

ACTIVELY ENGAGING WOMEN AND GIRLS

Recommendations for High Performance Coaches and Leaders

Coaches and leaders involved with athletes in the Train to Compete and Train to Win stages of LTAD must consider the psycho-social needs of the female athletes to create optimal conditions and systems for athlete success.

1. EDUCATE YOURSELF – Invest time to learn about the psychosocial factors influencing female athletes, and how to reduce the barriers affecting their full engagement and optimal performance. Encourage and provide opportunities for everyone involved with your athletes to learn more, including support staff and parents/families.

2. COMMIT TO LONG-TERM TALENT DEVELOPMENT – Respect the spectrum of abilities of all your athletes. Develop intrinsic motivation and desire to develop skills. Emphasize personal choice and responsibility by encouraging your athletes to practice motor and sport skills outside of organized practices. Provide opportunities for mental and physical rest. Be proactive in addressing transitions in athletes' lives, providing suggestions for on and off ramps including links with other sports, as well as coaching and officiating opportunities. Maintain connections during periods of disengagement, whether the athlete's involvement is interrupted temporarily or longer-term.

3. CREATE AN OPTIMAL PERFORMANCE ATMOSPHERE – Respect that athletes have different and unique personalities. Use appropriate tactics to motivate each individual, recognizing that tactics effective for some might negatively impact others. Maintain a positive attitude and communicate in a respectful demeanour (verbal and nonverbal). Provide constructive and specific feedback; use mistakes to foster self-teaching. Challenge athletes on all levels (physically, mentally, emotionally and socially), encouraging them to strive for their true potential. Make goal-setting a collaborative effort between the athlete(s) and coaching staff.

4. CREATE AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT – Take responsibility for managing the social dynamics of the team. Proactively address signs of disengagement. Promising practices to build positive team dynamics include:

- Establish social contracts or codes of conduct that include shared values and expectations for positive behaviours. Identify specific rules to create and maintain an inclusive environment (e.g., no texting in dressing rooms), and implement agreed upon consequences that are consistent with the values, rules and policies.

- Enforce a policy of zero tolerance for bullying, harassment, racism, and homophobia.
- Integrate social time into practices through informal activities (e.g., chatting while running to warm up, playing modified games, or providing opportunities for team members to take turns leading activities).
- Organize social opportunities outside of games and practices (e.g. team hikes or meals, attending women's athletic events, movies or taking part in a charity event).
- Know when to use humour, and allow athletes to joke and feel relaxed during training.
- Mix up partners and groups during drills to encourage interaction and avoid the formation of cliques, which have the power to destroy a team or jeopardize camaraderie within a club.
- Respect and spend equal time with all athletes to avoid perceptions of favouritism.
- Welcome newcomers, and avoid "rookie" events that emphasize disparity between team members.

5. REDUCE STRESS – Minimize stress-producing social influences, such as parental pressure, ego-oriented climates, punitive approaches to discipline, and authoritarian and autocratic leadership. Female athletes are more likely to internalize emotional issues than to speak up about conflict and personal challenges. Provide individualized coping tools and strategies, and develop social resources among female athletes, such as relaxation training, support and social ties.

6. SUPPORT OPTIMAL TRAINABILITY – Performance plateaus, drops, and peaks due to many factors including physical and psycho-social issues. Design and implement developmentally appropriate training programs that consider the physical and psycho-social aspects of an athlete's development. Familiarize yourself with your athletes' personal story and sport history, as it may provide insight into the specific psycho-social factors impacting their lives and sport experiences.



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