

IS IT APPROPRIATE COACHING—OR ABUSE?



Emotional, physical, and sexual misconduct are never appropriate. Make athlete well-being a priority. Be aware of which behaviors coaches should model, and which they should avoid. It is important for coaches to adapt coaching practices to each setting. For example, older athletes may understand that a raised voice is not always the same as yelling in anger, but younger athletes may not. These tips will help you recognize the difference between abusive behavior and appropriate coaching.

ABUSE

PHYSICAL MISCONDUCT: A coach acting intentionally to endanger or reasonably threaten to cause physical harm to an athlete, regardless of reason or motive behind the behavior.

EXAMPLES

Overexertion: Instructing team members to hold a painful position for an extended period of time because of poor performance or attitude.

This can cause physical harm to athletes' developing bodies, especially if they are already fatigued, temperatures are extreme, or they are already injured.

Dehydration: Refusing to allow water breaks.

This can cause muscle cramps, increase pulse and heart stress, and lead to faster breathing, in addition to negatively affecting performance.

Injury: Ordering players to re-enter games despite signs of injury or lack of medical clearance.

This can lead to reinjury and reduce athlete physical health and well-being.

APPROPRIATE COACHING

ACCOUNTABILITY AND SAFETY: A coach holding athletes accountable to program standards and practices that safely improve performance.

EXAMPLES

Clear and Consistent Discipline: Making a clear connection between a coaching action and the reason (e.g., removing an athlete from a starting lineup for violating team rules).

This helps athletes associate appropriate consequences with specific behaviors.

Respect: Requiring athletes to arrive on time for meetings and practices.

This teaches athletes to respect the time of coaches, staff, and teammates.

Help, Not Hurt: Encouraging athletes to learn new skills while maintaining safety.

This helps athletes improve their performance without harming their bodies.

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ABUSE

EMOTIONAL MISCONDUCT: A coach repeatedly and excessively using words or severe behaviors that negatively control, intimidate, demean, or harm athletes, damaging their self-esteem and causing them emotional distress.

EXAMPLES

Intimidation: Using fear and punishment to get results.

This can harm athletes, even if it may occasionally lead to a “result” the coach seeks.

Denying Attention or Support: Preventing athletes from fully participating in regular team activities or routinely withholding coaching guidance given to other athletes.

This kind of isolation can be physically, emotionally, and socially damaging to athletes.

Demeaning Language: Using hurtful words or nicknames to reduce athlete self-esteem.

This can cause lasting emotional harm and does not increase overall performance.

APPROPRIATE COACHING

MOTIVATION AND SUPPORT: A coach talking to athletes in ways that increase their self-esteem, build trust and camaraderie, and encourage athletes to reach their full potential.

EXAMPLES

Encouragement: Giving clear direction in training to help athletes improve technique.

This increases athlete self-esteem and motivation.

Fair Expectations: Setting achievable goals that encourage athletes to reach their full potential.

This motivates athletes to improve without pushing them past their limits.

Self-Care: Teaching athletes to listen to their bodies instead of shaming them for doing so.

This shows athletes they are valued as people and that their well-being is more important than winning.

If you notice any abuse or misconduct involving anyone in the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Movement, report it: uscenterforsafesport.org/report-a-concern. You play an important role in protecting athletes and promoting well-being.

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