

## CHAPTER 2: PSYCHOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Instructors need to know some general psychological considerations relating to the development of young children, including:

1. Differences in teaching children versus adults.
2. Establishing a Disciplined Environment when dealing with Children.
3. Building Self Esteem in Children.

### 1. TEACHING CHILDREN VERSUS ADULTS

Adults and children respond differently to communications styles. When communicating with children, as opposed to adults, some key differences to consider are:

CONSIDERATION	ADULTS	CHILDREN
ATTENTION SPAN	Adults tend to have longer attention spans, therefore instructions can be longer.	Children have shorter attention spans, so instructions should be shorter (less than one minute) to get “into action” quickly.
MODE OF LEARNING	Adults learn through verbal explanations, visual demonstrations, and through “feeling.” Use all three modes when dealing with adults	Children also learn through verbal explanations, visual demonstrations, and through “feeling,” however, when explaining to children, use key words to simplify verbal instructions.
LEVEL OF UNDERSTANDING	Adults have a better understanding of abstract concepts.	Children may not always grasp certain abstract concepts, however, they understand analogies such as: “It’s like throwing a ball,” or, “lift your racquet as if it’s going up an escalator.”
DISCIPLINE	Adults are used to following social norms. They have the discipline to listen and to focus on learning. Adults usually take lessons voluntarily (this is not always the case with children).	<p>Children require discipline and limits.</p> <p>Instructors need to express their expectations with regards to listening, picking up balls, etc., so that children know how to behave correctly in a group situation.</p> <p>The Instructor’s behavior is very important because it influences the children’s behavior.</p> <p>The Instructor must be an excellent role model.</p>

## **2. ESTABLISHING A DISCIPLINED ENVIRONMENT WITH CHILDREN**

### **Introduction**

Instructors must establish discipline to ensure an environment conducive to safety, fun, and better learning. This is possible if you are an excellent **role model** and are **proactive** when establishing rules.

### **What is necessary to being a role model?**

For children to regard you as a role model, treat them with respect. This will be evident in a number of ways:

- listen to them, show interest in what they have to say
- speak to children in a friendly manner, without using sarcasm
- show that you care about their improvement
- be flexible and sensitive to individual differences amongst them
- show enthusiasm for the sport and all aspects of their work
- establish rules early and proactively, and enforce rules fairly (e.g., better players are not given preference)
- thank children when they pick up the balls, and praise them when they show good effort

### **Why is it Important for the Instructor to be proactive when establishing discipline?**

By being proactive (anticipating common disciplinary problems), you are taking measures to prevent problems. Do this by outlining your expectations for proper behavior and the consequences if the rules are not followed.

### **What basic rules can the Instructor establish?**

Some basic rules to establish:

1. When the Instructor speaks, everyone listens while maintaining eye contact. (In groups, to prevent children from swinging their racquets or hitting balls, have them cross their arms with their racquets resting on their chests).
2. All participants must support (respect) one another. (This deals with the issue of children making fun of one another or picking on one another, etc.)
3. All participants must pick up the balls quickly.

### **Why must the Instructor deal properly with Behavior Problems?**

Proper discipline relates not only to the enjoyment that you and your students experience during the lesson, but emphasizes the extent to which sport mirrors life. Sports skills are life skills, and what is learned within the sporting context is akin to experiences outside of sport. The lessons learned from you may help a child to positively change attitudes and to develop problem-solving skills.

Remember that children usually rate their Instructors amongst the most important people in their lives—a significant opportunity to promote positive behavior change. Use your influence to help children develop both their athletic and people skills (listening, supporting peers, discipline, respecting others, giving best efforts, etc.).

### **How should the Instructor deal with Behavior Problems?**

The following are a few recommendations to follow when dealing with behavior problems:

1. Have a plan. For example, if a student is misbehaving:
  - 1) Ask them to stop what they are doing and inform them of what they are supposed to do.
  - 2) The next time they misbehave, or if they persist, ask them if they know what they are doing. If they don't, then tell them and ask them to stop.
  - 3) The next time, ask them to take a "time out."
  - 4) Then, if after the above attempts have failed, expel the problem student for the rest of the day. Speak to the student's parents to see if you can come up with a solution to the problem.
2. Always stay calm. Never lose your temper. Use a friendly tone.
3. Do not criticize children in front of their peers. Take the child aside to remind him/her of your expectations and of the consequences.
4. When a child breaks a rule, do not attack the child's character (this hurts the child's self esteem.) Focus on the child's behavior. For example, after asking the child a couple of times to pick up the balls, do not say: "Are you stupid? I've already asked you twice to pick up the balls!" You may try: *"I've asked you twice to pick up the balls. The sooner we pick up the balls, the sooner we can go on to the next drill"*.
5. Use key words to establish focus. For example, "*Eyes!*" (to get their attention), "*Lets go!*" (to get them moving), "*Balls up!*"(to pick up balls) , "*Everyone in!* (to form a group).
6. If you are forced to expel a child for the day, be sure to contact the child's parents, to provide them with details of what happened and to ask them to help. Also, let them know that, if the behavior continues, their child will be asked to withdraw from the program. You should also inform the individuals responsible for the program, i.e., Head Coach, Manager, Recreation Department Head, etc.

### **What specific problems might could occur?**

- 1) The selfish or 'spoiled' child:

The selfish or 'spoiled' child often violates rules and places their own needs ahead of others. These children expect attention and need to understand that they will not be given special favors, that the rules apply equally to all. They must learn that they will be rewarded for appropriate behavior.

