

# 3 How to coach children

An instructor is responsible for working with children to create an environment where they can grow on their own, rather than the instructor raising them. To grow on their own means to learn to control themselves with their own will (autonomy), to feel confident and to act upon their own initiative to establish their goals and solve their problems (independence/activeness). The experience of achieving their goals motivates them to try harder (diligence). It is, therefore, essential for the instructor to think with the children, respecting their individuality and self-initiative instead of coaching them unilaterally by teaching or making them do things. The instructor's attitude of being there for the children and thinking together leads the children to focus on their records and results as well as the process of how much effort they put in.

Still, it is typical of childhood to be hyperactive (kinetic drive) and always searching for some kind of stimuli. At times they can take off without any reason and are at risk without a proper instructor. For this reason, an instructor must have shared awareness in advance to watch over them. The instructor has to establish some basic rules they must follow such as not leaving the specified area. Furthermore, the instructor explains the reasons why they have to follow the rules so that they can give thought to their significance. If the children behave according to the rules, the instructor praises them. If not, the coach stops the game to go over the rules and discuss what they should do. This type of approach on the instructor's side enhances their autonomy.

Let us now look at some of coaching methods and techniques.

## 1. Key perspectives required for a good instructor

### (1) Start off with physical interaction

Children are not good at listening silently to instructions or understanding complicated rules. They come to you expecting to have fun; if you tell them to line up, sit down and listen to detailed explanations, you are spoiling the fun. Lead the children so that they can comfortably join the game without being interrupted. Address the children as they come to the field and let them join the game even if some of them have not yet arrived. An icebreaker game should be simple enough for the children to enjoy exercising, such as throwing a ball, running around or playing tag instead of one that requires complicated rules. Gradually, as all the children gather and have a good sweat, give them a break to greet them. A flexible introduction maintains children's ability to concentrate on the activities to follow.

### (2) Experience diverse actions

Children need to experience a diversity of exercise through having a fun time playing. Therefore, the instructor must design a program that enables children to engage in different types of exercise (regardless of the event the instructor specializes in or the events of Sports Clubs). The experience of trying and having more sophisticated diverse physical exercise builds up the foundation for

comprehensive body movement, which will help them improve their competitive skills in a specific event that they might take up in the future. However, some guardians may request the instructor to give their children technical training for competitive sport right away. The instructor must therefore continue explaining to the guardians the importance of doing a variety of exercises in childhood.

### (3) Secure a certain amount of physical activity and intensity of activity

Children today lack physical activity in their daily lives, especially after school and during holidays. Sports clubs and sports lessons have a key role in securing a certain amount of exercise in terms of the time and intensity of each activity. Occasional use of a pedometer or activity tracker may be efficient to verify the content of an activity. An instructor should not let the children wait in line longer than the actual exercise session.

### (4) Take account of personal differences in growth and development

Children are often characterized by personal differences in growth and development including their strong and weak points. In fact, some are not good at sports in general. Individual differences in physical fitness and athletic ability are conspicuous, especially in younger age groups. An instructor is required to address each child according to their ability and watch over them patiently without comparing them. Singling out a child just because their progress is slow is inappropriate. An instructor must remember that the psychological development of each child also varies and that verbal interaction has to be conducted in accordance with their respective attributes.

### (5) Introduce a series of programs seamlessly

Since children easily become bored or distracted, an instructor needs to introduce a set of programs one after another before they lose interest instead of telling them to concentrate and not act up. It might be effective to include some fun workout games.

### (6) Give credit for what they have achieved

Children often ask us to watch their performance; they want their performance to be acknowledged when they achieve something new. If an instructor only praises good performers, the rest of the children will not be able to enhance their sport competence (refer to p. 49). In order to motivate them, the instructor should carefully watch the individual level of progress and praise them every time for what they have achieved or improved. Instead of saying that a child is still not good at XXX, the instructor should encourage them, saying that they did a good job and asking if they would like to try doing XXX next. Repeating positive comments will produce motivation and sport competence.

### (7) Always create a lively and fun atmosphere

Children are quite sensitive to subtle changes in the instructor's expressions and moods. When coaching children, take care how you express your emotions through facial expressions. Try to create a lively and fun atmosphere at all times. You must also be careful what you say or how you act in front of the children. Children often feel afraid when they see their instructor using strict words or acting harshly toward other children.

