

Chapter 5:  
Resilience and Character Development of players

Curriculum Content Development

# Content Outline

## Module 5: Resilience and Character Development of players

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| **Module Units Break down** |
| **Unit 1: Resilience Development and Empowerment**   * Unit Overview * Unit Learning Outcomes * Unit Content * Terminology and key concepts * Approaches in resilience development and empowerment – Responding to racism * Unit Assessment * Question 1: Multiple choice * Question 2: Multiple selection * Question 3: True/False   **Unit 2: Empathy Development**   * Unit Overview * Unit Learning Outcomes * Unit Content * Terminology and key concepts * Approaches in empathy development * What does empathy – or lack of empathy – in youth sports look like? * Unit Assessment * Question 1: Multiple choice * Question 2: True/False * Question 3: Multiple selection |

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| **Module Overview** |
| This Module provides coaches with the knowledge and skills to support their players helping them to develop their character so that they can overcome the effects of racist behaviours and discrimination. Additionally, coaches will be provided with information and guidance on how to help their players develop empathy towards others and help instil an understanding of diversity. |

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| **Module Learning Outcomes** |
| Upon completion of this Module, participants should be able to:   * Implement methods that support and empower players to overcome obstacles and develop their resilience; * Apply practices that support their players in developing their character and resilience; * Choose conditions that embrace a culture of positive change and proactive behaviours within their sportclubs. |

### Unit 1: Resilience Development and Empowerment

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| **Unit Overview** |
| The present Unit will familiarise you with the relevant terms, concepts and ideas of resilience and empowerment, by providing examples and characteristics of both resilient and empowered athletes. |

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| **Unit Learning Outcomes** |
| Upon completion of this Unit, participants should be able to:   * Interpret the terms “resilience” and “empowerment”; * List the possible reasons individuals react (or do not react) to racist incidents; * Apply the theoretical knowledge shared in their everyday practice; * Personalise the tips and examples provided, to their athletes; * Organise sports activities that will foster resilience and empowerment building. |