2) Children who act like they don't want to be there:

It is unrealistic to think that every child is eager to learn tennis. They may be attending the lesson because they have to. Children often resist being coached and/or may appear bored or distracted. These children may even attempt (directly or indirectly) to sabotage your efforts.

Studies show that, before the age of 11, children need to be stimulated because commitment is an advanced level of motivation, usually achieved at a later age. For this reason, your main focus must be that the children have fun. This is why the approach to organizing drills focuses on fun through learning, movement and competition, de-emphasizing the traditional static mode of learning the game.

If, after a few lessons, the child still lacks enthusiasm, either contact the parents if there are difficult behavioral problems, or take on the challenge yourself of trying to “*turn the child around*”!

3) Children who feel uncomfortable in a group:

Some children feel uncomfortable in a group because of low self-esteem. A pattern of low self-esteem is usually due to lack of past success. Children with low self-esteem feel inadequate and set goals that are unrealistic, so they need to understand that their efforts, regardless of the outcome, will be rewarded. Create a positive environment that rewards “*doing the best you can.*” This may be difficult for some Instructors to grasp because they are used to a system that rewards being the best (winning), e.g.: who gets the most serves or forehands “in,” who runs the fastest, etc. The irony is that most of the drills we traditionally use reward the results or outcomes (one winner and many losers), which undermines the development of confidence. The main concern should be to provide a positive outcome for each player.

4) Children who don't follow the Instructor's rules:

Some children will not follow the Instructor's rules. These children do not help pick up balls; they do not listen when the Instructor speaks; they do not regroup quickly; or, they are chronically late. Whenever this happens, remind these individuals that appropriate behavior will be rewarded, and that ‘acting-out’ will not. The key here is to be firm and consistent. If you are not consistent in rewarding appropriate behavior and ignoring inappropriate behavior, the latter will accelerate to test the limits of your tolerance. Use key words to draw attention away from those individuals not following instructions,. For example: “Balls” (for those who are not picking up balls); “Eyes” (for those not making eye contact).

### Summary

Developing a disciplined environment is a key element of a successful program. A disciplined environment is safe, optimal for learning, and fun. Treat students with respect; be proactive in establishing rules and consequences, and deal properly with behavioral problems.

### 3. BUILDING SELF-ESTEEM

#### What is self-esteem?

Simply put, self-esteem is how you feel about yourself. Self-esteem is closely related to one's self-confidence and self worth. For each of us, our level of self-esteem reflects the uniqueness of our own personal experiences.

#### Why is Self-Esteem Important?

People with high self-esteem evaluate themselves positively and feel good about their strengths. They are realistic about their weaknesses and will work hard to improve without being overly critical of their efforts. Individuals with low self-esteem have negative feelings about themselves. They may feel incompetent, ineffective, worthless, and find little to be proud of in their actions. Their lack of self-confidence creates a vicious cycle in which poor performance results in withdrawal of effort. Improving self-esteem through tennis helps children develop a love for the game.

#### What is the Instructor's Responsibility?

Promoting self-esteem in others is perhaps your most important role. Actions which diminish self-esteem are clearly unacceptable. Research indicates that basic coaching principles exist to develop an athlete's self esteem, including the following:

#### What are some keys to Developing self-esteem?

- **Use Reinforcement:** It is important to both **praise** present performance and **encourage** desired performance. Use reinforcement liberally to promote desirable behaviors. You can combine praise with a specific description of a desired skill, e.g., "*That was good. . . you kept your eye on the ball*". Look for little things to praise because any amount of positive feedback strengthens the positive feelings of an athlete.

Use continuous reinforcement until a skill is mastered (when less frequent reinforcement maintains a high level of motivation). You should provide reinforcement directly after the execution of a skill. Always reward effort. Athletes should be aware that their efforts are appreciated more than their results.

Take a positive approach to errors. Errors provide opportunities to learn and subsequently improve performance. This approach helps maintain positive motivation rather than fear of failure. Give encouragement and, if appropriate, give corrections in a positive manner. Use the "sandwich" approach to correction, placing an instruction (e.g., "*Remember to follow through after contacting the ball.*" ), between a compliment (e.g., "*You kept your eye on the ball.*" ), and a positive final statement (e.g., "*Your footwork is excellent.*").

- **Be realistic:** Develop realistic expectations based on individual abilities. Consistently reinforce achievement. This allows athletes to feel good about themselves before mastering the skill.

- **Reward effort:** Finally, remember that one of the most important tools you have in developing self-esteem is language. Describe the behaviors you observe in words that give accurate feedback **without** judging the individual. Avoid the use of labels (e.g., “lazy”, “slow”) and reward effort, whether or not it is successful. This way, individuals will feel good about themselves even when being corrected. For example say, “*Great effort to get to the ball, now try to react a little quicker and you will get there next time.*” Your approval helps to shape behavior; young athletes will be motivated to please you. By promoting students’ self-esteem, you give them something more than just better tennis skills.
- **Do not punish athletes:** Avoid punishing athletes (both verbally and non-verbally) as this leads to resentment of the Instructor and decreases the athlete’s enjoyment. Young athletes participate in sport primarily to have fun, improve their skills, learn new skills, and to be with friends. When these elements are missing, individuals are more likely to drop out. If discipline is required, discipline the behavior, not the person.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided you with some considerations and general recommendations on dealing with children. However, no knowledge can replace the genuine empathy of an Instructor. Always remember what it was like when you were a child and what you were looking for from the activity and from the Instructor. Communicate your love of the game, and make children feel loved at all times through your praise and encouragement.