

# Solutions to five common coaching challenges

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**A selection of coaching conundrums that have the potential to cause angst amongst even the most experienced coaches, along with some solutions to steer you and your participants on the road to happiness and success.**

Challenges are to coaching as fells are to the Lake District. They come with the territory.

And when you embark on your own personal coaching journey, be prepared for some ups and downs.

Whatever your motivations and aspirations – beginner, intermediate or advanced, working at a grassroots club for pleasure or a performance centre for payment – you WILL encounter your share of false summits that sap your morale.

But no coaching challenge is insurmountable, and having ConnectedCoaches as your guide can serve as an essential piece of survival kit, curbing that human impulse to make mountains out of molehills.

Here is just a selection of common coaching conundrums waiting to trip up even the most intrepid coach hell-bent on scaling the heights, along with some solutions to get you back on the right track.

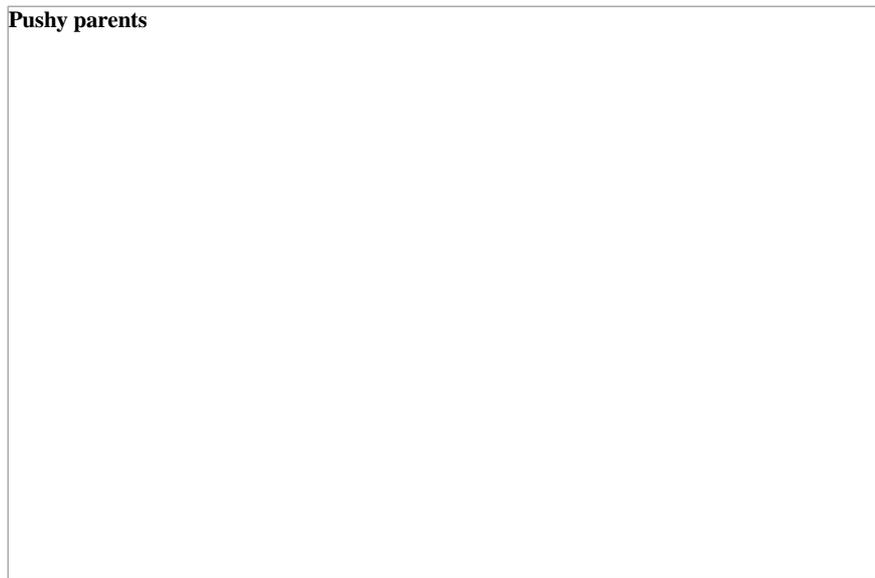
Condensing answers to such significant topics to a few paragraphs is difficult. These snippets are intended as your ‘starter pack’ – guidance in a convenient nutshell. Links to the unabridged ConnectedCoaches blogs from which they are taken are provided, along with recommended suggestions for further reading.

And please do use the search facility to discover what other members have had to say on the topics highlighted – or any other topics for that matter. Whatever the challenge, there is good chance members have swapped advice in a relevant conversation thread.

If you can't find what you're looking for and you've got a coaching question why not [start a conversation](#) (click share on the menu -> start a conversation etc) in the relevant [specialist interest group](#)? There are lots of members willing to share their experiences with you who will only be too happy to help.

## 1. Dealing with pushy parents

### Pushy parents



Talking of essential ‘coach survival kit’, every children’s coach must feel that a whistle and a hard hat is something they cannot afford to leave home without. A hard hat to deflect the verbal volleys of advice being fired out machine-gun style from the side lines on match days, and a whistle to silence these back-seat coaches. Well-intentioned their [advice](#) may be in most cases, it is nonetheless misplaced, and can be incredibly damaging to the psychological development of the child – not to mention immensely frustrating to the coach.

According to [Ceri Bowley](#) given that the primary objective of both coaches and parents is to provide young people with a positive and fulfilling experience of sport, a common sense approach would be to work together.

Here are a few of his top tips for engaging with parents so that they go from knowing how to push the coach’s buttons, to learning how to pull in the same direction.

Hold a pre-season coach-parent meeting to initiate open, healthy communication, and thank them for their support and the commitment they will show in bringing their children to training and matches throughout the season. Consider stretching the lines of communication to outlining your coaching philosophy for the team and including them in team talks and debriefs.

Making the time to speak to parents in such a way will hopefully mean they will be less likely to ‘coach’ their children from the touchline.

