

# REGULATION CHECKLIST FOR COACHES

*“Trying to reason with someone before they are regulated won’t work and indeed will only increase frustration (dysregulation) for both of you.” – Dr. Bruce Perry, M.D., Ph. D.*

Athletes’ challenging emotions and behaviors often stem not from willful defiance, but developmental gaps in certain skills (i.e. emotional regulation, frustration tolerance, cognitive flexibility, etc.)<sup>(1)</sup> To best support athletes through behavioral challenges, you must be able to respond in thoughtful and supportive ways. This can be especially difficult if you feel emotionally triggered by the situation.

**Use the following regulation strategies when you feel emotionally activated:**

## COACHES CAN:

- Identify your triggers**  
Recognizing what pushes your buttons can help you stay one step ahead when you are facing challenges.
  - **Incorporate reflection into your coaching practice so you can learn and improve**
    - Ask yourself: What caused the emotion? What was your reaction? How can you handle it better next time?
  - **Seek feedback**
    - Encourage your assistant coaches to share feedback when they observe you reacting emotionally or when you remain calm.
  
- Develop a reset cue**  
A reset cue helps you regain control when emotions run high, enabling you to return to a calm state.
  - **When you’re feeling triggered you can:**
    - Pause and count to three
    - Clench your fist to tension and then release
    - Tap your right foot on the ground twice, then your left foot twice
  
- Plan ahead**  
Routine is a key ingredient to regulation. When we know what to expect, we feel in control.
  - **Plan practice ahead of time, anticipate where challenges may arise. Prepare strategies to support athletes through those moments.**
    - Example: If an activity may be particularly challenging, plan for a water break afterwards so athletes and coaches have a few minutes to connect, decompress, and reset.

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**Incorporate breathing exercises**

Effective breathing techniques can help regulate the nervous system and reduce stress.<sup>(2)</sup>

- **Take a deep breath through the nose for six seconds, then out through the mouth for eight seconds.**
- **Five finger breathing: Hold out your hand with fingers outstretched. With your other pointer finger, trace the outside of your fingers. Breath in as you trace upwards, and out as you trace downwards.**

**Engage in patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activities**

Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activities are powerful tools to support regulation for both coaches and athletes. Our brains associate the patterned, repetitive, rhythmic beat of our mother's heartbeat in the womb with safety. The following activities can help create this association.<sup>(3)</sup>

- **Take a second to dribble a basketball, juggle a soccer ball, or toss a softball up and down. Pay attention to the rhythm of these activities.**
- **Take the team on a run and focus on the pattern of feet hitting the ground.**

For strategies to regulate athletes, check out:  
[Supporting Athlete Attention and Emotional Regulation in Sports](#)

1. Tami-Hill Washington, Kathleen Osta: Connection and Co-Regulation Precede Self-Management: A Common Sense Approach to Learning, Development, and Discipline
2. Vernon Williams, MD Neurology, Cedar-Sinai
3. Kathy Boras. (2014, April 11). Perry: Rhythm REgulates the BRain [Blog Post]. Retrieved from <https://attachmentdisorderhealing.com/developmental-trauma-3/>