

COACHING FOR RESILIENCE

CONFIDENCE BUILDING

Athletes tend to take on more challenges, endure setbacks, and perform at their highest levels when they believe in their abilities. This belief can be fostered or discouraged based on the type of motivational climate that coaches create.

DO THIS

- Set simple goals (focus on good form instead of scoring 15 points)
- Praise effort (point out when an athlete makes a good play)
- Encourage teammates (have all players focus & give positive feedback to each other)
- Use mistakes for learning (even the best players have off nights)

NOT THIS

- Only praise outcomes (points scored, games won)
- Require that athletes outperform each other
- Compare individual performances in front of the team
- Call out players for their mistakes in anger, especially in public

MENTAL TOUGHNESS/GRIT AND COMPETITION

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- Emphasizing that effort, attitude and response to adversity matters
- Using language that promotes persistent effort: "Focus on the next play," "Control what you can"
- Teaching the mental side of the game using visualization, self-talk and more
- Knowing how your individual athletes respond to stress and tailoring your approach
- Walking the talk and demonstrating emotional control and resilience

COACH-ATHLETE COMMUNICATION

Misunderstandings and unclear messages can short-circuit your effectiveness as a coach. Consider these communication strategies:

- **Identify the purpose of your message.** Is it to calm the team? Change execution of the plan? Build confidence? Keep your message on target to help players stay focused.
- **Avoid "why" questions.** These can trigger a defensive response which can hurt communication, especially in high pressure situations.
- **Focus on specifics,** especially for feedback. Reinforce what is being done well using verbal or nonverbal messages.
- **Give corrective feedback only** if athletes can make those changes within the situation.
- **Align your tone to the message.** Facial expressions, voice pitch, level of energy, etc. should match what you are saying to aid in understanding.

EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK DELIVERY

As already described, effective feedback and communication are vital to building resilience. Consider whether these barriers may interfere with your feedback.

PROBLEMATIC FEEDBACK

- Negative criticism: Can look like a harsh or attacking tone that damages a student athlete's confidence.
- Weak feedback: "You're not moving fast enough" is vague and offers no direction
- Neutral statements: "That was wrong" lacks guidance for improvement

ENVIRONMENTAL BARRIERS

- Time pressure during games/practices can lead to rushed communication
- Noise and distractions distort the message
- Public settings may cause embarrassment or defensiveness
- Not knowing the athlete's comfort level can make feedback harder to accept. Try to lean in and understand your student athlete

COACHING BARRIERS

- Lack of self-awareness (negative tone, body language, poor timing)
- Emotional reactivity can result in a harsh and impulsive delivery
- Bias or perceived favoritism reduces trust between coach and athletes
- "One size fits all" approach ignores individual needs and different styles of communication