

# 6 TOP TIPS FOR CHILD-FIRST COACHING



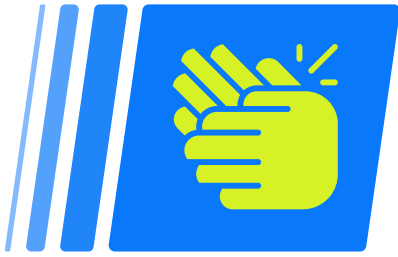
## 1. Connection before correction

Coaches must invest time and energy to form connections with their athletes. Trust cannot be demanded; it must be earned. Scott Hann, Director of Coaching at South Essex Gymnastics Club, told us:

“It takes years to build that trust and respect and form strong personal connections that enable you to understand what that child needs and then align yourself with those needs, and really help them to grow.

“Sometimes as a coach, it is a case of advising them to step off the gas a little and maybe have a bit of fun. It might be a challenging session and you see the child has become quieter than usual. That’s the point when you need to ask, ‘how do you feel today?’ and ‘tell me what it is you want to do?’ and give them a few choices so that they feel empowered as part of the process.”

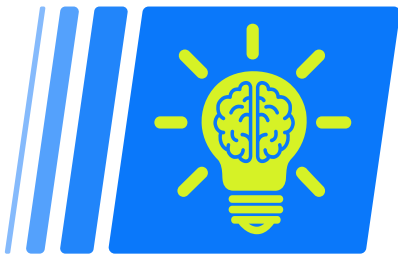
**“Sometimes it is a case of advising them to step off the gas a little and maybe have a bit of fun.” Scott Hann**



## 2. Be specific

“It’s important to be specific with praise so that your comments hold more value for the children,” says experienced coach Becky Evans. “For example, I might say: ‘Kate, that was a really sharp change of direction – well done’. If you provide generic praise all the time, it becomes less and less effective.

“At the end of the session, I’ll offer praise relating to something they’ve worked on. I might say: ‘I’m really impressed with all your efforts today. At the start of the session, I asked you to make sure every ball was thrown flat and fast and in the game at the end I didn’t see one long and loopy pass. I’m very impressed so well done’. I’ll also tell them what a pleasure they are to coach and how hard they’ve worked.”



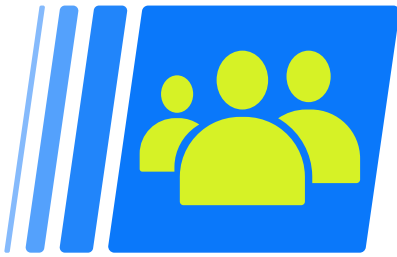
## 3. Give their imaginations a workout

“Children have got such great imaginations,” says Lorna Woodroffe, former British number one and head coach at WimX Academy in Essex.

“A good example is to simply create a pyramid of balls in different parts of the court, then have the kids fire balls at them to knock it down. As well as helping improve their aim, they’re also given the freedom to be a bit destructive!

“You paint a picture of the game and they’ll tweak it and it will come alive,” Lorna says. “Because they’ve had a part in it, they’re more involved and invested. They are empowered.”

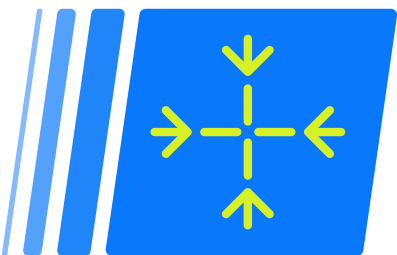




## 4. Consider age and stage

“Start with the child in mind and explore the skills they feel most excited and interested to explore,” says children’s football coach Jamie Williams. That way, he says, every single session when you’re coaching youth football will be fun – and that is the most important thing to consider.

“It’s always fun improving skills and getting better, particularly if the children feel excited, inspired and connected to the skills being practised. In order to gauge and appropriately plan for this I recommend carefully considering the age and stage characteristics of the children you coach. By starting with the child first, we can create practice and games to suit.”

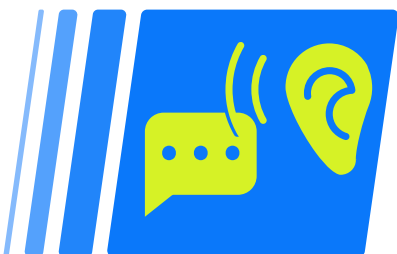


## 5. Stay on the ball

Although being child-first in your coaching is all about empowering children and young people to make choices for themselves, decide their own journey and have the freedom to play their own way, that doesn’t mean the coach is any less important. Coaches need to stay on the ball, because child-first coaching must always be rooted in safe practice.

Trampolining coach Hermione Paul advises, “As a coach of trampolining and gymnastics, you have to be there to physically support them, if required. It can be a high-risk sport. You’ve always got to be switched on and be prepared in case an error is made because at the end of the day, they’re children.”

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## 6. Listen to kids’ voices

Play that is initiated by the kids themselves is an important part of development as it helps them build confidence, social interaction skills, and decision making. Likewise, involving children in planning by asking for feedback and input on a regular basis helps empower children and young people to shape their own sporting journeys.

“At the close of a session, it’s good practice to ask what they enjoyed, what they got from the session, and what they want to do next week,” says kids’ coach Becky Evans. Make sure you actively listen to what they have to say so they know their input is valued, and be sure to get the views of the less vocal members of the group too.