

Social



SOCIAL FOCUSED ACTIVITIES

- Participation vs Performance
- Making Friends
- Dream Big
- Shuttle Runs Warm Up
- Human Knot
- Creative Obstacle Course
- Circles of Influence
- Finding Balance
- Scrambled Eggs
- Duck, Duck, Goose

Social factors can be both useful and supportive, or negative and stressful when it comes to young people's participation in sport. The social factor encompasses environmental, cultural, and relational influences. Teammates, coaches, and club environments hugely influence a young person's experience of sport and physical activity.

As adolescents transition from their parents and immediate family as primary influencers, the sway of friends and peers becomes increasingly significant. This is a big milestone in their social development and can be an opportunity for positive growth if they are in a supportive setting. However, it can also be a challenge if their peers are not active, and dropping out of sports is the norm.

Get Your Expectations Right

Coaching young people is very different to coaching adults. That may seem obvious, but it means you might have to adjust your expectations on why young people come to training and what is best for their development. For most young people, playing sports is mainly about having fun and spending time with their friends. Winning and competition are just by-products of being involved in sport, rather than the main driver. Young people often turn up to participate in an exciting activity and to feel part of something bigger.

When coaching young people, focus on developing basic skills for their long-term involvement in sports, rather than modelling adult training and levels of seriousness. Take the pressure off, keep it as fun as possible and avoid zoning in on winning or losing too much.

Participation and Performance

As young people progress through the different age groups, the level of 'seriousness' can increase prematurely. As the emphasis slowly (often subconsciously) moves from participation to performance, there is a link to the number of players dropping out. While sport is intrinsically linked with competition, this doesn't always align with what many young people want to get out of their sport. Some players aspire to be the next Rhasidat Adeleke or David Clifford and compete at a high level, however, for many young people they play sports to socialise, make new friends, exercise, have fun and be part of a team.

The Why

Again, it may seem simple, but start by asking your players why they enjoy coming to training and playing sport. Having an understanding of what success means to them will help you as a coach to tailor training sessions that align with their goals and motivations. It's essential to find the right balance between having fun and competition. Every team is different, so explore what works best for your group of players so that all team members enjoy playing and want to stick with it. It's about tuning in to what motivates your players and adjusting your coaching to support their goals. This approach may not help you win every game, however it will mean that players are more likely to stay involved in sports.

Interpersonal Skills

Sports participation is an effective way for young players to develop interpersonal skills. Two key elements that play an important role in this developmental journey are teamwork and communication. Playing team sports helps young players understand the importance of working together as a team. This teaches them to rely on one another and encourages them to support their teammates. In turn, this creates a sense of belonging and can give young people focus and purpose.

Communicating clearly and effectively is the backbone of successful teamwork. In sports, players need to tell each other what they're doing, where they're going and take action in real-time. These constant interactions foster important communication skills, teaching young players to both express themselves and listen to others. These learnings extend well beyond the playing field and become valuable lifelong skills. Keeping young players involved in sport provides access to opportunities that develop these skill sets and so as coaches, you are doing a lot more than just coaching!

Engaging in sports should be a fulfilling, fun and enriching experience for young people, but often, they encounter hidden hurdles that act as barriers to being involved in sports. Understanding the impact of these obstacles is important for creating an environment that fosters long-term participation and involvement.

1. PEERS DROPPING OUT

Navigating the maze of adolescence comes with its own set of challenges. One significant hurdle is the influence of peers on a young person's life, which includes participation in sport and physical activity. The decision of friends to drop out of sport can create a domino effect, influencing others to follow suit. However, the opposite is also true, if a few players commit to playing sport, it can have an important positive effect on the whole team. Understanding this peer influence and addressing early on why a player may be thinking about dropping out is key. Focusing on fostering a fun, supportive environment that encourages sustained participation is the best way to counteract this.

2. ACADEMIC PRESSURE

Combining the demands of the school day with sports participation can be a balancing act. From rushing from school to training and eating on the go, it can feel like a lot for young players in the middle of it all. Having strong coach-player trust becomes essential in helping young players manage both effectively. It could be as simple as having a fun warm-up (check out our Little Monsters, or Hot Potato activities as a start point) or giving the players an extra five minutes to gather themselves before starting. It might look unproductive, but they're chatting to their friends and mentally getting ready to train. Allocating a certain amount of time at the beginning of training to chat and socialise, can also reduce disruption during the training session. The key is to make sure that playing sports remains an enjoyable part of a young person's life, instead of becoming an additional thing they 'have' to do.

3. TRANSITION

Linked to academic pressures, is the transition from primary to secondary school, which is a pivotal period in a young person's life. This shift brings with it a lot of changes, including a new social environment, increased academic expectations and a reshuffling of social dynamics. Navigating this transition can be challenging at best. So having a coach that's aware of the challenges that arise during this period, a person who not only provides a space for physical activity, but also a safe and welcoming environment, can help ease the transition.

Don't underestimate the impact a quiet word on the sideline can have on a young person. It's amazing the influence a check-in from a trusted coach can have on players. Most of us can think back to a time when we considered dropping out of sport, and the difference the right social support (either from a teammate or coach) might have made or did make if we were lucky! Coaches play a pivotal role in reinforcing the positive aspects of sports; emphasising teamwork and fostering a sense of belonging that can counterbalance the many hidden hurdles.