

## Communicating with Players



Although we are Ladies Gaelic Football coaches, the reality is that all coaching is more about people than it is about the specific sport in question. To be a really effective coach you must understand the effect of your actions on your players.

As a coach your players are watching everything you do. They pick up on your mood and your attitude towards them and they are constantly looking for signs in relation to your opinion of them.

Especially when we are coaching children we must be extremely mindful of the potential effect of our actions. We can all be excellent coaches but to achieve this we must think about the following:

### Developing Communication Skills:

#### **a) Develop credibility when you communicate**

- a. Be knowledgeable about the sport and honest about knowledge you possess
- b. Be reliable, fair and consistent
- c. Follow through on what you say you'll do
- d. Express warmth, friendliness, acceptance and empathy
- e. Be dynamic, spontaneous and open
- f. Remain calm under pressure
- g. Use positive approach

#### **b) Communicate with positive approach**

- a. Emphasizes praise and reward
- b. Provide honest, direct and constructive messages
- c. Embrace an attitude in which you look to catch your athletes doing good or right, then tell them they've done so
- d. Avoid sarcasm and put downs, but at the same time don't sugar coat athlete's behaviors by falsely putting a positive spin on them
- e. Emphasise what can be done, not what cannot be done, and avoid language that dwells on problems, but instead use language that focuses on solutions
- f. Seek to build character rather than destroy it

#### **c) Send messages high in information**

- a. Provide athletes with specific information that helps them correct mistakes rather than general information that judges their performance
- b. Be certain you understand the reason for your athlete's actions before you judge their behaviour
- c. Avoid making evaluative comments when athletes know they've made a mistake
- d. Focus your comments on the athletes' behaviours, not on them as people, to avoid damaging their self worth

#### **d) Communicate with consistency**

- a. When you promise to do something, be sure to follow through
- b. Avoid gossiping, and discourage your athletes from gossiping
- c. Develop a sense of trust with your athletes by being consistent and positive

**e) Learn how to listen**

- a. Show the person speaking to you that you're interested in listening and trying to understand
- b. Once someone has spoken to you, check that you understand what was said by paraphrasing the message, not only the content but the message behind it
- c. Express empathy not sympathy by showing you care and respect what person speaking to you has to say

**f) Improve non verbal communication**

- a. Categories: body motion, physical characteristics, touching behaviour, voice characteristics, body position
- b. Recognise how much of what you communicate is in the form of non verbal messages
- c. Learn how to both send and receive messages by effectively using and reading body position, body motion, voice characteristics and touching behaviours
- d. Remember that it's not so much what you say but what you do that influences your athletes

**Coaches need to ask themselves:**

- Do I have the athlete's attention?
- Am I explaining myself in an easily understood manner?
- Has the athlete understood?
- Does the athlete believe what I am telling him/her?
- Does the athlete accept what I am saying?

**Difficulties in communicating with an athlete may be due to a number of issues including the following:**

- The athlete's perception of something is different to yours
- The athlete may jump to a conclusion instead of working through the process of hearing, understanding and accepting
- The athlete may lack the knowledge needed to understand what you are trying to communicate
- The athlete may lack the motivation to listen to you or to convert the information given into action
- The coach may have difficulty in expressing what she/he wishes to say to the athlete
- Emotions may interfere in the communication process
- There may be a clash of personality between you and the athlete

**Before communicating with an athlete, coaches should consider:**

- **WHY** they want to communicate
- **WHO** they wish to communicate with
- **WHERE** and **WHEN** the message could best be delivered
- **WHAT** is it that they want to communicate
- **HOW** they are going to communicate the information

**Effective communication contains six elements:**

- Clear            Ensure that the information is presented clearly
- Concise        Be concise, do not lose the message by being long winded
- Correct        Be accurate, avoid giving misleading information
- Complete      Give all the information and not just part of it
- Courteous     Be polite and non-threatening, avoid conflict
- Constructive   Be positive, avoid being critical and negative