intervention

Give the player space to come to himself. You do this by calling the player to you and supporting them in a calm tone: *"I see (name the behaviour). This gives me the idea that you are overflowing for a moment. Let's work together on calming your breathing. We can do this by breathing in and out slowly for one minute. Do you like it when I do this with you? Then concentrate on my breathing and follow my rhythm."*

If a player finds this challenging, you can also choose to help them by directing the thoughts and using a grounding technique aimed at managing stress.

"Take a minute, close your eyes, try to breathe slowly, and think of something that makes you very happy. This can be a memory, or you can imagine yourself doing something you really enjoy."

You can help here by asking them to describe the situation. Where are they? What are they doing? What do they feel or smell at that moment? The better the player describes the pleasant thought, the better they enter that feeling.



Other options include:

- Letting them listen to relaxing or cheerful music
- Asking them to hold something and to describe the object
- Asking them to describe their current environment
- Breathing in deeply ten times, placing the hand on the chest and concentrating on the rise of the chest while counting each breath
- Giving a candy and asking them to describe what it reminds them of or to describe the taste of the candy

When you see that a player is very agitated, it is often still too difficult for them to regain composure. Direct the player's attention to their thoughts and feelings. You can do this by asking them the following question: *"What is happening in your head and body? Tell me how you feel, what you think, and whether you are ready to focus on regaining the peace within yourself."* If necessary, give them time to regain their composure and then take the first step.

If the player calms down, it is good to give positive feedback on this. Ask them to open their eyes and ask how they are feeling. Ask them whether they need more time to calm down. End with the following positive feedback: *"You can be proud of the work you've done to reach to this point of calm."*

Ask the player if they need some time to recover. Indicate that they can take a minute to do something for themselves, such as go for a walk, tell about something they did recently, or do something else they feel comfortable with.

Ask the player to think about what they can do in the future if they feel this way again. Say, for example: *"What can you do next time to take control of your thoughts and behaviour, if I am not there?"* Then conclude.



In case of aggression

Although it is always preferable to be ahead of an incident, this is not always controllable. This means that we must also be prepared for situations in which verbal or physical violence occurs.

Here, too, we recommend practising the techniques. Repeated practice helps to maintain control during an incident and also gives self-confidence in one's own skills.

- Make sure that you have your own emotions under control. Do not argue and do not react to verbal abuse.
- Use a normal to quiet speaking pace and keep your voice down (imagine yourself in the library). In addition, use short pauses before responding.
- Have an open posture and keep your movements calm.
- Do not make more eye contact than usual and give the player opportunity to look away.
- Do not position yourself directly in front of the player and keep at least 50cm distance.
- Remove yourself and the player from the rest of the bystanders and appoint a specific parent or supervisor to take over your duties on the field. Ask another parent or supervisor to fetch support.
- Communicate your expectations clearly and give directions. Support what you say with non-verbal signals. Tell the player to stop (support this with a hand signal, for example) and focus on identifying solutions.
- Wait for help if there is an extreme escalation.
- Use physical interventions only in emergency situations, and only if you are trained to do so.



Giving directions and offering choices

The process described here is based on techniques that are often used by social workers in crisis interventions.

First of all, it is advisable to indicate clearly and very specifically what action you expect the other person to take. "Sit down now" and "Step away from the other person" are concrete instructions that help confused or emotional players. Avoid naming what the other person is not allowed to do, as this does not give them any insight into what is desirable or expected.

Give players a limited number of options, preferably no more than two. For example: "You may go sit down and discuss the situation or you may go to (name a location)." If the child makes no choice, repeat the options with a time limit: "If you do not sit down within the next 10 seconds, I understand that you choose to leave and I will ask (name someone) to escort you to the (name time-out location)."

As soon as they are ready to talk to you, adopt a non-invasive position. Then allow them to talk about the emotions they are experiencing. Here it is not about whether the emotions are logical or right, but about the player getting the feeling that their emotions are being acknowledged.

Sometimes young players need reassurance that what they are feeling is not crazy. With children, you often see that they get frightened by their own extreme behaviour. Use inclusive language here: "We all get angry and it is okay to feel that way. We can definitely find a solution."



Setting clear boundaries

Setting boundaries can be done in different ways. You can ask the player to take a certain distance, for example. Calmly explain which behaviour is unacceptable and why.

When two (or more) players are fighting with each other, you can use the following questions during the reflection

Younger players often do not realise that their behaviour has been harmful towards other children. In such cases, it is usually good to reflect on the event together. This helps them to get more insight into the reasons for their own behaviour, the reasons for the behaviour of another, and how to prevent the occurrence of similar incidents.

1. What happened? And how did you feel in that moment?
2. What would the other person say about what happened?
3. How do you feel about what happened?
4. How do you think that the other person feels?
5. What do you think the other person needs?
6. What would you want to say to the other person?
7. What is the best way to resolve the situation so that you are both satisfied?



During the guidance process, the coach, the trainer, and the youth player all recognise coachable moments on and off the pitch.

These moments arise from unplanned events where the youth player consciously takes a step back from their situation to examine what happened. With the goal of linking knowledge and skills.

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