### (8) Enhance psychological development and stimulate sociality

In order for the children to enjoy exercising, coaching should be included in their play. This does not mean that the instructor, in an effort to please them, acts on every request from the children. There are only two situations when the instructor should scold the children: when they do something morally wrong and when they do something dangerous. Children, especially in their infant stage, do not clearly understand right and wrong; they lack sufficient ability to predict the consequences of their behavior. From time to time, they act only thinking of themselves or display dangerous behavior. At such times, the instructor should scold the child on the spot, indicating their misconduct and explaining why it is wrong. However, the standard for warning children should be consistent at all times. Improvement in their behavior is a sign of social development and the instructor should praise them from the heart. Furthermore, children often get into fights while playing. This is another sign of growth for the group and also an opportunity for psychological growth for the children. The instructor must watch and wait at times like this. Although children may complain to their instructor about their problems and ask for solutions, the instructor should try to refrain from stepping in as much as possible and just watch over them so that they gradually grow to express their opinions to their peers.

Basically, an instructor provides an environment for the children to improve their skills in exercise and sports as well as to enhance their psychological development such as motivation, endurance and overcoming problems as well as their sociality such as cooperativeness and rule compliance.

### (9) Make the most of cross-age interaction

Since sports coaching involves children of different age groups working together, exercise games are effective as part of cross-age interaction. The experience offers a perfect opportunity for children in higher grades to take care of the younger children. However, when they are left on their own, the older children may scare the younger ones by speaking aggressively, even when they are without malice. The instructor should supervise the older children and ask for their assistance.

### (10) Share coaching information

Coaching children without any planning would result in imbalanced activities. The activity program would also be fragmented when you have multiple instructors and guardians taking turns at coaching the children. A coaching log, for instance, is helpful so that everyone will be able to grasp the flow and purpose of the previous activities. You can write down the monthly goals, training focus, coaching methods and issues to be addressed, and share the progress of each child as well as the coaching items. When you try different variations of exercise games and practicing methods, you can note down anything that might be useful in the future such as that the children enjoyed the activity even more by changing the rules to such and such. By doing so, other members of the coaching team will be able to use the same methods and the children will have more opportunities to take interest and positively engage in the activities. The coaching log will be of great benefit to the coaching team in maintaining sophisticated programs through sharing information instead of each instructor trying out a new program or variation.

In the meantime, problematic issues happen frequently while coaching children. Instructor es

should share information of the potential danger of children's movements and reactions during exercise programs as well as that of the coaching area and exercise equipment so that the problematic issue will not happen a second time. Leaving a record of problematic issues in the coaching log is essential for safety.

### <About sport competence...>

Sport competence is a feeling of self-confidence or confidence in sports that develops through improved performance or successful experience. It consists of three factors: recognizing one's physical competence, which is to feel confident about one's performance in sports, self-control, which is to feel confident about one's achievement through trying or practicing, and a sense of acceptance, which is to feel confident about being accepted by the instructor and peers (See drawing below).

Childhood experience has much to do with developing sport competence. With the help of efficient methods and instructors, children will develop healthy sport competence. To the contrary, their sport competence will be significantly held back if they are misdirected. An instructor, therefore, is required to devote great attention when coaching children.

