

## Creating A Positive Environment

### Be Understanding of the Athlete's Experience

Some athletes may have little exposure to movement and sports. Other athletes may have had a negative prior experience. The process of a child understanding their body and enjoying movement may take time. During the process of developing sport skills, athletes may not always cooperate for various reasons. Coaches should always try to have the athlete participate to the best of their ability while being respectful of the athlete's tolerance. Consider asking families about previous experiences so you have a better understanding of where the athlete is coming from.



### Keep Your Cool, Stay Positive and Don't Take it Personally

During programming, some athletes may not be cooperative and display challenging behaviors when asked to engage with others, practice skills, or follow directions. Do your best to stay composed and not get upset or angry. These behaviors are not directed at you personally and are not because the child is a "bad kid". They are usually the way a child communicates a variety of emotions including fear, pain, or frustration. Do your best to redirect the athlete to accomplish something that you can praise and then build off the positive experience to make it a fun learning environment. Try speaking with families before or after the program on how they handle behaviors at home or ask the families what they think may have caused the athlete to react negatively. If there is a behavior system set up at home, it might make sense to incorporate it at the YA program.

### Encourage and Reassure Families

Families may become anxious or self-conscious if their child is displaying an inappropriate or disruptive behavior. If a family verbalizes or apologizes for their child, reassure them that they are welcome and that they do not need to apologize. They should also be encouraged to keep coming to the program. If the behavior is unsafe for the child or others, you should still be positive and reassuring but follow up with additional steps. If a family does not verbalize concerns, it may be a good idea to reach out after the sessions to get a sense of how the family and athlete are feeling after the session and give encouragement for future sessions.

### Get Personal

Getting to know your athletes and their families can help you understand many things: family dynamics, struggles the families have had, strategies they have previously tried, and the athlete's personalities. Having better background information will help you create a positive learning environment and assist you in developing different coaching strategies. Taking time to talk with families before and after a session is key in developing this relationship. You do not have to ask invasive personal questions, but questions that pertain to athlete development in the YA program including the activities they enjoy as a family.

### Remember, It's a Process

For both families and coaches, it is always good to keep in mind that learning and development is a process. Everyone progresses at his/her own rate and has different strengths and weaknesses. Progress is not a straight line and athletes may have some regression when faced with a new challenge. Athletes can have good and bad days like anyone else. Remember it is ok if an athlete does not make progress every time and there are many other realms someone can make progress in besides gross motor skills.