POSITIVE COACHING ALLIANCE

4 WAYS TO DEVELOP LIFE SKILLS DURING PRACTICE

Youth sports, under the guidance of a supportive and intentional coach, provide a unique opportunity to help athletes develop both sports skills and essential life skills. Coaches can focus on cultivating four key life skills: persistence, optimism, self-regulation, and empathy (POSE). Below are some ways you can intentionally teach POSE:

PERSISTENCE

Persistence is the determination to work towards goals, regardless of setbacks.

- Reframe mistakes as learning opportunities and allow athletes the space to fail. If they try a new skill and struggle, help athletes identify ways they can overcome the challenge(s).
- When an athlete does something that demonstrates persistence, make sure you name it and explain it. (e.g. “Jasmine, I know it was difficult for you to try dribbling with your weaker foot. You really showed a lot of persistence by slowing it down and sticking with it when it got challenging.”)
- Create games that require athletes as a group to be persistent. (e.g. lead a basketball lay-up drill that requires the team to make a certain number of lay-ups in a specific time frame. Set the lay-up goal for the team. Make it challenging enough so they will get close to achieving the goal. Then encourage the team to strategize and try again.)
- During scrimmages make sure to point out to your bench when you see examples of persistence and highlight the new strategy used that helped their teammate succeed.

OPTIMISM

Optimism is the hopeful outlook that positive things can happen, and with effort those positive things will occur.

- Be optimistic! You cannot spread what you don’t have. When you are faced with challenges, always model that there is a solution. (e.g. you get to the field and it’s all muddy and they can’t play that day – get excited that you can do an inside activity and get to know each other better).
- Focus less on outcome and more on effort. (e.g. the team just missed a game-winning goal but the defense held the other team to only two goals the entire game.)
- Find times to name it and explain it. (e.g. “Marco, you are so optimistic today! I really like that you kept an encouraging attitude the entire game!”)
- If an athlete engages in negative self-talk, ask them to think about positive things they can tell themselves. If the athlete struggles, help them by naming some of the good you see in them.

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SELF-REGULATION

Self-regulation is the ability to control one's own thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors when encountering challenging situations.

- Recognize that there are many factors that can contribute to how athletes show up to the sports space and that they can be affected by specific experiences or situations. Try to understand the factors behind certain responses and give athletes grace.
- Help athletes identify the emotions that lead to certain responses so the next time they start to experience those feelings, they can take a step back to regulate themselves.
- Teach athletes how to understand and determine alternate responses in specific situations (e.g. if an athlete gets frustrated by a teammate, ask the athlete to talk about what was happening and what an alternate response should be. Try not to make this punitive, but a teachable moment).
- Ask athletes to rate their emotions on a scale so they understand where they should be in specific situations. One way to do this is to start with a 10 and ask athletes to describe what a 10 looks like for them. Then ask athletes to describe a 7, then 5, then 3, and then 1. It will look different for different athletes. When athletes are in situations, and you need them to be mindful of their reactions, ask them to bring down the level.

EMPATHY

Empathy is the ability to understand and share what someone else is feeling without judgment.

- Model empathy by listening to athletes to understand their perspective without judgment and expressing support for them. Coaches should be mindful of personal biases that may affect their reactions and work to take a breath and believe athletes' experiences.
- Encourage athletes to connect with each other to learn about their teammates, their experiences, and their preferences.
- Remind athletes that empathy isn't just important for their teammates, but it's important to have it for opposing teams, coaches, officials and fans (e.g. give players the opportunity to be officials at practice.)
- Sometimes for younger athletes, the concept of empathy might be hard to understand so it's helpful to use the term "being a good friend". Take the time to find examples of what it means to be a good friend and then name it and explain it.