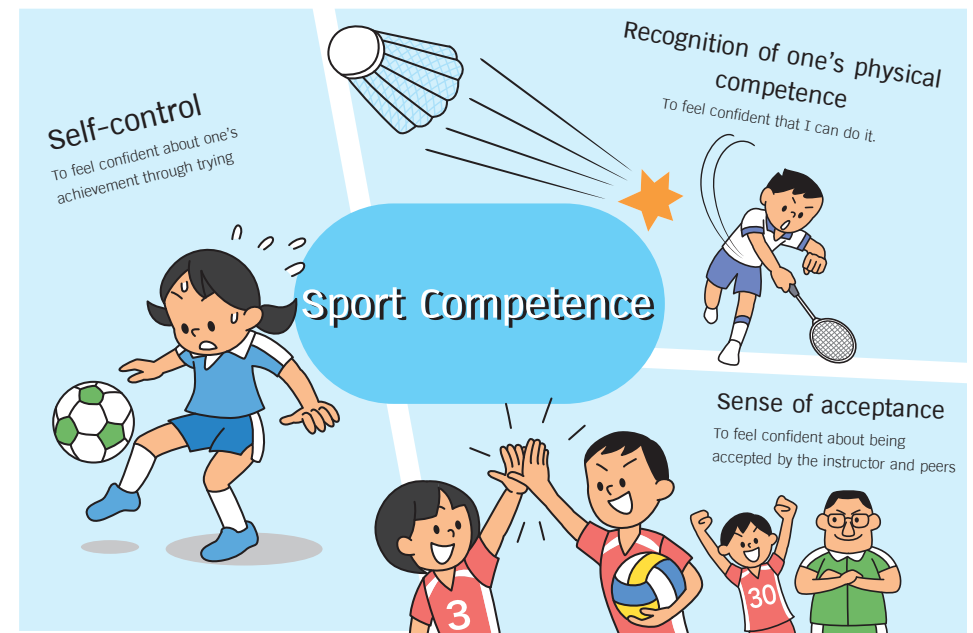


Figure1 Sport competence

## 2. How to arrange the program and get ideas

### (1) How to vary and arrange the program

Children tend to have an especially limited attention span when they are young. In order for them to concentrate and enjoy exercise, the instructor needs to vary the program by introducing new games one after another within a short time. Arranging the program maintains their focus, leads them to engage in various movements, controls exercise quantity and facilitates the games in a multi-age group where children can interact with younger children, their peers and older children.

Yet the instructor has to continue learning different repertoires of exercise games and may find the work overwhelming. It is, therefore, recommended to flexibly change the method or rules of each particular game. By changing or arranging each game, the instructor can create new ways of playing the game to add more variations. Children's creative rules may become a source of inspiration at times to conceive new variations. For this reason, the instructor is encouraged to be open-minded in developing a program. It is also effective to ask the children for ideas on how to develop a game and think together to create new variations.

#### ① Arranging a game to bring out various movements

- If they move forward, have them move backward. If they can do it with their right hand, have them do it with their left hand. Always be conscious of including movements in two directions; forward-backward, left-right and up-down. (bilateral movement)
- Combine multiple movements, e.g. by adding upper body movement to an exercise using the lower body. (composite movement)
- Vary the conditions, e.g. by using a volleyball instead of a tennis ball. (responsiveness)
- Change signals or intentionally introduce unexpected movements. (irregularity)
- Bring out various movements by gradually raising the difficulty level in small steps when the children successfully complete a particular exercise pattern. (degree of change)

#### ② Variation for controlling exercise quantity

- Adjust exercise quantity by changing the size of the court or the distance depending on the age and physical fitness of the players as well as environmental factors such as the temperature and humidity.

#### ③ Variations for cross-age groups (vertical relationship)

- Handicap children in the lower grades by doubling the score, for instance, or having the older children hop when a younger child becomes it in tag.
- When a game is meant for establishing peer relationships, add a condition to include one pre-school children in each group to also make sure that younger children are accepted by the older ones.

### (2) Have children enjoy sports through games and play

In tennis, for instance, if the coach focuses on practicing returns, the player would repeat returning the ball hit by the coach. Then the player may move on to practice volleys near the net or serves. Such drills focusing on a specific technique have been traditionally conducted in Japan. In many cases though, children may not acquire sophisticated skills; experiencing the entire flow of the game has a more favorable effect on their future development than encouraging them to learn each technique separately. Practicing sports in a game format including fun elements offers the opportunity to enjoy

and learn the typical movements required for the game, which is much better than simply repeating basic drills for specific skills.

### <Develop the habit of exercising>

In order to develop and perpetuate children's habit of exercising, we should deliberately create attractive places and artifices that make children want to spontaneously exercise. According to the guidelines of the Japan Sport Association, children are required to exercise at least 60 minutes or more every day. Instead of building special training facilities for children to meet the guidelines, we must direct the children to spontaneously achieve the required objective.

Let us look at some of the tips on how to approach children:

- ▶ Have the children think about how they can exercise more than 60 minutes, including daily activities, exercise and sports in their daily routines. Ask if they have any ideas about what kinds of exercise they can do after school.
- ▶ Have the children establish goals or think about themes related to physical activity.
- ▶ While teaching them how to play exercise games and playing the games together, stimulate the children's creativity by encouraging them to invent new variations and rules for the games.
- ▶ Take the children out on foot or by bike to explore different places.
- ▶ Give them items that provide them with opportunities to exercise such as jump ropes, unicycles and different types of balls.
- ▶ Make good use of traditional events and volunteer activities in the local community.
- ▶ Get the whole family involved in outdoor activities.
- ▶ Have the children watch professional sports such as baseball or J League football at stadiums and encourage them to watch the games on TV at other times.

## 3. Safety precautions

As mentioned earlier, we must create an environment where children have fun and exercise on their own initiative, engaging in a wide variety of movements. The instructor is required to offer a helping hand as necessary and watch over them to assure their safety. Aside from paying attention to the routes the children are likely to take to arrive as well as the layout of the grounds and equipment, the instructor must regularly conduct safety inspections of the facilities and equipment as well as hazardous spots. While playing games together, the instructor guides the children to understand the significance of the rules, risky behavior, hazardous locations and safe use of the play equipment so that they can become conscious of their own safety.