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| **Unit Content** |
| This Unit follows a comprehensive structure aiming to familiarise you with the core concepts of resilience and empowerment. First, the relevant terminology is presented answering “*What do we mean by resilience?*” and “*How do we understand the concept of empowerment?*”. Next, we provide you with specific and practical guidance on how to foster the resilience development and empowerment of your athletes in the sports field. Special attention is given to the concept of the “bystander intervention”, and to the creation of a supportive environment. A supportive environment can lead to what is known as “cultural safety”, i.e., “having an environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together […]” [[1]](#footnote-1). At the end of this Unit, you will have the opportunity to assess the knowledge you gained, by answering a series of relevant questions.  Terminology and key concepts  1.***Resilience***  It was back in 2014 when the Brazilian football player of Barcelona, Daniel Alves became a target of racism, with the fans of Villarreal FC throwing him a banana, indicating that he was a “monkey”. Villarreal fans probably did not expect him to peel the banana and eat it, as a response to this assault. He then continued playing pretending that nothing had happened. Alves’ calm response could be a simple example of someone who has become resilient in adverse events and has managed to control his/her emotions. In this sense, **resilience** can be defined as “*the capacity of individuals to cope successfully with significant change, adversity or risk*”[[2]](#footnote-2).  Resilience can also be defined as “‘*individual’s stability or quick recovery (or even growth) under significant adverse conditions*’’[[3]](#footnote-3). This definition predicts not only recovery but also growth. While some research views resilience as a “fixed personal attribute” which some possess and others do not, there is a “strong push” to conceive of resilience as a “process of adaptation” that can be built through a range of factors[[4]](#footnote-4).  Concerning racism, resilience refers to the ability “*to persevere and maintain a positive sense of self when faced with omnipresent racial discrimination*”[[5]](#footnote-5). If, when confronted with racism, a person can maintain pride and strong self-esteem, and avoid harmful outcomes such as depression and social dislocation, they can be said to exhibit resilience[[6]](#footnote-6). People who practice sport are often described as resilient in the face of stress, and a growing body of evidence points to involvement in sports programs as a way to foster resilience[[7]](#footnote-7).  2.***Empowerment***  It was in December 2020 when the players from Paris Saint-Germain and Istanbul Basaksehir walked off the field during a Champions League game and did not return after a match official was accused of using insulting language about a Black coach. The score was 0-0 after 14 minutes when the game was stopped because Basaksehir assistant coach Pierre Webo accused the fourth official, Sebastian Coltescu of Romania, of using a racial term to describe him. It sparked a commotion in the technical area that led to Webo being sent off by the referee.[[8]](#footnote-8) This active form of players’ protest constitutes a clear example of empowered athletes who did not miss their chance to protest, despite the possible unpleasant consequences.  In social sciences, ***empowerment*** does not constitute a clear concept, leading to the emergence of various definitions. One minimal definition, given by Robert Adams[[9]](#footnote-9) is: “*the capacity of individuals, groups or communities to take control of their circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they can help themselves and others to maximise the quality of their lives*”  Empowerment may be seen as a process where individuals learn to see a closer correspondence between their goals and a sense of how to achieve them, and a relationship between their efforts and life outcomes[[10]](#footnote-10)  Taking into account the aforementioned concepts, we can realise that both resilience and empowerment constitute not only desirable but also necessary equipment in the battle against racism. Empowering players to overcome adversities can be extremely crucial in addressing the effects of racist behaviour and discrimination against them, their teammates and their team. The rest of the Unit is dedicated to the core ideas that promote the transformation of sports as safe spaces.  Approaches in resilience development and empowerment – Responding to racism   * *Acknowledging racism*   A very first point in responding to racism is acknowledging the existence of racism and its impact. That means that both you and your athletes are called to educate yourselves on the complex phenomenon of racism, its main causes and manifestations. Module 2 of the present curriculum provides the specific information.   * *Sense of identity*   Evidence suggests that measures to reinforce pride in one’s racial or cultural identity can help to build resilience to racism. More specifically, a study[[11]](#footnote-11) has shown that a high number of racial socialisation messages led to significantly higher resilience to racial discrimination among those who had received them than those who had not received such messages. That means that if you provide messages that help your athletes understand inequality, they may promote the development of a sense of understanding about one’s ethnic identity, fostering their resilience development. Keep in mind that the racial socialisation messages and the promotion of ethnic orientation have to be tailored to individuals and specific communities, i.e., to the ethnic characteristics and background of your athletes specifically   * *Challenging racism*   Challenging racism is not always easy or for granted. The research of Ferdinand, Kehaler and Paradies in 2013[[12]](#footnote-12) with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds found that 72% of those reporting racist experiences either ignored or put up with the perpetrator(s). This approach in coping with racism is detrimental to mental health as it exacerbates the negative effects of racism[[13]](#footnote-13). Challenging racism however does not always mean confronting the perpetrator. Challenging racism can also mean increasing empathy between those of different racial or cultural groups, providing accurate information to address inaccurate beliefs or negative stereotypes, and increasing personal accountability for prejudicial views.  