

Dealing with “Disruptive” Children in your Training Session

A Frequently asked question of me and every other coach who has ever done a workshop is “What should we do with kids who mess in training?”. The “Bold Child Syndrome” is something that happens only when kids come training. For 23 hours of the day, a child is relatively well behaved but for that 1 hour they come down to training, they cause more mayhem than can ever be imagined from a person so small. What is it that drags out this inherent need for a child to be as disruptive as possible for this 1 hour period? Trying to impress their peers? Trying to drive the coach to stress levels not known since the last time he/she moved house? Whoever does proper research on this topic and finds an answer, should become a multi-millionaire for providing the answer to this seemingly unanswerable question. Whoever comes up with the definitive answer should be put on the pedestal alongside Superman, Batman and all other comic book heroes.

Children do not get up in the morning with the sole ambition of making life difficult for their coach that evening. Children by their very nature are nice people. The problems of the world have yet to drag down their temperament. They want to play, to be challenged, to be acknowledged and they want to have FUN.

Where children generally become disruptive is when they are bored. Why do children get bored? Simply put, they get bored when they are doing nothing. Standing in line, listening to adults for too long, watching someone else having fun. This is when a child begins to get disruptive. They want to be engaged. If they are the 7th person in a line waiting for a chance to play, they will do something to entertain themselves in the meantime. Look at it from this perspective, if you are waiting in a Que 8 people deep, do you just stand there waiting patiently to get served, are you cursing the time you must spend in the line or do you take out your phone to entertain yourself? Phone usually for me, I’m not standing in a line doing nothing like a psycho. If you go into the Bank and there are 2 Cashiers open and behind Cashier 1 is a line of 6 people and behind Cashier 2 is only 1 person, which line will you join? It might seem like a stupid question but what do we do with kids in training sessions? We put them into lines, waiting for their turn.

How about we take an interest in the needs of a child when we are coaching them. Instead of putting them in lines, we give them all a ball. Instead of getting them to do drills, we play games with a challenge. If you have your session well planned and child focused, there will be no messing in the training. Children are not “Bold” on purpose, they are just bored. Who is responsible for keeping them engaged? You are. The coach must ensure children are challenged and engaged in the sessions. Personally, I love the challenge of being asked to do a training session and being told that they are a “Hyper Bunch” and “those 3 are big messers, any hassle and send them out”. Being able to do a session which caters for the children’s needs without any messing occurring does give an amazing sense of satisfaction.

Lastly, don’t separate friends when they are young. Some boys and girls come training just because their friend goes. If you separate them every week, that’s a sure way to lose one, if not both. Every child does not have the ambition to play intercounty, they just want to spend time with their friends. Be conscious of these children as well.

A few tips for you to help have a more engaging session:

- Plan the skills you want to achieve in advance and develop games for them
- A ball per player.
- Pick teams as children arrive and put bibs on them, to save time during the session
- No lining up. Eliminate Ques from the session plan.
- Games, Games and more Games.
- Reward the group with “Free Time” (They can do whatever they want) if they do something well.
- Have a Fun Warm up.
- At least one game that ensures they get a lot of scores in an actual goal.
- Start with a match
- Finish with a fun game e.g. Penalty shoot out, free competition, crossbar challenge etc
- Use positive words and phrases.