

- Ask questions, make sure the players comprehend what is being said/shown. The game sense approach, which challenges children to develop an awareness of when and why to execute a certain skill or strategy, improves their decision-making. Use questions to develop this skill. This will also give you an indication of the effectiveness of your coaching techniques.

Other key communication issues when coaching juniors:

- Learn – and use - their names as soon, and as often, as possible. You are more likely to get the desired response by targeting the receiver of your message (as opposed to ‘hey you’), Use their names as often as possible to keep them mentally alert e.g. “Well done John” or “quickly Therese”. Be hesitant in using nicknames or abbreviations unless you have asked the players what they prefer to be called. Using a name makes the interaction personal, and as discussed last issue, children like to develop rapport with their coaches.
- Coaches will need to effectively communicate with players, parents, referees, administrators, score-table officials and other coaches. How you conduct yourself in each of these relationships will have a bearing on your impact as a coach. Treat each of these groups with respect and the favour will be returned!
- Don’t talk for too long, children have shorter attention spans!
- Humour is an important tool but beware of using sarcasm, which is easily misunderstood by juniors.
- Talk to your players about more than just the game. A simple “Good morning, how was your weekend?” can help build a positive environment and encourages interaction.

Asking questions of players, analysing video footage of yourself coaching, have another coach (mentor) evaluate your communication are all methods to identify strengths and weaknesses. Address these to improve your skill as a communicator. Your ability to communicate with young players will make you a better teacher of skills and strategy, but most importantly will allow you to create a positive environment where kids will enjoy themselves – and that’s what it’s all about!



BUILDING BETTER BASKETBALL

ISSUE No. 2

COACHING

HOW TO COMMUNICATE WITH KIDS?

*How to communicate with kids?
Communication builds friendships
Children play with their friends
More friends means more teams and greater variety of
games*



Welcome to our second issue on coaching juniors. The focus of this series is on coaching at the grass-roots level. In our first issue we discussed why kids play and examined the importance of this in relationship to our approach when coaching juniors. This issue will focus on a component of all successful relationships, whether it be personal, work or coaching, and that is COMMUNICATION.

Coaches should possess certain skills to be successful, including knowledge, organisation, time management, experience and communication. So what is communication? By definition (Concise English Dictionary), communication is: “to impart, convey, reveal, give or exchange information, an act of giving (especially information), a means of exchanging messages.” All of these have relevance to coaching. The more effectively we convey that knowledge and impart our philosophy, the better our players will become. If we can not only teach, but reveal the ‘why’ of skills and strategies, then we can develop their understanding and improve their decision making – a key aspect in all sports. Your ability to interact with your players, so they can exchange their thoughts and feelings, positive or otherwise, will allow you to make adjustments quickly. This will make you more efficient as a coach and as a team. Communication can be broken down into the following components:

1) VOICE

- Volume – your voice must be sufficiently loud to be heard by all athletes. Vary the volume, speak softly if they are close enough to hear you (which encourages them to be quiet and listen).
- Speed – do not speak too rapidly for young athletes.
- Tempo – When you want athletes to move quickly, you might try speaking in a fast repetitive manner (e.g. quickly, quickly) or if you want to emphasize something, you might slow down.
- Emphasis - Vary the tone of your voice and use inflections to highlight the importance of what you are saying or to convey emotions. Constant yelling and monotone voices are less effective, whilst a pause allows time for a player to think and absorb the meaning of the message.

2) NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

Just as important as verbal communication, it has been suggested 7% of the received message is verbal, 38% is vocal and 55% is visual. Your non-verbal communication should reflect what you are saying. Be aware that your facial expressions, gestures, movement, mannerisms, physical proximity, dress and eye contact, all convey powerful messages.

3) LISTENING AND RECEIVING SKILLS

Coaches are often more experienced at giving instruction, but listening and receiving skills are vitally important in building your rapport with young athletes.

- Establish eye contact and use gestures to convey your interest (e.g. nod your head).
- Ask questions to clarify that you understand what the player is asking/saying.
- Take note of how they are communicating, their voice and behaviour.
- Be aware that your own feelings can influence how you hear what the other person is saying.

4) INSTRUCTIONS AND EXPLANATIONS

- Your communication should be appropriate to that group. The language used, the complexity of your explanations, how demonstrative you are, should all be tailored to the group you are working with. Their age, gender and experience will affect how you communicate.
- Terminology and jargon are important weapons in your battle to communicate with younger athletes. Terms that you know and use may not make sense to them. Be consistent and make sure they know what you mean. Watch NBA, college, NBL, WNBA, WNBL, other coaches and playground games because kids will pick up on words. Basketball has a language all of its own, which can lead to confusion for those new to the game – players and coaches.
- When teaching, introduce cue words, phrases that encapsulate what you mean. Identify teaching points that players should know and attach a cue word. This will allow you to coach on the run, the cue word will (hopefully) trigger a response without you having to give a complete explanation.
- Explanations should be Simple, Step-by-Step, Short and with Substance – the five S’s!

5) DEMONSTRATIONS

- If athletes are not paying attention, they are not going to learn!
- Position players so they can see and hear your message e.g. not looking into the sun, form a semi-circle, on the baseline, etc.
- Show at normal pace, slowed down and then again at full pace OR show in full, broken into parts, then in full again.
- Tell the athletes what to look for, or they may not learn the points of emphasis. You may even leave the ball out of the demonstration because they will often follow that, instead of watching what you are emphasizing.
- Ask athletes to repeat cues during the demonstration.
- Explain why and how the skill you are demonstrating is important for them to learn (where they will use it in a game).
- Because of our limited practice time, we need our demonstrations to be concise and precise.

6) QUESTIONING

Questions can be valuable in arousing the interest of your players, checking their understanding, summarizing key points, forcing them to think and getting their attention.