An ever-expanding alternative in combating racism in sport is enhancing teammates’ capacity to react to racism when it occurs, leading to what is known as “bystander intervention”. **Bystander** anti-racism has been defined as “*action taken by a person or persons (not directly involved as a target or perpetrator) to speak out about or to seek to engage others in responding (either directly or indirectly, immediately or at a later time) to specific incidents of racism and also to behaviours, attitudes, practices or policies that contribute to racism*”[[14]](#footnote-14). Active (and/or ‘pro-social’) bystander” is an individual who takes action to intervene in response to the observed incident. By contrast, “passive bystander’” refers to the individual who observes an unacceptable or offensive behaviour and fail to act or intervene[[15]](#footnote-15).  How to be an active bystander  The research team of the Bystander Anti-Racism Project[[16]](#footnote-16) listed the following actions that witnesses of racist incidents can take to act as active bystanders:  • Calling the incident "racism" or "discrimination" (if it is safe or productive to do so);  • Interrupting or distracting the perpetrator;  • Comforting the person(s) targeted;  • Expressing bitter feelings;  • Seeking assistance from a friend, teacher, manager, coach, etc.;  • Reporting the incident to authorities.    Factors that boost individual to help or prevent him/her from intervening are identified in the context of the Bystander Anti-Racism Project[[17]](#footnote-17). In this context, people are *helped* by the following factors:   * + Awareness of harm caused by racism;   + Perceived ability to intervene;   + Desire to educate a perpetrator;   + Emotional responses to racism: empathy, expressing anger, disapproval, etc.;   + Self-affirmation;   + Social norms such as the social responsibility norm which causes individuals to feel a shared responsibility towards helping others in need.   In converse, people can be *stopped* from intervening, when they witness racism, by the following factors:   * + Seeing the target of racism as belonging to a different group that you are not responsible for (exclusive group identity);   + Fear of violence or vilification, being targeted by the perpetrator;   + The perception that action would be ineffective;   + Lack of knowledge about how to intervene;   + Concern that confrontation would be seen as aggressive or not 'feminine' (gender role prescriptions);   + Impression management;   + A desire to preserve positive interpersonal relations;   + A desire to avoid conflict;   + Freedom of speech/anti-political correctness;   + Social norms such as the ‘*mind your own business’* norm;   + In group settings the individuals are less likely to feel responsible for taking action, and are more likely to think that somebody else may intervene or had already called for help (diffusion or responsibility).   To foster the **resilience**-building process, you need to be aware of the several opportunities offered and potential challenges during your contact with your athletes. Recognising these opportunities and challenges will better equip you and your colleagues to plan activities dedicated to resilience.  *Opportunities include the following*[[18]](#footnote-18)*:*   * Sports clubs can be ***safe spaces,*** in which participants can be confronted with moments of adversity (through sport) in a controlled space. The concept of “safe spaces” is fundamentally important to the process of youth empowerment and development in all facets and stages of young people’s lives. Safe space is conceptualised as a multidimensional process. This process involves physical, psychological, sociocultural, political and experimental dimensions. Sports can become safe spaces through strategic planning of sport-based activities and the inherent power, neutrality, and popularity. * Sports clubs can also be used as sites of socialisation that decrease the polarisation of society and racist phenomena. * Dealing with loss and defeat is part of the sport and can be turned into a teachable moment for the participants. * In-game action can be used as a real-world simulation of the pressures encountered by youth. * Sports can help individuals recognise their strengths.   *Challenges include the following*17*:*   * Resilience is not a fixed trait; it needs to constantly be built up. * Resilience is negatively affected when an individual is faced with too many challenges; this needs to be managed within the setting of the sports programme. * Maintaining a “*we are in this together*” attitude is critical but not always easy with large numbers of participants. * The context and surrounding environment cannot always be controlled. This means that you may work hard to provide opportunities for resilience building, but the rest of your athletes’ network does not cooperate. Close relationships with your athletes and regular contact with their families are crucial in this process.   To foster the **empowerment** process, you need to be aware of a number of opportunities offered and potential challenges during your contact with your athletes. Recognising these opportunities and challenges better equips you to plan activities dedicated to athletes’ empowerment.  *Opportunities include the following*17*:*   * Sport can encourage individual empowerment, helping to realise opportunities to develop new, positive ideas and perspectives that the group will support. * Sport can foster empathy and tolerance among the participants by listening to different viewpoints and ideas from group members. * Sport can help participants and the community develop home-grown solutions to racist incidents. * Sport can increase the participation of women and girls in sports and leadership.   *Challenges include the following*17*:*   * Receptivity to new skills and support in managing newly acquired skills. Lack of community and family support for your initiatives raises the need for you to find ways of engaging the wider microsystem within which the young people live. * Empowerment can become time- and space-bound if strategies are not put in place for youth once they leave the sports area. * Certain sports may ostracise participants. * Feelings of empowerment can be affected if a deficit of trust with your athletes exists. |

