Coaching Boys INTO MEN®

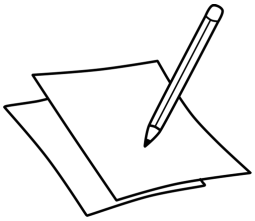
Advanced Coaches Clinic

Coaching Healthy Conflict, Breakups, and Rejection

Time: 1 hour and 55 minutes

Goals:

1. **Discuss the relationship between traditional ideas about masculinity and unhealthy ideas about conflict, breakups, and rejection**
2. **Evaluate past conflicts to identify strategies that did and did not support a positive outcome.**
3. **Apply best practices for modeling healthy attitudes and behaviors about conflict and rejection.**



Worksheets Included:

1. Healthy Conflict Guide
2. Handling Rejection Guide
3. Helping Athletes Handle Conflict and Rejection

For training demos and additional guidance on delivering Advanced Coaches Clinic materials, check out our Learning Collaborative recordings at:

https://www.coachescorner.org/healthy-relationships-advocates/#collab

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Acknowledgments:

FUTURES extends special appreciation to the **One Love Foundation** who provided critical support in writing, revising, and sharing content. More One Love content can be found at JoinOneLove.org.

Section 1 Warm Up and Reflection

15 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the following out loud with coaches. Then, spend 10 minutes covering the warm-up questions out loud with coaches in a circle.

Introduction to Section 1: Warm Up and Reflection

In past trainings, we have talked about the role of proactive healthy communication; today, we're discussing some of the more reactive aspects of healthy communication. Many young people (and even adults) think that to have a healthy relationship means to never argue, disagree, or have the occasional frustration with one another. However, even in the healthiest relationships, conflict is inevitable. Also inevitable is romantic rejection and breakups—in high school, both of these things can feel like the end of the world. As a coach, being able to identify when your athletes are experiencing conflict in and outside of the sports setting will enable you to support athletes more effectively. Teaching your athletes how to react to, process, and resolve conflict and handle rejection and breakups in a respectful, nonviolent way is vital to their growth and development as young men.

Warm Up Questions:

1. ***Why do you think it's important to discuss conflict and rejection in the context of CBIM?***
2. ***How can you tell there is conflict present within your team or an athlete is experiencing conflict elsewhere? What signs do you look for?***
3. ***What types of conflict are most common on your team? How do you handle it?***

Debrief Talking Points

- Breakups and rejection can be particularly challenging for men and boys because many feel the constraints of traditional masculinity, such as the need to feel strong and superior. Translated, emotional vulnerability and losing are both traits that fall outside the “man box.” Boys and men may struggle with the feeling of loss that comes with a breakup or rejection and may not know how to process emotions like sadness or reach out for help.
- For young men, it’s essential to learn how to handle the negative emotions associated with breakups and rejection in a healthy way, instead of resorting to retaliation or violence.
- In any sport, the object is to win. For this reason, athletes may take a breakup or rejection particularly hard, much like they would a loss. As a coach, you can be part of your athletes’ support systems during a difficult time, and teach vital coping skills.

Conclusion

During this training, we’re going to be focusing on two elements of healthy communication: healthy conflict and handling rejection. Diving deeper on these topics will improve your CBIM facilitation for all training cards, but will be especially relevant for Training 8 (When Aggression Crosses the Line) and Training 9 (There’s No Excuse for Relationship Abuse).

- As you go through the training, think of ways you can weave your learning into the questions you ask athletes and the talking points you follow up with during card facilitation.
- While many of the themes and topics addressed today will integrate nicely into training card facilitation, they will be especially important when it comes to teachable moments with your athletes. Your ability to model healthy conflict and normalize rejection in your every day interactions with them will have an impact.
- Even while modeling these values, there’s no harm in sharing you still have some work to do--it may even inspire your athletes. Share the ways you’ve handled conflict and rejection in the past, what you’ve learned, and how you’re handling it moving forward.

Section 2 Modeling & Teaching Healthy Conflict

15 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the following prompts out loud to coaches, and allow them to silently reflect for 1 minute per prompt. If time, pause to have a few coaches share their reflections out loud. Then, use one (or all) of the video clips from One Love to illustrate unhealthy conflict and invite reactions from coaches using the two discussion questions.

Individual Reflection Prompt 1:

Think about a recent conflict you had with a partner, coworker, family member, or friend that did not go well. What didn't work? Think specifically about what was said and how you felt during that conflict.

Individual Reflection Prompt 2:

Now, think about a recent conflict that did go well. What was the conflict about? How was it resolved? Think specifically about what was said and how you felt during that conflict. How did the way it played out differ from the previous conflict?

Individual Reflection Debrief

In relationships with others, conflicts arise all the time. Without thoughtful attitudes and behaviors to resolve it, conflict can become toxic and unhealthy for everyone involved. For the young athletes we work with, learning healthy conflict styles can prevent conflict from leading to relationship abuse and violence.