**Read the full blog:** [The athletic triangle: Coach-parent-athlete triad](#)

**See also:**

- [When dads go bad](#)
- [What are your tips for managing parents?](#)
- [How to manage parents' expectations?](#)
- [Parents - Why must this always be a dirty word?](#)
- [The Role of a Sporting Parent: Parents Just Don't Understand...or do they?](#)
- [Can I sack a parent?](#)
- [How coaches can work in partnership with parents](#)

## 2. Dealing with bullying

### Bullying

To excel as a coach, it is imperative you hone your surveillance skills. By this I mean an aptitude towards observing, monitoring and supervising your participants, not wire-tapping, [espionage](#) or covert undercover intelligence work.

Taking the time get to know your participants and having the inclination to [build a good rapport](#) with them will allow you to develop something of a psychological radar that warns you when something isn't quite right – as you become trained in recognising and understanding their behaviours and emotions.

The [Annual Bullying Survey 2016](#) highlighted the scale of the silent epidemic, finding that 1.5 million young people aged 12 to 20 (50%) have been bullied within the past year; 44% of young people who have been bullied experience depression; and 33% of those being bullied have suicidal thoughts.

The challenge for every coach is to improve your receptiveness to those who may be being bullied and sharpen your responses to how to deal with a range of scenarios if you spot the clues, thereby giving you the confidence to challenge either a team-mate or parent.

Remember too that coaches can be inadvertently guilty of bullying behaviour – which can be verbal, physical, emotional or written – and that the competitive nature of sport makes it an ideal environment for the bully to operate in.

**See also:**

[Beating the bullies: A crash course for coaches](#) contains more information on what bullying behaviour looks like, the signs that coaches should look out for and the appropriate action that should be taken.

UK Coaching (formerly known as Sports Coach UK) has developed, in partnership with the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU), the '[Renewal: Safeguarding and Protecting Children in Sport](#)' eLearning course, which includes a Safe Communication with Digital Kids module. [Find out more](#).

## 3. Dealing with problem players

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## Positive behaviour infographic

One of the most common phrases my childhood football coach (and my mum and dad for that matter) used to say to me in jest, every time an excuse was thrown his way, was: 'If I had a pound every time I heard that, I would be rich.' Well, I wish that I had a pound every time I had written in a blog that a solution to a particular coaching conundrum lay in 'developing the person before the player.' Suffice to say, I'd be rich.

As advice goes, it is worth a million dollars, and is certainly relevant in the context of developing performers who are perceived to be lazy or disruptive. It is paramount that you understand the individual that you are trying to develop – their particular motivations and needs. Once these have been established, you can begin to identify what you can do as a coach to help that individual get better.

So, if you are working with a squad of 16 players, you have to develop 16 unique and sometimes very different relationships. Ask them the following five questions to establish their motivations and to identify what you can do as a coach to help each individual get better:

- Why do you play this sport?
- Why do you play for this club and not another club?
- What [motivates you \(competition or enjoyment\)?](#)
- What are your ambitions?
- What do you expect of me as the coach and of the team?

It is likely that each performer will want/need something different, says Dr Ceri Bowley in his advice to coaches.

He is adamant there is no such thing as an uncoachable player. By adhering to the 'person before player' development philosophy and constructing individual learning journeys, the hope is that more coaches will begin to appreciate this.

**Quotes taken from the blog:** [The secrets to building a more productive relationship with problem players.](#)

**See also:**

- [How to inspire good behaviour in your sessions](#)
- [Emotional intelligence: How to recognise and coach an overconfident 'know-it-all' participant](#)

## 4. Dealing with pressure

Pressure stress



What words of wisdom do you impart to your participants to help calm their nerves and ensure they perform at the top of their game when it matters? And what techniques can you integrate into sessions to help them cope with pressure and control their emotions on the big day?

The growing recruitment in professional sport of consultant or even full-time sports psychologists is testimony to the rising influence this sphere of coaching – the science of the mind – is having on the profession as a whole.

Coaches should consider taking an ‘aggregation of marginal gains’ approach to developing strong mental mindsets in their performers – applying the following series of small steps that, when combined, can lead to big performance gains.

Distractions, disruptions and differences that occur in a competitive environment can sabotage exhaustive preparations. Try listing what form these could take in the context of your own sport, and discuss them with your athlete one-to-one so they do not come as a total shock to the system on the day. This changing environment is often enough to trigger doubts and invasive thoughts. ‘The more information they know about travelling to an event, for example, the more it helps reduce anxiety and perceptions of pressure,’ says [Nick Ruddock](#)

Mimic the feeling of stress by inducing the reaction of sweaty palms, an increased heart rate, the feeling that they didn’t sleep the night before, by purposely placing them in pressurised situations where they feel uncomfortable. That could include messing with warm-up timings, radical changes to training patterns or training in an alien environment that takes them out of their comfort zone.