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| **Unit Assessment** |
| **Question 1:** When witnessing an aggressive racist verbal attack in the field, a young athlete ought to:  **Type**: Multiple choice  **Options**:   1. interrupt or distract the perpetrator 2. seek help from a co-athlete who can trust 3. report the incident to his/her coach / seek help from his/her coach   **Correct answer:** C  **Feedback Correct Answer:** An aggressive racist verbal confrontation is highly possible to be evolved into a physical attack, a dangerous condition for all the people involved. In this case, bystanders ought to call help from someone who knows how to handle the situation with minimum damage.  **Feedback Incorrect Answers:** Answer A and Answer C are also effective strategies when we witness someone being targeted. However, we ought to assess each situation, the level of risk, and the possible outcome of our actions. This means that when a situation is unclear, and our involvement may harm ourselves too, we ought to step back and ask for the effective involvement of someone in charge.  **Question 2:** An athlete is possible to react while witnessing a racist incident in the locker- room if:  **Type**: Multiple selections  **Options**:   1. he/she hates conflicts. 2. he/she wants to preserve positive interpersonal relations. 3. he/she knows the impact of racism on the victims. 4. he/she is the only witness.   **Correct answers:** C and D  **Feedback Correct Answer:** People who know how detrimental racist incidents are on victims’ psychological, emotional, cognitive worlds or even their physical health are, it is less possible for them to tolerate racism. Moreover, it is more possible for someone to intervene if he/she is the only one witnessing a racist incident with no-one else to help.  **Feedback Incorrect Answers:** Hating conflicts and desiring positive relationships with the others often leads to the “mind-your-business” mindset which discourages individuals from facing unpleasant or disturbing events.  **Question 3:** Sports provide several opportunities for resilience- and empowerment-building; however, they may be proven inadequate if athlete’s family applies competing values and practices.  **Type**: True/False  **Options**:  a. True  b. False  **Correct answer:** A – True.  **Feedback Correct Answer:** Sports have the potential to become a great influence in one’s life, cultivating values and healthy habits. However, if the rest of one’s social network challenges the “under construction” mindset, these efforts can be undermined. |

