

Giving Athletes Voice and Choice

Creating opportunities for athletes to provide their input, thoughts, and opinions develops their critical thinking and problem solving skills while giving them control and ownership over their own experiences. Athletes who are invited to share their feelings and thoughts about their team, and participate in crafting team routines and values are set up to develop self-agency and self-advocacy and tend to feel more connected and engaged. In addition, encouraging youth voice and choice helps them feel heard and valued.⁽¹⁾

To instill athlete voice and choice on their team, coaches can:

Collaborate with players to...

- Create team agreements - i.e. We'll try our best, respect each other, and have fun.
- Develop pre and post game routines - i.e. before each game, players huddle up and say something encouraging about the team.

Ask open-ended questions so athletes can expand upon their thoughts.

- Ex at younger levels: "What is your favorite part about playing basketball?"
- Ex at higher levels: "Next time you find yourself open on the wing, what can you look out for from your teammates?"

Invite athletes' input on how to improve their experience on the team.

- Use anonymous surveys, debrief at the end of practice, or through one-on-one conversations in a public space. When you listen to athletes' suggestions you demonstrate that you value their thoughts and this contributes to an inclusive environment

Let athletes determine elements of practice

- At younger levels - ask athletes to pick a skill to work on for next practice
- At higher levels - ask the team to pick a skill-based game to end practice on; or to develop team goals for practice

Give athletes the option to choose between two different skill-building activities during practice.

- I.e. "We are going to work on dribbling today. Do you want to play 'Dribble Circle' or 'Relay Race' to practice our dribbling?"

Build opt-in/opt-out opportunities in practice so players can manage their own response to stressful situations.

- Offering opt-out opportunities can help athletes practice identifying their emotions and work towards regulating themselves.

1. <https://casel.org/practice-of-promise-youth-voice-washoe/>

