

Coaching Tools and Tips

by Barb Yackel

C = Comprehension

O = Outlook

A = Affection

C = Character

H = Humor

Comprehension

It is essential that you understand the basic elements of the sport you coach. Attend clinics and talk with other, more experienced, coaches in an effort to constantly upgrade your skills.

Outlook

This refers to your perspective and goals. To work successfully with children in a sport setting, you must have your priorities in order. Your priorities should be:

- To have fun.
- To help your athletes develop their skills.

Affection

Coaches need to show genuine concern for and patience with all students in their classes. There are many ways to demonstrate affection and patience.

- Make an effort to learn the names of all your students.
- Empathize with those trying to learn a new or difficult skill.
- Be in control of your emotions.
- Show your enthusiasm.
- Be upbeat and positive in all your communications to the class.

Some children appreciate a pat on the back or shoulder as a sign of your approval, but be aware that not all feel comfortable with being touched. When this is the case, you need to respect their wishes.

Character

Having good character means modeling appropriate behaviors for sport and life. This involves more than just saying the right things. What you say and what you do must match. There is no place in coaching for the “do as I say, not as I do” philosophy. Consider the following steps to being a good role model:

- Build on your strengths.
- Set goals for yourself.

Humor

Humor is an often overlooked coaching tool. A sense of humor puts in perspective the many mistakes young students make.

- Make classes fun by including a variety of learning activities.
- Keep all students involved.
- Consider laughter a sign of enjoyment.
- Smile.

Body Language

What would your students think you were feeling if you came to class slouched over, head down and shoulders slumped? Would they perceive you as tired, bored, unhappy? What would they think if you had your hands on your hips, your jaws clenched and you rolled your eyes? Would they think you were upset with them, mad, disgusted?

None of these impressions is what you want your students to have. That's why you should conduct yourself in a pleasant, confident and vigorous manner. Such a posture not only projects happiness with your coaching role but also provides a good example for all who may model your behavior.

Physical contact can also be a very important use of body language. A handshake, a pat on the head, an arm around the shoulder, or even a hug are effective ways of showing approval, concern, affection and joy with your students. Youngsters are especially in need of this type of nonverbal message. Keep within the obvious moral and legal limits, but don't be reluctant to make appropriate physical contact with your students.

Facial Expressions

The look on a person's face is the quickest clue to what he or she thinks or feels. Serious, stone-faced expressions are no help to kids who need cues as to how they're doing. Don't be afraid to smile. A smile from a coach can give a boost to an unsure young athlete. Plus a smile lets your students know you are happy to be instructing them.

Professional Image

Appearance is very important when teaching classes. An instructor dressed in three layers of heavy outdoor wear will give the impression that it's freezing in here and that everyone needs to dress like that inside the rink. An overdressed beginner will not be able to move freely and learning may be hindered on the first attempt. Remember: First impressions are lasting impressions.

Coach's Role

Coaches play a very important role in shaping the lives of young athletes. Coaches - advisors, guides, instructors, mentors, tutors, confidence builders - not only teach athletic skills, they teach life skills. The role of "coach" must be taken seriously and responsibly. We owe it to our young people.