Please develop the storyboard for Unit 1. Unit 2 is included for reference only.

### Unit 2: Empathy Development

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| **Unit Overview** |
| The present Unit familiarises you with the terminology, concepts and ideas of empathy, by providing also both positive and negative examples in empathy development. |

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| **Unit Learning Outcomes** |
| Upon completion of this Unit, participants should be able to:   * Understand the concept of empathy; * Apply effective strategies regarding empathy development; * Practice empathic listening when interacting with players; * Promote empathy through role modelling and positive reinforcement. |

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| **Unit Content** |
| This Unit follows a comprehensive structure aiming to familiarise you with the core concept of empathy. First, the relevant terminology is presented answering “*How do we understand the concept of empathy?*”. Next, we provide you with specific and practical guidance on how to help your athletes in empathy development, following mostly the core ideas of modelling behaviours and positive reinforcement. Positive and negative real-life examples in empathy development are also provided. At the end of this Unit, you will have the opportunity to assess the knowledge you gained, by answering a series of relevant questions.  Terminology and key concepts  Empathy used to be a word associated with weakness — and great athletes were tough: they did not ask for empathy. However, today’s emphasis is on keeping new athletes in the game, developing lifelong football fans and the new, ultra-competitive nature of soccer requires more for success than ever before. Empathy now is a requirement. But what is empathy?  **Empathy**  Despite this extensive history of the term (as it was coined over 100 years ago), ***empathy*** is not yet a well-defined notion. The attempt of accurately defining it has led to a range of definitions. Colman[[19]](#footnote-19) has identified empathy as “*one’s capacity to understand and enter into another person’s feelings and emotions or to experience something from the other person’s point of view*” (p. 146). Moving towards a similar direction, Coplan[[20]](#footnote-20)elaborated more and defined the term as “*the complex imaginative process through which an observer simulates another person’s situated psychological states while maintaining clear self–other differentiation*” (p.146).  Empathy, as a complex, multifaceted, dynamic process[[21]](#footnote-21), includes three stages:  i) *empathy potential*, which refers to the coach’s perception of athlete’s emotions and situation,  ii) *empathy expressed*, which refers to the coach’s expression of understanding of athlete’s emotions and situation,  iii) *empathy received*, which refers to athlete’s perception of understanding on behalf of their coach[[22]](#footnote-22). A number of emotions can evoke empathy. For example, anger, anxiety, fear, happiness, while individuals may not have the same empathic capacity for each emotion[[23]](#footnote-23).  Empathy is often confused with other related terms, such as *sympathy* (which has been defined as the emotional reaction of pity toward the misfortune of another)29 and *compassion* (which means “suffer with”, and refers to the deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it)[[24]](#footnote-24) which tend to be used interchangeably24.  Despite being closely related to the specific terms, empathy has been identified as a skilled response that involves imagination and creativity. In contrast, sympathy and compassion typically refer to reactive and unreflective responses26. This aspect of empathy, as a capable response, implies that coaches can foster the development, reinforcement and reflection of athletes’ empathy levels. Fostering empathy development is a necessary condition while equipping the toolbox to combat racism:  coaches need to teach their players this attribute so that they try to comprehend the different realities, experiences and perspectives of their teammates or opponents, facilitating inclusion.  Approaches in empathy development   1. **Model the desired behaviour.**   **“***You teach your players by your actions***”**  One of the key aspects in character development is modelling. Modelling has been strongly associated with the Social Learning Theory and learning through observation. According to observational learning, most of the behaviours people display are learned either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of example[[25]](#footnote-25). In this regard, your attitudes, behaviours and responses during training sessions or matches have the power to influence your athletes' attitudes, behaviours, and responses.  Ask yourself the following[[26]](#footnote-26):   * *How am I treating the fans or parents before, during, and after a game?* * *Am I respecting the calls the officials make?* * *Do I encourage all the athletes in their efforts? Or is my focus on just one or two of them?* * *Am I polite towards the opponents?* * *Do I give generously of my time and resources for the entire team?* * *How do I act toward everyone when our team has lost?*   The questions above are critical for your practice and attitudes. These questions can help you becoming aware of any unconscious patterns you may perpetuate.  *“Am I practicing what I am preaching?”*  This is a key question. Many coaches struggle to practice what they preach and during training sessions they often show the type of behaviour they would never accept from their players. They may belittle the referee or the opponents, and practice “harmless” trash talk during matches. They may also exclude “weak” players from sports opportunities or mock individuals with non -dominant to the specific cultural characteristics (e.g., ethnicity, skin and/or hair colour). They may also not show the appropriate commitment to the team without being accountable for their actions afterwards. These patterns will be detected by their players sooner or later, and it is only a matter of time for them to start behaving accordingly.   1. **Praise the desired behaviour.**   A second key element in empathy development is the concept of praise and positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement has been defined as “*the presentation of a reward immediately following a desired behaviour intended to make that behaviour more likely to occur in the future*” [[27]](#footnote-27). Coaches who effectively use praise to reinforce desired behaviours foster intrinsic motivation in their players[[28]](#footnote-28). Intrinsic motivation refers to one’s desire to engage in behaviours for no reason other than enjoyment, challenge, pleasure, or interest[[29]](#footnote-29).  For a successful impact, a praise should:   1. always follow the desired behaviour as quickly as possible; 2. be appropriate for the behaviour and be important to the player; 3. be appropriate for players’ ages and abilities; 4. contain specific statements about the appropriate behaviour; 5. be frequent and consistent; 6. focus on athletes’ improvement and effort; 7. be sincerely delivered with an affirmative and natural voice; 8. not be competitive or comparative across athletes; 9. be (preferably) private as opposed to praise in front of peers. The reason players may prefer this type of positive reinforcement is because they may not like to be singled out[[30]](#footnote-30).   *Phrases you can use to praise your players*   * I like the way you supported (*Name*). You used such kind words. * You came up with a thoughtful answer and nailed that question! * You’ve come up with an inventive solution. * That’s a very generous thing to do. * That’s very thoughtful of you. * You’re such a good friend/teammate. * You gave excellent advice to your friend/teammate. * Your compassion for others is wonderful. * You inspire me. * You’re a problem solver. * What great ideas you have. * I enjoy coaching players like you. / It is a pleasure to work with a player like you.  1. **Promote empathic listening.