

Managing Typical Discipline Problems

The following list of possible solutions is by no means an answer to every problem encountered by a Coach when dealing with under-age players. It does, however, cover a range of the most successful, tried and tested means used by experienced Coaches to reduce and eliminate discipline problems.

The suggested solutions are not in any particular order.

Variation

To maintain interest among young players the Coach(es) must vary the training routine and the environment, e.g. after warm-ups etc. begin with games first rather than drills or invite another Coach to take a session now and again.

Praise

Recognise and praise players for their achievements. e.g. no matter how insignificant you may think the achievement is, it may be a big deal to the player. Everybody, including the Coach, works better when praised.

Goal Set

Set targets for players (short term performance goals) e.g. pointing 6 out of 10 'frees' or making 5 'clean' overhead catches in a practice game.

Delegate Responsibility

Give some players more responsibility during training, e.g. put them in charge of groups/individuals or ask them to help younger players learn skills.

Seek Assistance

Insist on more input from club members; making sure they know that their help will be useful but not too taxing or time consuming, e.g. a person is more likely to agree if you say you need them to referee small-sided games for an hour on a Sunday morning rather than ask them to help Coach a team. (Many people do not think they have the necessary skills or time to get involved).

Play Games

Young players get bored when a session has too many drills. Although drills are necessary, many players see them as a chance to mess about when a Coach attends to other groups. The same is true of games which involve big numbers and few touches of the ball. Why not build your sessions around modified and conditioned games.

Don't Let Them Play!

A disruptive player may still cause problems, no matter what is tried. Very often he is one of the better players, if not the best you have. If the behaviour is affecting others and undermining your position, the answer is simple...get rid of the player until he or she changes their ways.

Keep Your Distance

Never be drawn into trying to be 'one of the lads', as young players will take advantage and you may lose the authority you once had.

Set an Appropriate Challenge

Make sure your sessions are interesting and varied and pitched at the right level for the players you are dealing with. Good players need to be challenged and given the opportunity to improve, just as weaker ones need to feel part of the squad and should get the chance to work in small groups of players of similar ability.

Make a Stand

If parents complain about or try to influence the picking of a team, nip it in the bud as soon as possible or it will overshadow everything you do from then on. Pass the problem to officials in the club and look for a quick resolution. At the start of the season 'set your stall out' at a meeting of players and parents. e.g. agree a code of conduct so that everyone involved knows what is expected of them.

Use a Reward System

Think about some sort of reward system to be built into your sessions now and again. e.g. use the U-Can Awards to challenge and reward players.

Make the Tough Decisions

Do not be afraid to make tough decisions if the need arises. Never ignore problems or allow them to fester.

Address the situation appropriately

When an individual player is causing discipline problems, the problem should be addressed directly to the player, on a one-to-one basis. When the problem is more widespread and is a common group behaviour, the problem should be discussed openly among the group as a whole.

Encourage/guide the group to establish their own code of behaviour/conduct, to which each will feel responsibility towards, and as a result towards the group as a whole.

Educate the Players

Many issues of discipline centre on breaches of the Rules of Play. At each training session, choose one Rule of Play and discuss it with the players. This makes the players more aware of the lesser-known rules that often lead to disputes over refereeing decisions.