

1 | Be CHILD-CENTRED

The iCoachKids Pledge



Always have the best interest children at heart and listen to them. It is about what children want and what they need, not about the adults!

- Take the adult 'glasses' off and try to see the sport through the eyes of the child. It looks a lot different from where they sit.
- Find out children's motivation to attend your sessions: Why are they there? What do they want out of it? What do they like/dislike? What kind of sport experiences have they had before?
- Determine the age and stage of development of the children you coach. This will allow you to better decide what their needs are, and to tailor the sessions appropriately to maximise learning and enjoyment.

2 | Be HOLISTIC

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See and develop children in your sessions as people first and foremost, not only as athletes.

- Aim to develop their psychosocial skills and capabilities not just their physical ones.
- Give them opportunities to develop a positive sense of self by valuing each child regardless of their skills and by helping them focus on their own personal improvement and effort.
- Create an environment that caters for and promotes the development of children's social, emotional, cognitive and moral repertoire
- To do this use activities that engage the children at more than just the physical level

3 | Be INCLUSIVE

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Cater for all levels of abilities and motivations. Coaching is far from a one-size-fits-all. Get to know the kids you coach and dare to coach them differently.

- Make sure that you have removed all barriers to participation so every child feels welcome regardless of their background, motivation, ability, and previous experience.
- Greet all children individually and by name. Ask them about their day.
- Pay equal attention to all children regardless of ability level.
- Differentiating (creating sessions where all children are engaged, stretched and learning) is one of the hardest things to do. It requires good knowledge of the children and a lot of planning, but it is worth the effort!

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Make it FUN and SAFE

Children want to have fun and learn. To do both they need to feel safe. As a coach, you have to build positive relationships and enjoyable and caring climates that allow them to thrive and that keep them coming back.

- The most important factor in determining what children make out of sport is the quality of the relationship with the coach and other children. Go out of your way to build great relationships. Spend time on it. Nothing else matters until this is achieved.
- Safety first - physically and emotionally
- Make sure children are safeguarded and protected from any potential threats to their well-being (i.e., have a safeguarding and protection policy and protocol in place.)
- Don't let learning get in the way of fun. When children are having fun and are deeply engaged in an activity, they experience more positive feelings and learning happens faster and is longer-lasting

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5 | Prioritise the LOVE for sport above LEARNING sport

Only a small proportion of kids want to be elite athletes, and of those who do, only a minimal number will actually become elite athletes. Yet, all of them have the potential to become healthy active adults. Creating that fantastic legacy is part of your job.

- Make sure children want to come back next week for more. Make it fun, make it enjoyable, make it varied and novel, make sure they are learning, make it a social experience. Get them hooked!
- Encourage the whole family to be active: for instance, have parent and child sessions every now and again (or even always if you are dealing with younger kids) or talk to parents about how important it is for their kids to see they are active too.
- Spend time helping children understand the benefit of sport, physical activity and of leading a healthy lifestyle

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Focus on FOUNDATIONAL skills

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Do not be overconcerned with the specific skills of your sport. At a younger age kids need to gain essential motor skills and learn the basics of how to play games using generic tactical principles that apply to most sports. This actually leads to increased lifelong participation as well as higher levels of performance.

- Yes, if you are coaching a specific sport, your sessions will have a distinct sport-specific flavour, but the main ingredients should be fairly generic:
 - Foundational motor skills
 - Foundational game skills
- All of this can be worked on through fun drills and games, and within the framework and theme of your own sport. You don't have to abandon your sport to be able to coach foundational skills, you just need to be creative.

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Engage PARENTS positively

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Parents are not the enemy, but the biggest resource at the disposal of coaches, schools and clubs. They want the best for their kids and so do you. Partnership is the key word.

- You will never know what parents can offer if you don't talk to them. Open and maintain regular lines of communication with the parents.
- Parents know their children better than anybody. If you want to know the kids you coach so you can tailor your delivery, you have to talk to their parents.
- And yes, parents can sometimes be overzealous and do or say things they should not... However, as a coach, it is also your responsibility to support parents and help them understand the best ways they can help their kids make the most out of sport. The role of the coach as an educator cannot be overestimated

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Plan PROGRESSIVE programmes

We are taking kids on a learning journey. Coaching children **should not be about 'peaking-by-Saturday' to win a game**, but more about the accomplishment of mid to long-term holistic goals. **Failing to plan is planning to fail!**

- First of all, you must **have a good idea of the destination** point for the children you coach. What does the finished article look like? What skills do we want them to develop (physical, technical, tactical, mental and psychosocial)?
- Then you have to **work backwards and develop short, mid and long -term goals** and plans that will help the kids get there. Your role will depend on how long you are going to be working with those kids. However, regardless of whether you will coach them for 5 hours, 5 days, 5 weeks, 5 months or 5 years, you have to develop a plan.
- Programmes, plans and sessions must **be developmentally appropriate**, that is, they need to take into account the children's age and stage of development. **Children are not mini-adults! You have to make the game fit the kids, not the other way around.**

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Use different methods to ENHANCE LEARNING

Learning is a complex process and it doesn't happen overnight. Different coaching and teaching strategies can serve different purposes at different stages of learning and development, complement each other, and help us achieve the desired results.

- There is not one single or best way to coach. Different coaching strategies (drills, repetition, conditioned games, mini games) are better suited for different stages of learning and have different effects.
- Whether we are using a drill or game-based approach, practice sessions should provide opportunities for children to problem-solve and develop their own solutions to technical and tactical problems.
- In any case, it is not an 'either or' situation. The art of coaching is to know when a child or a group need to be exposed to one type of practice or another to maximise their chances of learning and retaining a skill or concept.

10 | Use **COMPETITION** in a developmental way

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Competition is neither good nor bad by itself. It all depends on how it is organised, presented and managed. When done properly, competition is an amazing motivator, a lot of fun and a very educational experience.

- Make sure the format and the atmosphere around competition is built around the developmental stage of the kids and considerate of their needs.
- Competition formats that mindlessly reproduce the adult version of the game are bound to fail. Think about the best way to adapt the game to the kids' capability
- Competing and winning are two different things. The focus of matches, games and meets should be on teaching kids to compete appropriately, not on winning.
- At some ages and in some contexts, keeping score, winning and losing should not even come into the equation. A 'festival-like' approach where no score is kept, may be more appropriate.