**   **“***Most people do not listen with the intent to understand, they listen with the intent to reply”*  Listening is not just a passive act, but an active process that requires attention and focus. While a lot of people believe they are great listeners, empathetic listening involves more than just waiting for your turn to speak. Empathic listening (which was first introduced in psychotherapeutic practice by Carl Rogers) is considered a core element in human communication[[31]](#footnote-31) and the following remarks aim to equip you with concrete guidance on how you and your athletes become attentive listeners.  Α) Modeling empathic listening  If you aim to promote empathy to your athletes and teach them how to become empathic listeners, the first and foremost step is to become an empathic listener yourself. People learn by other’s example and being a role model constitute a powerful tool in character development.  Let’s take a look at do’s and don’ts of empathic listening[[32]](#footnote-32):  *Do’s*   1. Remain attentive to what the other person is saying. 2. Pay attention to body language: Listening is about far more than how you respond verbally to the speaker. You can engage in eye contact to show you’re listening, as well as face the speaker to show that they have your full attention. You can also make sounds in between their sentences to indicate that you’re still paying attention. 3. Notice subtleties: Pay attention to subtle shifts in the speaker’s voice, the feelings behind their words, and patterns in how they share their thoughts. Try to look deeper into these subtleties as a way to better understand their thoughts and emotions. Allow your thoughts and feelings to take a backseat as you listen actively. 4. Try to understand what the person is saying. That means that you should avoid coming to premature conclusions or offering solutions. 5. Be open-minded and acceptive. 6. Allow the other person to lead the conversation and determine the topic discussed. 7. Speak in soft voice: Studies show that tone of voice is an important factor in how someone will receive feedback. When you give your input after listening and take the time to use a supportive and warm tone, your team members will leave the interaction with a more positive feeling. 8. Reflect to the speaker what you heard them say: Use a "reflection" approach, which means thinking of yourself as a mirror. See how you would have felt if you were the speaker. Then, repeat the speaker's thoughts and feelings back to them. Encourage the speaker to continue the message, do not interrupt. 9. Reword and paraphrase: Think about what the speaker is saying. Analyse and paraphrase it in your mind or in a discussion with the speaker. Replaying and dialoguing the information you have heard will aid in understanding what the speaker is attempting to convey. 10. Ask authentic open-ended questions: Questions, such as "Could you please tell me more about that?" or "What did you experience?" guide speakers to share more deeply. In addition, such questions are motivated by the desire to learn more truthfully (instead of reinforcing preconceived ideas). You can also ask empathic questions related to the speaker’s emotional state. You might ask, “What did you feel when that happened?” You might notice the speaker looks sad (or angry or fearful), and you can say, “Your expression looks sad. What’s behind that?” 11. Ask for input: You can encourage empathetic listening all the time and not only when someone comes to you with an issue. During practices or after games, make a habit of asking your team members for their feelings or perspectives. That will give you opportunities to listen more often and provide you with valuable information about the athletes.   *Don’ts*   1. Daydream: Just because you’re looking at someone as they speak doesn’t mean you’re truly listening. If you’re lost in your mind reviewing your list of chores or reminding yourself to call someone back later, you’re allowing yourself to get distracted instead of being present for that person. Stay present. 2. Judge: Empathetic listening means receiving what the speaker says without condemning them for it. Listening to someone while judging them for what they say is the opposite of listening with true empathy. 3. Plan: If you’re “listening” to someone while planning out what you will say next, you aren’t truly listening. 4. Interrupt. 5. Say, “I know what you feel”. You don’t. 6. Fear silence: Long silences can be uncomfortable, but resist the urge to fill the silence with your suggestions or remarks. Allow the speaker to use the silence to process their thoughts and then break the silence when they are ready to speak.   B) Provide opportunities for athletes to practice empathy[[33]](#footnote-33)  Learning empathy requires practice and your contribution is important in this process by providing your athletes the space to do so. Regularly considering other people’s perspectives and circumstances help make empathy a “automatic” reflex. Τhrough trial and error, athletes get better at tuning into others’ feelings and perspectives. Providing opportunities for practicing empathy may take the following form:   1. Have team meetings: Hold team meetings when there are challenges or conflicts, and in those meetings give athletes a voice and encourage them to take the perspective of other team members. Listen carefully to your athlete’s views and ask them to listen carefully to the views of others. 2. Encourage empathy for peers: Ask athletes about their teammates and other peers. Ask them when they’re in conflicts with peers to consider their peers’ perspectives. 3. Discuss empathy dilemmas: Training sessions and matches provide a range of dilemmas to work on and if you keep your eyes (and ear) wide open you will realise the available teaching opportunities. The key mark here is to grab the offering opportunities and discuss them your athletes, asking questions such as “How this made you feel?”, “What would you do if you were in your teammate’s position?”, “Should we continue the ongoing match considering that some of your teammates are upset due to negative comments from the spectators?” etc.  * *Try to remember that empathy is not an end goal, it’s a process; incorporate empathy into all facets of coaching, from motivation to behaviour management.*   What does empathy – or lack of empathy – in youth sports look like? [[34]](#footnote-34)  Below, you can find some indicative examples of developed empathy in the sports field and some negative ones, which may indicate that your players do not share a sense of community. These examples will help you recognise whether your efforts impact your players or you need to try harder to cultivate prosocial behaviours for them.  *Positive Examples*   * A high school player puts his arm around an opponent after a game who is upset and says, "you guys are getting much better - you’re going to beat us one of these times." * A team's mom reports to the opponent's coach and tells him that she loves their team and sometimes finds herself rooting for them. * Everyone takes a knee for a fallen colleague - even though the referee has not called a stoppage of play. * A 9-year-old stops after accidentally knocking over an opponent turns around, reaches out a hand, and lifts the opponent from the ground for the first time.   *Negative Examples*   * Hand clapping in the direction of an opponent in a way that is clearly meant to evoke a negative reaction to a referee's call; * Leaving a teammate to suffer alone; * Walking away when there is work to be done; * Name-calling; * Goading: making another player react or do something by continuously annoying or upsetting them; * Bullying; * Displays of superiority in the face of a win. |