### (1) Place selection

#### ① The enough space and environment for movement

The instructor checks if the place has enough space for the planned exercise games and sports, trees to provide enough shade and if the trees create blind spots. Special attention must be paid to the condition of the play equipment and fences as well as the grounds for areas where children may climb and jump down from trees or structures.

## ② Positional relation of the place and roads

The instructor has to inspect the safety of the place assuming the movements of the children including their accompanying siblings; if there are car stops, guardrails or pathways at the entrances of the grounds as well as the volume of traffic on adjoining roads.

## (2) Check the facilities and equipment

### ① Confirmation of the facilities (e.g. fixed playground equipment)

Playground equipment used every day wears out little by little. The instructor must conduct regular inspections in advance by using or moving the equipment as well as by touching the main parts that the children may come into contact with to see if there are any loose bolts or damages. Especially after a long spell of rain, strong winds or heavy rain, or after a long interval, the instructor must inspect the equipment with extra care aside from the regular inspection. Having children join in some of the inspection work before playing will enhance awareness for their own safety.

### ② Hazardous spots

Adventurous children often climb trees and structures, such as lavatories and sheds. They should be following the rules but at times their mischief behind the instructors back provides significant experience as long as it does not pose any dangers. If you find a rock or a bump that might cause sprained ankles within a landing area, you should remove the obstacles. Special attention has to be paid to hazardous spots, such as structures with heights exceeding the permissive range.

### ③ Remove dangerous objects such as broken glass and cigarette butts, etc.

A ground or park where many people come and go may be littered with broken glass bottles and cigarette butts. Check the place in advance and be sure to remove dangerous objects. Instead of the instructor doing all the work, involve the guardians so that cleaning up becomes part of the regular activity for creating a play area together.

### ④ Play equipment and sports gear

As for sports gear that the instructor provides, be sure to check the gear regularly before and after use as well as during storage. Count the number of items, check for any damage or wear and try using the gear from time to time.

## (3) Preparation for emergency

### ① Neighboring hospitals

Securing safety is the priority but the instructor must list the neighboring hospitals, especially those with emergency departments, in case of accidents and injuries. The list should include surgeons, orthopedists, ophthalmologists, dentists, etc. and opening hours and days of the hospital or clinic.

### ② Contact information of people concerned

In the event of an accident or problem, the instructor may not be able to handle the situation alone. Contact the people concerned so that they will be ready to come and help. It is recommended to have a simulation with everyone concerned about how to respond in an emergency before starting to coach.

## ③ Emergency response manual

Produce an emergency response manual with a list of hospitals and carry it at all times so that you can take it out at any time during the activity. Share the manual information with the guardians as well as all the people concerned.

## (4) Prevention of heat stroke

Since children's body functions are still undeveloped and they cannot sweat as much as adults, their temperature rises quickly in hot environments. They are more exposed to sunlight reflecting off the ground because they are shorter. Do not make children push themselves in the heat and be sure to take frequent breaks. The Japan Sport Association lists five tips to prevent heat stroke during sports activities.

### ① Strenuous exercise in the heat can cause accidents

Even if the temperature remains unchanged, the risk of heat stroke increases as humidity rises. Adjust exercise intensity, take frequent breaks and have the children drink adequate amounts of water depending on the weather.

### ② Heat waves require caution

Many of the accidents caused by heat stroke occur when the weather suddenly gets hot. Caution is required during the first few days until our bodies acclimatize.

### ③ Replenish lost water and salt

We lose both water and salt from sweating. Be sure to replenish 0.1-0.2 percent of the salt in the body by having sports supplement drinks.

### ④ Dress lightly and stay cool

How you dress has much to do with keeping and releasing heat from the skin. During the hot season, dress in light clothes made with hygroscopic fabric and wear hats outdoors.

### ⑤ Poor physical condition can cause accidents

When you are not feeling well, your thermoregulatory function drops, causing heat stroke. Do not allow children to exercise when they have symptoms such as exhaustion, lack of sleep, fever, cold or diarrhea. Explain the importance of daily healthcare to the children and their guardians.

## (5) Prevention of infectious diseases

Infectious diseases such as COVID-19 and influenza may spread in the community. In order to prevent diseases from spreading, you should follow the guidelines provided by the specialized institutions of the government or the local community instead of deciding on your own when coaching the children. In view of the children's psychological and physical development, total absence of motion stimuli for a certain period of time holds back their healthy growth. For this reason, the instructor is required to provide exercise programs with ingenuity and proper supervision, placing priority on adhering to the guidelines to prevent the spread of infectious diseases.

Furthermore, the instructor is responsible for teaching the children the importance of healthcare and regular life habits.