Watch and Discuss - Behind the Post

Use one (or all) of the following video clips from One Love to illustrate unhealthy conflict and invite reactions from coaches:

Go to JoinOneLove.org/Education-Center to watch the following videos:

Behind the Post | Volatility Behind the Post | Belittling Behind the Post | Guilting

Debrief Questions:

1. ***What are your first thoughts about the clip? What reactions or feelings did you have as you watched?***
2. ***How could Will have handled conflict in a healthier way?***

Section 3 Healthy Conflict Guide

10 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Have coaches rotate through reading the list of healthy conflict messages on Page 1 of the Coach Handout and close using the debrief question.

Healthy conflict is openly and respectfully discussing issues and confronting disagreements nonjudgmentally, and it's a skill that takes practice.

Coach Handout - Page 1

Key messages on healthy conflict you can share with athletes:

1. Relationships are teams; healthy conflict shouldn't be about winning. Harmful messages about masculinity and conflict pressure men to approach conflict like a fight they have to win. Compromise may not always leave you feeling that you got exactly what you wanted, but keeping a "team above the individual" mindset will help enable compromise. When a conflict arises out of differing values or boundaries, you may need to agree to disagree, acknowledging the other person's feelings and beliefs while maintaining your own.

2. There are positive ways to handle intense emotions. Traditional gender roles tell us that the only way for men to respond to conflict is with anger, aggression, or retaliation. Learn to recognize when you're becoming overly aggressive and recognize what you need to do to cool down. It could be taking a deep breath, talking it over with friends, or doing something you enjoy to take your mind off the situation.

3. It can be useful to take space and time to process. It may take time to fully resolve some conflicts in a healthy way. If you cannot seem to arrive at a compromise the first time you try to talk it through, don't sweat it. Take some time apart to think about what has been said, sort through your feelings, and recharge. You'll come back to the conflict rejuvenated and ready to work toward compromise.

4. Promote respect for different conflict styles. Not everyone has the same experiences with conflict, nor will they have the same reactions when conflict arises. While one person may want to address conflict in the moment, another may need time and space to think before diving in. Recognizing and respecting others' conflict styles is a key component to arriving at a healthy resolution.

5. Encourage taking responsibility for your side of the disagreement or conflict. Often, men learn to deflect responsibility. Even if you did not mean to hurt someone, the impact of a behavior or attitude could have been harmful. This may mean apologizing (and try doing so without saying the word "but"), working through feelings such as shame or sadness, and making an effort to change your behavior in the future.

6. There's a difference between listening to *respond* and listening to *understand*. Try to really hear what the other person is saying instead of thinking about what you're going to say next. Aim to understand the other person's point of view by asking open-ended, clarifying questions. Acknowledge the other person's feelings or opinions before reacting or jumping in with your own, and use "I" statements to communicate your feelings and needs.

Debrief Question:

What are times that you have been successful and unsuccessful at modeling these elements of healthy conflict?

Section 4 Modeling Healthy Conflict

20 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the background information to prep coaches to participate in the scenarios. Then, read each scenario out loud, discuss and debrief together using the debrief questions. Spend 10 minutes on each scenario. Close with the conclusion.

Introduction to Section 4: Modeling Healthy Conflict

Imagine the following scenarios play out on your team. Think back to Training 8, "When Aggression Crosses the Line." How can you show athletes that you are in control and responsible for all of your actions and emotions on and off the field? How can you model healthy conflict and mediate disagreements in the moment so your athletes feel confident doing the same?

Scenario 1 - Team Dynamics

At practice one day, two of your athletes get into an argument and begin shoving each other. When you and some of their teammates are finally able to separate the two, one of them makes a beeline for the locker room, even though you're yelling at him to "get back here!"

Debrief Questions:

1. ***How can you model healthy conflict in this situation? What would you say or do?***
2. ***Are there any key messages or skills you think would help you navigate this more smoothly?***

Scenario 2 - Teen Relationships

After a tough loss for your team, you notice one of your players in the parking lot yelling at his partner. The partner is getting very embarrassed and trying to disengage, but your player continues to yell at them.

Debrief Questions:

1. ***How would you intervene in this situation? What would you say?***
2. ***What would you say to your athletes that witnessed this?***
3. ***What would you encourage him to do in future conflicts?***

Conclusion

Teaching and modeling healthy conflict to young athletes is a big responsibility. When you can count on all the members of your team to intervene and be active bystanders when one person is upset and mishandling conflict, the whole team community is strengthened.

Section 5 Handling Rejection On and Off the Field

10 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read the introduction with coaches. Then, spend 5 minutes on the group reflection questions, encouraging coaches to share their thoughts with the group.

Introduction to Section 5: Handling Rejection On and Off the Field

Chances are, you've helped your athletes cope with discouragements like injuries and tough losses. Maybe you've been the one delivering a rejection and supporting an athlete through it, like when they didn't make the team they wanted or they aren't starting in a game. Then, there are other types of rejection your athletes experience that you can't control—like breakups and romantic rejection. But as a role model and part of their support system, you still step up when they need you most.

