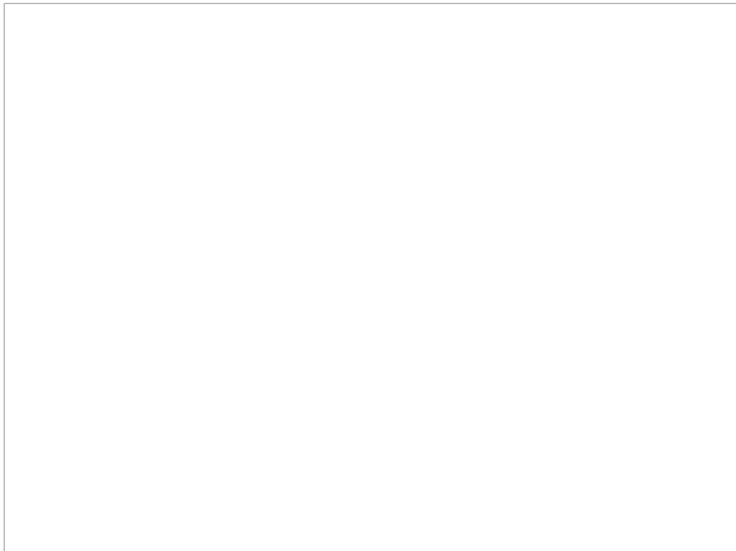


Practical examples to help you STEP back into coaching with confidence

Published 15 days ago by [Blake Richardson](#)



This article explores practical measures coaches can take to help them manage social distancing in their sessions whilst retaining the central components of safety, fun, creativity, challenge, social engagement and skill development.

These are turbulent times for the coaching sector, with the current situation perhaps best summed up metaphorically.

As coaches venture into uncharted waters, the threat of choppy seas is unnerving. But you are not alone on a rudderless ship. It's all hands on deck, and you have a vast number of experienced crewmates at your side.

UK Coaching is at the forefront of a huge collaborative effort that is here to help the nation's three million coaches on their voyage of discovery.

This article will serve as a handy route planner to guide you on the first daunting stretch of your journey. Follow its series of 'directions' and 'signposts' to help you plot a safe passage, so you do not feel all at sea!

Making molehills out of mountains

Adaptability is one of the main attributes you need to flourish as a coach.

There will be hurdles to negotiate in every coaching session, but these will usually be of the 110m kind – easily overcome with a little knowledge, forward planning, inventiveness and practical experience.

Living in the shadow of the coronavirus pandemic has heightened the barriers to delivering safe, effective, fun and engaging sessions and made the requirement to adapt and modify your approach more important than ever.

Make no mistake, physical distancing constraints will be a long-term legacy of the pandemic. On first impression, this new hurdle may seem more akin to clearing the high-jump bar, or even the pole vault.

In the [Time2Learn webinar](#) hosted by UK Coaching Policy and Partnership Manager Heather Douglas and Coach Development Manager Paul Thompson, coaches were given some practical steps to help them clear this daunting obstacle.

'Step' being the operative word. For Paul showed how by using the **STEP Model** – a foundational framework for all forms of coaching – in tandem with the **Plan, Do, Review** process that underpins good coaching practice, coaches can work up a healthy appetite for change and be enthused with a new sense of what is possible.

Below is a summary of the key takeaways from their conversation on supporting the people you coach that will help you keep pace with rapidly changing guidelines and develop your adaptability skills.

Creating a safe space

The webinar was structured around the [series of Infographics](#) that UK Coaching has created to help coaches plan, organise and design activities, and evaluate sessions, while taking social distancing into account.

Paul, who is also a Foundation Phase Coach at Sunderland Football Club, began with some “canny” ideas for implementation around ‘drop off and pick up’.

This is an element of coaching few will have given much consideration to previously but which, in the current climate, he says is often cited as an area of concern by parents taking their children to and from training sessions.

It is customary for parents, participants and coaches to gather en masse in the period leading up to the start of a session.

Maintaining a safe space between yourself and other people requires careful planning, but there are some easily achievable solutions to overcome this particular barrier.

Consider e-mailing or printing out a simple site map for parents, not only marking the drop-off and pick-up points, but also exit and entry points to your training venue, one-way systems and waiting zones. Even the most rudimentary of visual maps is an effective communication tool and a great way to build understanding and drum up support for your proposals.

If you coach a large group, consider staggering the drop-off times to avoid everyone converging at the same time.

Gearing up for a session

The Scout motto: ‘Be Prepared’ is great advice in the current circumstances and the message should be communicated to parents and children. For example, make it a requirement that players turn up ready for the session in their full kit.

Simply putting their boots on in the car can limit time spent interacting with others in the car park (or by the side of the pitch/track/hall) while they fiddle with their laces and get side-tracked in conversation.

Consider if you will need extra help to manage the arrivals or departures process or with setting up equipment prior to the session to further cut down waiting times and the risk of people congregating as they wait for the session to start.

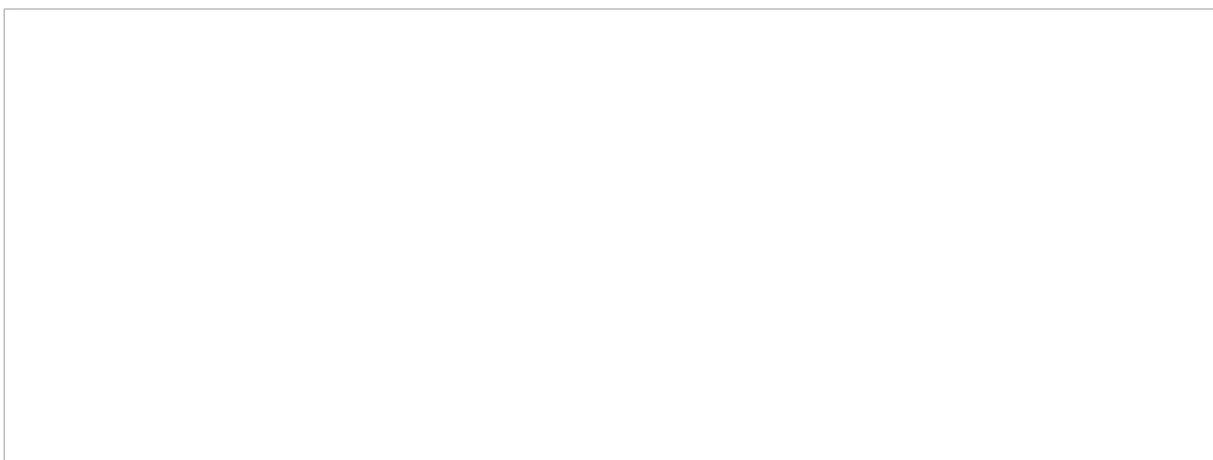
You could also ask your group to bring their own equipment to reduce time spent sanitising kit.

Are you making full use of the endless versatility of the humble cone? Assign each person in your group their own cone, appropriately spaced out, where they can store any personal belongings, such as water bottle, food, inhaler, keys or kit bag. They can return to their cone at drinks breaks and intervals and think of it as their own ‘changing room’, removing any threat of cross-contamination.

As an extra layer of protection against contamination, ask for names to be written on all drinks bottles and hand sanitizers. For some reason, the act of labelling is a highly embarrassing parental manoeuvre in children’s eyes but reassure them it’s no worse than having their name tags sewn into or ironed onto their school uniform, so is something they will have to grudgingly get used to.

Another thing to bear in mind is that, while it is common practice to ask players to collect cones at the end of the session, this should now become the sole endeavour of the coach, or coaches, to limit the amount of equipment that is being picked up and touched.

Reignite your creative spark





There is understandable uncertainty, particularly among less experienced coaches, around how to design a full range of activities that adhere to physical distancing guidelines at the same time as being fun, challenging and motivating.

The STEP model recommends changing the **space, task, equipment** or **people** for a chosen activity – to make it easier or more challenging.

The framework assists coaches in making adaptations to their sessions so that they can keep everyone actively engaged, whatever their level of ability, and encourages coaches to be creative and playful in their approach.

We have already covered several adaptations coaches can make around use of ‘equipment’.

What about modifying the ‘task’ or ‘space’? It could be something as simple as asking players to dribble their ball, or use their hockey stick and ball, to spell out their name – a task that is engaging, focuses on individual skill development and can be executed while maintaining a safe space between yourself and your team-mates.

Imposing **constraints** on a drill or game based on the STEP principles compels players to develop enhanced responses. The idea is that the players must change their behaviour to develop their understanding of tactical concepts.

Think of the 2-metre social distancing guideline as a ready-made ‘space’ constraint that coaches can use in their game design.

Here is a [great example from the sport of rugby](#) from ConnectedCoaches Content Champion [Dan Cottrell](#) involving five players and one coach to get your creative juices flowing.

Seize the initiative

The manipulation of space is a prominent feature of **invasion games**, where the objective is to attack the opposition’s territory, and where the emphasis is on teamwork, maintaining possession, scoring and defending.

Moving around and ‘finding space’ is naturally encouraged by coaches of team sports and is seen as the key to effective attacking play. You can see how social distancing and invasion games are a good fit.

Experiment with making modifications to the rules of your favourite games and drills – including the size of the playing space, the number of players and the methods of scoring or earning points to discover which can be done effectively whilst maintaining a safe distance between players.

Dividing your group into socially distanced ‘bubbles’ is another way of making an effective use of space.

Carousel sessions involve splitting the main group into smaller groups and setting up several activities that test different skills. Groups rotate from one challenge to another after a set amount of time on each activity.

Remember, as you experiment with making modifications, it’s absolutely fine if ideas don’t work perfectly first time.

Remember too that, while the players are there to learn from the coach, the coach can also learn a great deal from his or her players. Coaches should be striving to develop independent thinkers, and this entails giving players greater autonomy and control over their learning.

So put the onus on your players to make modifications to a game by factoring in physical distancing requirements. More than likely they will surprise you with their inventiveness!

Next Steps

Coaches operating at every level, from playground to podium, have been shaken by the ramifications of the coronavirus outbreak but maybe this is a chance to look at things through fresh eyes and experiment with creative new methods and ideas.

Change can lead to gains and, armed with a new perspective and an increased resilience, the recovery process could result in, not a new normal, but maybe even a better normal.

Fear of the unknown is only natural. Below are some more resources to help build your confidence about the future and allay any fears you may have so that you can look forward to your return to coaching with a renewed sense of enthusiasm and optimism.

Right now, you might feel you sit at number one or two on the scale above representing how confident you feel about returning to coaching. With the support of the coaching family, we'll soon have you up near the top of the chart.

[UK Coaching's series of infographics](#) will help you return to coaching under the current Covid-19 guidelines. Use them to guide your planning process; organise sessions and design possible adaptations; review your coaching practice.

Listen to the [Time2Learn webinar](#) hosted by Heather Douglas and Paul Thompson referred to in this article. It will help you make sense of the guidance available so that you can make your own return to coaching plan.

Watch the free UK Coaching resource [The STEP Model Explained](#) and read the subscriber resource [Understanding the STEP Model](#).

Book your place on the forthcoming Time2Learn Return to Coaching webinar: [Teaching Games for Understanding](#). The August 7 free webinar will explore the principles of TgFU and utilising games to support skill development and will consider how this approach can support the people you coach when they return to sport and physical activity, opening up a discussion about possible adaptations when returning to play.

Session design will be crucial going forward as coaches rack their brains for ways to coach groups while social distancing. You can learn more about how to make essential adaptations to activities by using the STEP and AIM

Models on UK Coaching's [Developing Your Practice Online Classroom](#).

Some [great feedback from ConnectedCoaches members](#) in Heather's conversation 'Coaching while social distancing: How will it work for you?'

And also in this ConnectedCoaches thread on [Covid-19 FAQs](#), including links to further guidance.

Keep up to date with the latest Covid-19 guidelines for the coaching sector [via this regularly updated page on the UK Coaching website](#).

Please add links to any other resources that you think will be helpful to coaches in the comments box below.

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tags : step-model, coronavirus, covid-19, return-to-coaching