



FACT SHEET 8

POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

No two children are ever the same and there is no exact science as to how a child will respond to certain coaching styles or discipline. One thing that is clear is that negative put-downs, shouting or even physical punishment (such as extra laps of the track / push-ups for misbehaving) will not improve a child's belief in themselves or how they value the opinion of their coach. It may well increase the child's fear of the coach but it will not increase the child's desire to remain involved in the sport.

Tennis Ireland encourages clubs to be positive in their focus: encouraging young people to become more responsible for themselves and contributing to setting boundaries for behaviour.

Tennis Ireland would provide the following guidance on sanctions:

The use of Sanctions

The use of sanctions is an important element in the maintenance of discipline. However Sports Leaders should have a clear understanding of where and when particular sanctions are appropriate. It should be remembered that effectively controlling organisations and successful Sport Leaders are characterised by the sparing use of sanctions. The age and developmental stage of the child should be taken into account when using sanctions.

Recommended use of Sanctions

Sanctions should be fair, consistent and in the case of persistent offence, should be progressively applied. The following steps are suggested:

- ★ Rules should be stated clearly and agreed
- ★ A warning should be given if a rule is broken
- ★ A sanction (for example, use of time out) should be applied if a rule is broken for a second time
- ★ If a rule is broken three or more times, the child should be spoken to, and if necessary, the parent/guardian should be involved (the parent may need to be involved straight away if the issue is serious enough)
- ★ Sanctions should be used in a corrective way that is intended to help children improve now and in the future. They should never be used to retaliate or make a Sports Leader feel better
- ★ When violations of team rules or other misbehaviours occur, sanctions should be applied in an impartial way
- ★ Sanctions should not be used as threats. If rules are broken sanctions should be implemented consistently, fairly and firmly
- ★ Sanctions should not be applied if a Sports Leader is not comfortable with them. If an appropriate action cannot be devised right away, the child should be told that the matter will be dealt with later, at a specified time and as soon as possible

- ★ Once sanctions have been imposed, it is important to make the child feel s/he is a valued member of the group again
- ★ A child should be helped, if necessary, to understand why sanctions are imposed
- ★ **A child should not be sanctioned for making errors when s/he is playing**
- ★ **Physical activity (e.g. running laps or doing push-ups) should not be used as a sanction. To do so only causes a child to resent physical activity, something that s/he should learn to enjoy throughout his/her life**
- ★ Sanctions should be used sparingly. Constant sanctioning and criticism can cause a child to turn away from sport

Positive Discipline

Works by:

- ★ Creating a good relationship with the young people in your charge
- ★ Being a good role model – not swearing or being abusive to opponents
- ★ Positive reinforcement – emphasising behaviour such as being honest, accepting defeat, shaking hands
- ★ Listening to the view of child members and agreeing codes of conduct with them. Children like security and boundaries in which they know they are safe
- ★ Avoid harsh punishment
- ★ Having clear simple rules reducing the amount of ‘grey areas’ that children can manipulate
- ★ The coach remaining calm and reasonable
- ★ Acknowledging the young person’s feelings that they may be or at least perceive themselves as being unfairly treated
- ★ Keep criticisms to a minimum
- ★ Criticising the behaviour not the child.

Do not become trapped in circular arguments which do nothing but reinforce the child’s frustration.

Allow children opportunities to ‘escape’ from a debate about poor behaviour i.e. asking how else they could have dealt with the situation.

Remember bad behaviour is not a personal attack on you or your coaching style but may be more a reflection of the child’s limited ability to obtain attention for positive behaviour.

Sanctions

As we mentioned these should be progressive, examples of these could be,

- ★ Discuss the behaviour with the child. If necessary agree a response to compensate for actions (clearing up equipment, washing up)
- ★ Discuss the behaviour with the child and their parent. If something has been broken or damaged financial reimbursement should be considered (even as only a token gesture)
- ★ Agree to review the matter again with child & parent. Depending on the age of the child & seriousness of the incident agree to monitor their behaviour
- ★ Being dropped from the team for one game/match as a sanction should always be discussed with the parent as well as the child
- ★ Being suspended from the team should only be used in extreme circumstances and reasons for doing this should be given in writing to the parents and children (in plain English)

Reference

Code of Ethics & Good Practice for Children’s Sport- SCNI & ISC
Encouraging Better Behaviour - NSPCC