

IIHF COACH DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

LEVEL I



PSYCHOLOGY



14. BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

14. Building Self-Esteem

An athlete's personality can be defined as the sum total of those attributes that make the individual unique. Self-image and self-esteem are two important components of each athlete's personality:

Self-Image: How one perceives or views oneself

Self-Esteem: How one feels about oneself

The key difference between the above two components of a player's personality is that self-esteem brings into play self-evaluation or self-appraisal.

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be better prepared to:

- *identify the primary processes which influence the development of an athlete's self-esteem;*
 - *social acceptance,*
 - *social reinforcement,*
 - *social comparison,*
- *develop techniques through the use of these processes to assist players in the development of high levels of self-esteem.*

Characteristics of Self-Esteem

- A high level of self-esteem is characterized by positive feelings about oneself.
- Self-esteem is learned. It is acquired through personal experiences and feedback from important people (e.g., parents, peers, and coaches) in one's life.
- Self-esteem can be changed.
- Self-esteem is extremely important as it affects one's motivation, learning, performance, personal relationships, and life satisfaction.

How Does Self-Esteem Develop?

Young hockey players receive feedback through constant interaction with their physical and social environment which provides them with information about what they are capable of doing and how others view them. The individuals in an athlete's life who are most important in shaping a player's self-esteem are parents, teachers, coaches, and peers.

The three main processes which influence the development of one's self-esteem are social acceptance, social reinforcement, and social comparison.

14.1 Social Acceptance

Social acceptance is the extent to which other people make athletes feel they are accepted as important persons.

Coaches can make athletes feel accepted by:

- showing a genuine interest in how they are getting along in situations outside of hockey (e.g., at school, work, or home),
- warmly greet the players each time that you see them,
- talking with each athlete individually at every practice and game,

- joking with them (but do not be a clown to them),
- asking their advice in certain areas (e.g., warm-ups),
- listening attentively to what the athletes have to say,
- being willing to help the players solve personal problems.

As a coach you can do a lot to assist athletes in the development and acceptance of high levels of self-esteem by demonstrating a genuine interest in each athlete as a person and a hockey player.

For the Coach

You have an athlete who has a low level of self-esteem. What can you specifically say and do to show acceptance of this athlete as a hockey player and a person?

14.2 Social Reinforcement

Social reinforcement refers to the positive or negative feedback that an athlete receives from other people.

- Feedback consists of the information which individuals transmit to an athlete by what they say and do.
- Young athletes are constantly seeking information about how well they are doing. Their coach's, peers, and parent's comments and gestures are important sources of such information.
- Positive reinforcement (praise or encouragement) will usually help the development of a positive self-esteem, whereas constant criticism or lack of interest in players will have a negative effect on the development of their self-esteem.
- Remember, praise is the highest form of motivation.

As a coach, try to use a lot of positive reinforcement to help players build high levels of self-esteem.

Positive Reinforcement

Positive reinforcement consists of any form of praise or encouragement which indicates approval of what an athlete is doing.

- Praise should be provided for good effort as well as good performance.
- Praise should be specific rather than general.
- Following a mistake in a game, a coach should show patience and explain to the player exactly what the error was and how to correct the error. Play the individual on the next shift to show your confidence in the athlete.
- Encouragement should be provided when athletes are working on new skills, especially after mistakes or setbacks.

- Use gestures such as a pat on the back, a smile, a wink, a nod of the head, or a thumbs-up sign to indicate approval.
- Encourage teammates to give one another positive feedback.
- Provide constructive feedback which will help the player improve performance.
- Do not use too much positive reinforcement or it will lose its effect. Make sure your positive feedback is sincere and meaningful.
- Set goals for each player which are specific, measurable, and attainable.
- Make sure that players feel that they have important roles on the team. Define the role for each athlete in a specific manner.

Negative Reinforcement

Negative reinforcement consists of any type of criticism or punishment which indicates disapproval of what an athlete is doing.