Reflection Question 1: Whether you're the one delivering the bad news or not, how do you help athletes handle feelings of rejection or discouragement when it comes to their sport? What do you do or say?

Reflection Question 2: What would you do to support an athlete who was navigating a breakup? What would you say? What advice or insight would you offer?

Bonus: Does your guidance differ if the athlete is the one doing the breaking up, rather than the one being broken up with? How?

Section 6 Handling Rejection Guide

10 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Ask coaches to volunteer to each read one of the key points to remember when handling rejection (Coach Handout Page 2). Coaches should approach these tips with the understanding that this is what we're encouraging our young athletes to do when experiencing rejection.

Coach Handout - Page 2

PROMOTE:

1. Growth and reflection in the face of rejection. Traditional messages about what it means to be a man tell us that men who get rejected are weak and should feel embarrassed or ashamed. Getting rejected doesn't mean something's wrong with you or that you're any less worthy. Sometimes rejection isn't about our behavior, but sometimes it is. It's important to take responsibility for how our own behaviors can be respectful and full of integrity.	**2. Respecting others' boundaries and decisions.** When experiencing rejection, strong feelings are often harmfully channeled into anger or aggression. We're not saying you have to like their choice—respect looks like honoring someone's wishes or feelings, even when we disagree, feel disappointed or uncomfortable. This means listening and sticking to the boundaries they express in the process, and not bad-mouthing them to your friends or teammates.
3. Open communication of feelings and needs. Boys and men can be strong by being vulnerable. As the person being rejected, your boundaries and needs matter, too. If you need space, take it. If you don't want to talk, you don't have to. But if someone makes a call or decision you don't understand or agree with, you can always ask for more information.	**4. Leaning on supports and accessing mental health care.** Men traditionally struggle with receiving support and getting rejected can dig up past disappointments or traumas. One way to process these emotions is to lean on friends, family, and professionals. Facing rejection by venting or talking through it, especially with a school counselor or other mental health professional, can help you pinpoint what you're struggling with and lead you toward acceptance.

Section 7 Activity: Helping Athletes Handle Conflict & Rejection

25 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Split coaches into 3 groups. Allow 10 minutes for coaches to read through their scenario, and then pick 1-2 key points from the *Healthy Conflict Guide* on Page 1 of the Coach Handout and *Handling Rejection Guide* on Page 3 of the Coach Handout that could be used or taught in their assigned scenario. Make sure coaches are putting the key points into their own words. Then, ask the coaches from each scenario to present their responses to the whole group, allowing 5 minutes for each scenario presentation.

Coach Handout - Page 3

Group 1 Scenario:

You have to tell an athlete, who was starting last year, that you've decided to start someone else this season. He gets really upset and tells you you don't know how to do your job.

Group 2 Scenario:

You arrive at practice and hear your team teasing one of their teammates, saying things like "I can't believe you got dumped!" He gets angry and you're worried he's going to get aggressive.

Group 3 Scenario:

One of your athletes tells you that he got in a huge fight with his partner of two years over the weekend. He's thinking of ending the relationship, but doesn't want to feel like a "huge failure" because he couldn't make it work.

Example:

Group 1 Scenario:

You have to tell an athlete, who was starting last year, that you've decided to start someone else this season. He gets really upset and tells you you don't know how to do your job.

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Healthy Conflict Guide:
#2- There are positive ways to handle intense emotions.
#6- There's a difference between listening to respond and listening to understand.

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Handling Rejection Guide:
#2- Respecting others' boundaries and decisions.

Section 7 Bringing it All Together: Healthy Conflict & Handling Rejection

10 minutes

DIRECTIONS: Read through the final debrief questions together and answer as a group. Then, finish up the training by reading the conclusion to coaches.

Debrief Questions:

1. ***What is the #1 thing you think athletes need to know about healthy conflict and handling rejection? How will you teach it, model it, or help them understand it?***
2. ***Which of these lessons will be the most challenging for athletes?***
3. ***Did any of your questions go unanswered? Ask them now!***

Conclusion

Deeper knowledge on these topics will not only help you educate your athletes, but they'll also boost your confidence in addressing Teachable Moments and supporting athletes on and off the field. Conflict and rejection are a part of life - sports, academics, careers, relationships, etc. Modeling and teaching healthy methods of dealing with conflict and rejection will give your team tools to be leaders in their schools, in their communities, in their families, and within their relationships. As a CBIM coach, every time your team loses a game or a call doesn't go your way, you have an opportunity to walk the walk. Emotional vulnerability and accepting disappointment make a huge difference in the healthy development of boys and young men.

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COACH HANDOUT

Healthy Conflict Guide

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Handling Rejection Guide

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Helping Athletes Handle Conflict and Rejection

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Notes: