



Coaches can help keep kids in sport

Source article: [Wekesser, M. M., Harris, B. S., Langdon, J., & Wilson Jr, C. H. \(2021\). Coaches' impact on youth athletes' intentions to continue sport participation: The mediational influence of the coach-athlete relationship. International Journal of Sports Science & Coaching, 16\(3\), 490-499.](#)

The challenge



In Australia, children as young as 11 are beginning to drop out of sport.



(Australian Sports Commission 2023)



Sport participation among children is declining. There are numerous suggestions about what is causing the drop out (Vell et al., 2015), but we are focusing here how coaches can help kids stay in sport.

What we know

One of the most impactful ways a coach can influence a participants experience with sport is by creating a positive relationship with them.

The quality of the relationship between the coach and participant is usually determined by the level of commitment, closeness, and shared behaviours they have for and with each other.

The behaviours a coach uses to interact with and influence their participants can be categorised in the following ways.

| Supportive | Controlling |
|--|---|
| Autonomy-supportive Encouraging a sense of freedom and self-determination. | Autonomy-controlling Not allowing participants to have any say in how things are done. |
| Competence-supportive Ensuring participants feel capable. | Competence-controlling Creating an environment where participants think they must be better than everyone else. |
| Autonomy-supportive Encouraging a sense of freedom and self-determination. | Relatedness-controlling Ignoring participant's values and perspectives. |



- Every supportive coaching style listed above has a positive impact on coach-participant relationships. Conversely, most of the controlling coach behaviours negatively impact the quality of the coach-participant relationship.
- Only competence-supportive coaching behaviours have a positive impact on a participant's intention to stay in sport. The stronger the coach-participant relationship, the greater the participant's intention to remain in sport.

Insights for coaches



Be supportive

- Use more supportive coaching behaviours and less controlling behaviours if you want to build and maintain strong, positive relationships with your participants.
- Include participants in the design or running of activities to make them feel part of the relationship (autonomy supportive).
- Provide feedback to participants about their performance during a training activity that informs and encourages (competence-supportive), rather than critiques.
- Bring participants into conversations and treat them as equals (relatedness-supportive). Show that you value their insights and thoughts.



Create a positive environment

Build an environment where participants feel they are capable of developing their skills and achieving their goals and make sure your participants know it is ok to make errors.

- Recognise personal success and allow sufficient time for participants to complete or improve during an activity. All coaches should strive to create this type of competency-supportive environment.
- Create positive sporting environments, with strong relationships to help your participants stay involved in sport.

More information

Read the full [research paper](#) or learn more about the modern approach to coaching on the [Australian Sports Commission website](#).