- If you must use criticism, make sure it is directed at a specific, undesirable action that you want to eliminate. It should not be interpreted by an athlete as a comment on their worthiness as a person.
- Negative comments should always be accompanied by specific corrective information.

For example:

Never just say “Don’t do that.” Instead, you should:

- explain to the players what they have done correctly,
- explain to the players precisely what they have done wrong,
- offer clear corrective advice which shows them how to carry out the desired behaviour,
- offer encouragement.

As another example:

If the centre on a line is a right-hand shot and has a tendency to use a forehand pass (rather than a backhand pass) to the right winger, you should not just say “Don’t use a forehand pass, use a backhand pass.” Rather, you should explain that:

- by turning to the forehand to pass to your right winger, you are taking too long to execute the pass and are telegraphing your intentions, thereby giving the opposing player time to intercept the pass,
- by using a backhand pass, you will be able to execute the pass more quickly and thus increase the chances of success,
- players at all levels make this basic mistake and must practice their skill.

Remember, following a mistake, offer corrective feedback and encouragement.

For the Coach

You have a hockey player who is a weak skater. How can you use positive reinforcement to help the player develop positive self-esteem and perhaps improve the athlete's skating skills?

Select one of the skills you teach your players. Identify a common error that occurs when athletes perform this skill. Would you use positive or negative reinforcement to correct the error? What feedback would you give to the players?

Skill: _____

Common error: _____

Use of positive or negative reinforcement: _____

Feedback given: _____

14.3 Social Comparison

Social comparison is the process by which athletes constantly compare themselves with others in order to conduct self-evaluations.

- Athletes discover through social comparison how well they are doing in the areas of physical, social, and mental abilities.
- Through their hockey experiences, players get answers to the following questions:
 - How good a player am I?
 - How good are my skills in, for example, skating, passing, shooting, and stick handling?
 - How strong am I?
 - How well-liked am I by my teammates?
 - How smart a player am I?

As a coach, you should be aware that players are constantly comparing themselves to their teammates, peers, and significant others.

The rating which players give themselves is an important determinant of their self-esteem.

For athletes with a low level of self-esteem, the coach should make a strong effort to point out positive events in the physical, social, or mental areas. Examples may include:

- “You’re a good team player.”
- “You’re very unselfish.”
- “You showed a lot of hustle.”
- “You showed a lot of discipline by not retaliating.”
- “That was a smart play.”

You should also explain to players their specific and overall roles within the team. For example, if specific players have good defensive skills, the coach should emphasize the importance of their contribution to the team which otherwise may go unnoticed. Defensive skills, such as blocking shots, freezing the puck when a change is needed, or taking face-offs, are necessary for the overall success of the team.

For the Coach

Think of your three least skilled players. Name one important role they each play in making a worthwhile contribution to the team. How do you reinforce these players for their positive contributions to the team?

Body Image

Players perceptions of their body and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their physical make-up are also important factors influencing the development of their self-esteem.

- Young athletes who have experienced a growth spurt may be gangly and uncoordinated and have a poor body image.
- Likewise, young athletes who are very late maturers may have a poor body image because of their small size.
- In both cases, poor body image may lead to low levels of self-esteem.
- A coach who recognizes a player who seems to have a poor body image due to being an early or late maturer should show patience with the athlete. The coach should also explain that many players pass through this growth pattern and eventually they all grow out of it. The coach should try to help the low self-esteem athletes realize the positive attributes they possess (e.g., hard worker, disciplined, unselfish, and honest).

SUMMARY

- Self-esteem refers to how individual players feel about themselves. A high level of self-esteem has a positive effect on everything the athlete says and does.
- Three main processes influence the development of a player's self-esteem:
 - social acceptance,
 - social reinforcement,
 - social comparison.
- Coaches should be able to develop techniques through the use of these processes to help their players develop high levels of self-esteem.