ENCOURAGING POSITIVE BEHAVIOUR
TIVERTON RUGBY FOOTBALL CLUB

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Inevitably, as a provider of rugby for children, adults will occasionally experience moments when one or more children behave less than ideally. Everyone has bad days, or days struggling to focus or stay motivated, and children are no different.

If a child is displaying challenging behaviour, this should not be met with judgemental behaviour. Rather than assuming that a child is challenging or disruptive, the coach or responsible adult should instead reflect on their own practices and consider if there are ways that they could arrange their sessions to better suit the needs of that child.

This guidance aims to aid coaches and adults to understand how to encourage positive behaviour in children. It is not an exhaustive list covering all potential situations, but gives some tips in identifying a problem, how to deal with it, and move forwards more effectively.

What is behaviour that challenges?

A child's behaviour can be defined as challenging if it puts that child, other children, or adults (such as the coach) around them at risk, or leads to a poorer quality of life. Challenging behaviour may include:

- Aggression, foul language, acts of violence
- Destructive behaviour, such as ruining equipment, throwing objects etc
- Disruptive behaviour that diminishes children's ability to focus on the session

With this in mind, as soon as it is apparent that there is a pattern of behaviour that is challenging, difficult, or worrying being displayed by a child, please consider the cause. Consider whether there is a simple explanation and if not, seek advice and begin seeking a solution that involves the child, rather than excludes them.

Planning activities

When planning coaching sessions, always consider if any child needs additional support or supervision to participate safely, due to their

behaviour. To ensure successful planning of coaching sessions, we would always recommend that you:

- Carry out an assessment of any additional risk associated with a child's behaviour
- Speak with the parents/guardians of children under your supervision to understand if there are any additional needs that need to be addressed
- Ensure there is suitable ratios of adults to children during sessions. Depending on the outcome of the above two points, there may need to be more adults than usual
- Ensure that all adults involved in the session understand how to manage behaviour that is challenging, and have a consistent approach agreed upon
- Consider whether the club need to consult with specialist expertise, depending on advice from the child's parent/guardian

Encouraging positive behaviour

When responding to challenging behaviour, the adult's objective should be to encourage positive behaviour among children. The response must always be proportionate to the behaviour and actions imposed as soon as practicable, fully explained to the child and their parents/guardians, and be inclusive, rather than exclusive.

When dealing with children who are displaying less than ideal behaviour, the coach and other supervising adults should consider the below Do's and Don'ts.

Do - Talk to the child and try to establish what the issue is. Perhaps they don't understand the instruction or objective, or are particularly tired, drained or stressed. Explaining a technique on a 1:1 basis or buddying the child up with someone who fully understands the technique can be useful methods.

Don't - Assume the problem rests solely with the child. Self-reflection is vital. Ask if you can factor in the individual needs of the child when planning sessions, if there is another way you could explain a task or how you could engage the child if they seem tired/stressed. Unplanned and ad-hoc coaching is more likely to result in children losing focus and becoming distracted, particularly if there is idle time in between tasks.

Do - Be open to the fact that there might be more going on for this child – If the problem cannot be easily resolved in a discussion with the child, be mindful that there is usually a reason why a child is behaving differently to the rest of the group. It might be a cry for help or attention if there is a deeper problem, bullying, abuse, family problems, substance misuse etc. If you suspect this is a deeper issue, please report it to the Club's Safeguarding Officer detailing all the information you have.

Don't - Minimise any suspicions or concerns that you have if you think there is a deeper problem, or that you're seeing a child behaving out of character. Seek advice from the Club's Safeguarding Officer, or the RFU Safeguarding team.

Do - Be open to the fact that the child might have additional needs – According to the Department of Education, 14.9% of all pupils have special educational needs (January 2019). A number of children within your club are therefore likely to fall into this category. Some will have a formal diagnosis, others not. Some parents will already have disclosed this to the club, others not. If a child has additional needs that are affecting his or her behaviour, there can often be simple adjustments that will bring about improvements.

Don't - Assume that you must be an expert in additional needs to be able to manage a child with additional needs. Rugby can be a positive influence in the life of a child who might struggle in other areas. Parents, schools and the RFU can signpost you and offer some advice about a specific need that a child/children may have.

Do - Speak to parents/guardians. Find out if the behaviour you are seeing also occurs at home, in school or in other activities. What measures do the parents/guardians use to manage this at home? Can this be replicated, or similar measures be implemented in rugby. For example, children with attention deficit might respond well to a task if it is timed, if they have a clear understanding of how many times they are required to complete a task, and for how long.

Don't - Blame parents/guardians for enabling their child to behave in this way. Encourage parents/guardians to work as a team with the club to tackle the problem. Support them and you may find that having a parent/guardian on your side will be a real benefit. Ostracise them and you might be facing the added difficulty of a complaint by them about your approach.

Do - Get consent from the family to speak to the school. Parents should be made aware that any information the school shares is strictly confidential. If a school recognises a pattern of difficult behaviour in a child they may be aware of triggers. A first step to dealing with this is to prevent any distress to a child and therefore any resultant problematic behaviour. The school may also have specific measures to deal with the child if things do spiral downwards. Replicating this in rugby will not only give the club some tools to manage the behaviour but will provide some consistency and routine for the child.

Don't - Be intimidated about speaking to a school, providing you have consent first, this is a reasonable approach. If you don't feel equipped to have this discussion, speak to your Club Safeguarding Officer or

the RFU who might be able to help by talking you through this or by contacting the school for you.

Do - Include the child in any discussions about how to manage the situation. If after going through the above options, you decide that a plan is needed to manage the situation ask the child for their view on how best to tackle the problem. They are more likely to engage with and respond to solutions if they have had input to what those solutions look like.

Don't - Be heavy-handed in dealing with the problem. A referral to club discipline is not likely to resolve the issue if this is a persistent problem with an underlying cause. While there are certain circumstances that might warrant intervention by club discipline, don't necessarily go straight to this as a solution.

Where discipline is involved, make sure that it is managed in an age-appropriate manner. Be aware that only in exceptional circumstances where the safety of a child or other children cannot be maintained should a child be excluded from club activities.

Tips for keeping children on track

Encouraging children's positive behaviour will result in coaches being able to run more enjoyable sessions, for the benefit of everyone. To keep children on track and engaged, try following the below tips:

- Deal with inappropriate behaviour there and then. Don't store up incidents to be presented to the child and family in one go or at a later date
- Poor conduct should be addressed in a timely manner, particularly if the child is young or has additional needs so that the child can understand link between behaviour and consequence
- Make sure coaches are suitably trained and qualified using up to date and age-appropriate coaching techniques to get the best out the children they are coaching
- Don't be afraid to ask parents/guardians to support coaches, to stay at the sessions and manage their child's behaviour where appropriate

Help and Support

If you are finding that the situation is not improving, despite best efforts and appropriate interventions, please seek help and advice from the club, your CB or external support. You should be linking in with your Club Safeguarding Officer regarding the wellbeing of the child, and they can monitor the situation and liaise with the RFU where necessary.

Clubs should also be proactive in working with the parent/guardian or

school. In some instances, children who are finding participation challenging may also be struggling in other settings, such as schools.

Some children may have an ‘Education, Health and Care’ (EHC) Plan at their school. In these instances, working with the parent or school to try and replicate what is helpful in other environments may be useful.

Further support can also be obtained from:
• The Child Protection in Sport Unit (CPSU)
• The National Autistic Society advice
• The National Attention Deficit Disorder Information and Support Service
• Minimum standards for coaches and referees, see RFU Codes of Practice