

## **Tips and Guidelines for Better Communication and Habits to Protect the Mental Health of Your Players**

**By Adam Sarancik**

At all times we must remember the influence we have on the players we coach. If the way we act toward them and the way we communicate with them are done properly, the affect will be very positive now and for the rest of their lives. If not, the effect on their mental health can potentially be negative and lead to self-destructive behaviors.

Here are some tips and guidelines for better communication to protect the mental health of your players which will have positive impacts on and off of the field or court.

### **For Coaches to Protect the Mental Health of Their Players They Must Remember and Teach:**

- *“When things do not go well, look first in the mirror with honest intent.”*
- What you do not say or do not do can be more powerful than what you do say or do. Be very careful (and have your assistant coaches monitor very closely) your non-verbal communication, (i.e., your body motions and gestures, your physical appearance, social distancing, touching behaviors), as well as, your voice characteristics (e.g. volume and tone).
- Reward adherence to the process, effort, and the demonstration of life skills twice as often and much more than sport skill results.
- Keep the ratio of positive to negative comments 99:1.
- Always start your comments about the results of a drill, a part of practice, practice itself or of a game with as many positive things as possible and always start with feedback from the player(s) first. In your mind, always start with giving yourself credit for what went right, too.
- Keep and reward the energy and feedback from the team and teammates positive.
- *“Motivate by catching the players doing something right.”*
- Motivate by inspiration, not intimidation.
- Role model at all times, in practices and games, what you are asking your players to learn, particularly “staying positive, staying present”.
- Give praise publicly and constructive criticism privately.
- Constructive criticism is always about the play and never about the player.
- Never breach a player or team confidence.
- In games, coach forward, not backward. Do not micromanage them. Let the players play.

- After games, give and receive only positive feedback. Save the “teaching moments” to the next practice.
- Become a master teacher. Spend 85% of your time teaching your players skills to help the team get better as people, athletes, and players and only 15% on praise and discipline. *“When you teach them they can be good at something, you will give them the confidence they can be good at anything.”*
- Teach them to appreciate what they already have and have already accomplished as a stepping stone to what they can achieve in the future.
- Teach them to fully appreciate when good things happen and to believe they will happen again even when bad things happen.
- Proactively conduct a meeting of the minds between coaches, players and players’ parents regarding expectations relating to wins, losses, attendance (tardiness and absences for personal matters, vacations, etc.), being fans, conduct/temperament during games and practices, playing time, etc. at a pre-season meeting.
- Discuss life lessons using quotes, acronyms, role plays, and guest speakers about work ethic, attitude, adversity, leadership and accountability at the beginning of practice and about life lessons involving character, personal integrity, and success at the end of practice to teach the players about how what they are learning on the field or court translates to their lives as brothers, sisters, sons, daughters, friends, students, and future husbands, wives, fathers, mothers, and business and community leaders.
- Learn generally about what is happening in the players’ lives at school and at home so you can connect with, understand, validate, and support them as persons on and off the field or court, too. *“The first step in making an athlete believe they can be a good player is to first make them believe they are a good person.”*
- All parts and aspects of practice must include competitions so players can learn the critical lessons of learning to control what they can control and being comfortable being uncomfortable.
- Educate players about the difference between who they represent and are responsible to with the choices they make in attitude and effort versus not being responsible for those people’s lives and feelings when things do not go well.
- Do community service without the expectation of monetary return, particularly games with Special Olympics and Miracle and Challenger Leagues.

**For Players to Play Better and To Protect Their Mental Health They Must Learn:**

- *“You cannot become on the field or court, what you are not in life.”*
- No matter the outcome, you are loved and supported by your family, friends, coaches, and teammates. This season is part of a journey; it is not a destination.

- You have talents, gifts, and abilities that will allow you to succeed outside of baseball. In this regard, it is critical you choose your friends wisely and a college first as if you were not an athlete.
- Who you are *becoming* is more important than what you are *accomplishing*.
- During a game, you do not perform to the level of your talent; you perform to the level of your training. *“You have to earn the right to be disappointed.”* These habits begin outside of your sport. Good grades, for example, are not a true indication of your achievement unless they were obtained from high standards, against elite competition, and through consistent hard work. The same can be said for the benchmarks of success in your sport.
- Your teammates must be held accountable to meet these same standards of excellence so that during the game you can trust their preparation too. Learn non-verbal skills to communicate holding your teammates accountable.
- Control what you can control (e.g., your attitude, effort, and preparation) and to adapt to what you cannot (e.g., weather, field conditions, umpires’ calls, fans, etc.).
- Establish and proactively practice personal and team “mistake rituals”.
- *“When practicing to get better, chase one rabbit, i.e., mechanic or concept, at a time. If you chase two, they will both get away.”*
- Ask yourself first, “What did I do well, e.g., with that throw, pitch, or hit?”
- Take your best aspects of every practice or game e.g., throw, catch, hit, and pitch, home with you in your mind. Choose to remember the positive in every day.

**Adam Sarancik is the owner of Elevate Sports Academy which mentors student-athletes in sports skills, athleticism training, nutrition and recovery, and career and college counseling. He is also the author of four Amazon Top 100 Best Selling Baseball Coaching books, *Coaching Champions for Life – The Process of Mentoring the Person, Athlete and Player*; *Takeaway Quotes for Coaching Champions for Life*; *A Ground Ball to Shortstop – How and Why Coaches See Their Game Differently Than Anyone Else*; and *Teacher, Role Model, Mentor; Lessons Learned from a Lifetime in Coaching*. For more, see [Coachingchampionsforlife.com](http://Coachingchampionsforlife.com).**