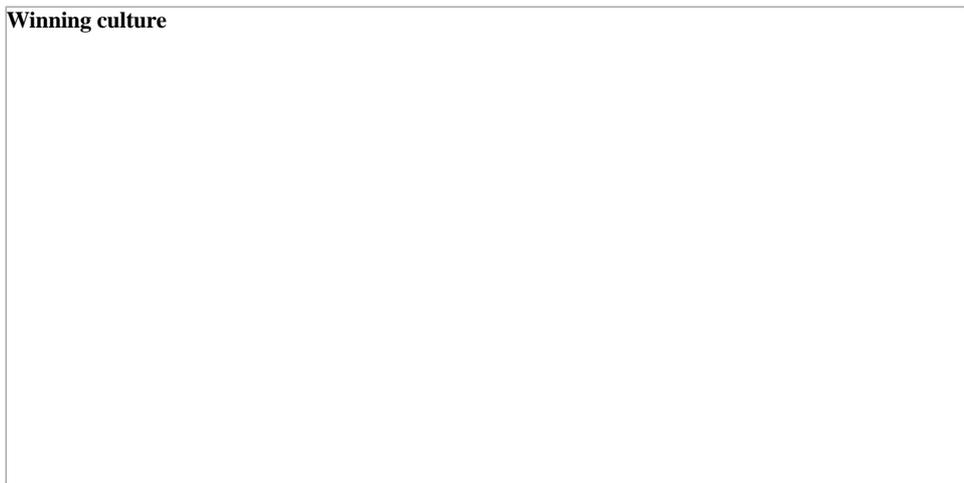
As well as preparation and planning, repetition is key. Practise competition protocol again and again... and then again. As [Chris Chapman](#) says: ‘What seems like pressure initially, if you do it repeatedly, is not pressure.’

**Quotes taken from the blog:** [Blessed or stressed: Dealing with pressure in sport](#)

**See also**

- [The psychology of success: Strategies for coping on the big occasion](#)
- [Mental Strength and Relaxation...there are Noe limits to the benefits!](#)
- [Emotional intelligence: How to approach coaching participants for ‘the big game’](#)

**5. How to create a winning culture**



Emotional intelligence (EI) can have a huge influence on team dynamics. Don't be put off by one of coaching's buzz terms. Boiled down to its essentials, it can be as simple as listening to one another, taking it in turns to speak and showing sensitivity to each other's needs.

Follow this mantra and you are halfway to developing a successful group culture whereby players feel confident they won't be embarrassed, rejected or punished for speaking up; where there is interpersonal trust and mutual respect; and where people are comfortable being themselves.

The particular EI behaviour traits at play here, says [Catherine Baker](#) and which are intrinsic to achieving this ideal state of 'psychological safety' needed for players to thrive within a team setting, are:

- the ability to put yourself in other people's shoes (empathy)
- your ability to build and maintain emotional bonds (relationships), and
- your ability to utilise and adapt social skills to fit certain situations (social awareness).

A coach looking to establish a philosophy of [collective ownership](#) – that is, fostering an environment conducive to building a common purpose and understanding, for the mutual benefit of all – should devise ways to encourage social interaction between players, so they bond socially and form social connections. Note the intended repetition of the word 'social', as a convivial club climate is instrumental to sustained success.

Head coach of the Olympic gold medal-winning Great Britain hockey team, Danny Kerry, goes as far as to say 'culture precedes performance – it is absolutely fundamental'.

**Quotes taken from the blog:** [Smells like teen spirit: How to create a winning culture through the use of emotional intelligence](#) – The blog also poses a range of scenarios that demonstrate how to put the concepts into practice.

#### See also

- [The Practical Issue With Developing A 'Culture'](#)
- [Building the culture within an amateur performance team](#)
- [Emotional intelligence is integral to becoming a great coach](#) (includes links at the end to other EI content such as more blogs, videos and podcasts)

Now read: [Solutions to 5 common coaching challenges - Part 1](#)

What are the biggest coaching challenges you have faced? Try using our search engine to find some solutions that could work for you.

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tags : ei, emotional-intelligence, culture, pressure, bullying, pushy-parents, coaching-challenges

