

Emotions Among Athletes

Coaches deal with athletes on many levels, such as providing technical instruction, physical development & training, as well as teaching individuals to work together as a team. In addition, coaches work on a more personal level with their athletes, helping them to understand their emotions and how those affect their performances. Coaches are in a unique position to help their athletes to learn how to deal effectively with their emotions and how to use them to improve as opposed to detract from their performances.

Although talking about and dealing with emotions can be uncomfortable, coaches who learn to do so can create well-rounded, self-regulating athletes who can motivate themselves and improve their performances. Here are some suggestions for dealing with athlete emotions:

Learn to check in with your athletes about how they are feeling. A quick, simple check-in can provide valuable information about the athletes on your team. By asking how they are feeling, you also are modeling the connection between emotions and performance. By opening the conversation about how the athletes are feeling, you can begin to learn to encourage those emotions that help performance and regulate those emotions that interfere with performance.

Understand what the athlete does with his/her emotions. As a coach, you have a unique perspective that allows you to observe your athletes in action. Take note of how each athlete handles various emotions. Do you see them have outbursts of anger? Do they play timidly when they are nervous? It is important to remember that different athletes experience different emotions. In addition, similar emotions can be motivating or distracting for different athletes. The better understanding you have about how their emotions affect their behavior, the better you will be able to educate them about more helpful strategies for emotional regulation.

Recognize when emotions are too much or not enough. One way to think about the emotional state of your athletes is to see three separate levels of emotion. 1. Not enough emotion, 2. Just enough emotion, & 3. Too much emotion. You can help your athletes to learn to regulate their emotions by helping them understand when they aren't using them enough (not playing inspired, too calm, etc.), or are experiencing them too much (too anxious, too hyped-up, etc.). This will allow you to help them to learn what levels of emotional intensity work for them as an individual. In addition to recognizing the intensity of emotions, identifying which emotion the athletes are experiencing will help you know if that emotion is a helpful or distracting emotion for that athlete.

At the Center for Sport Psychology and Performance Excellence at the University of North Texas, we have a dedicated staff of sport consultants who can help athletes, teams, and coaches learn to work more effectively with their emotions and motivation. For more information please call us at 940-369-7767 or visit our website at www.sportpsych.unt.edu or email us at sportpsych@unt.edu. As always, we leave you with our sport quote of the week:

Let's not forget that the little emotions are the great captains of our lives and we obey them without realizing it.

-Vincent Van Gogh