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| **Unit Assessment** |
| **Question 1:** One of your athletes, John, tries to calm his teammate, Nick, after a fight he had with the referee, who called him a “terrorist” because he is Muslim. You notice however that Nick has not said anything yet and is still particularly upset while John uses phrases such as “Do not worry about him! He always says stuff like that!” or “I know how you feel. I have been through the same because I am too tall.” What is your reaction?  **Type:** Multiple choice  **Options:**   1. You approach both and try to calm Nick by yourself. 2. You try tactfully to advise John to let Nick express his thoughts and feelings by giving him some time and space. 3. You congratulate John in front of everyone for supporting his teammate. He is a positive example for the rest of the team.   **Correct answer:** B  **Feedback Correct Answer:** Some of the key elements in empathic listening are paying attention to the individual you are trying to support, allowing him/her to lead the conversation, and not fearing silence when it arises, as it can provide time for reflections. The approach followed in Answer C respects all parties (both John who tries to support his teammate, and Nick who is upset), and actively fosters John becoming a better empathic listener.  **Feedback Incorrect Answers:** Approaching both athletes and trying to calm Nick by yourself is not the desirable attitude as it recognizes the power a coach has over players, both as an adult and professional, diminishing John’s efforts and promoting unequal power relationships.  Congratulate John in front of everyone for supporting his teammate is also problematic for two main reasons: a) you are about to positively reinforce some of the common mistakes while supporting someone, and b) you are about to congratulate John in front of everyone, a condition which may make him feel awkward and singled out.    **Question 2:** "*Empathy received*” refers to the coach's perception of an athlete's emotions and situation.  **Type:** True/False  **Options:**   1. True 2. False   **Correct answer:** B - False  **Feedback Correct Answer:** “*Empathy received*” refers to an athlete's perception of understanding on behalf of their coach.  **Feedback Incorrect Answer:** This definition refers to the “*empathy potential”* stage, not the “*empathy received”* stage.  **Question 3:** You have noticed that Valerie does not like verbal praise. All the times you have congratulated her, she seemed awkward and has complained that she does not feel comfortable being noticed, especially by her teammates. However, you have witnessed great progress regarding her team spirit, compared to when she first started playing football two years ago, when she was too competitive and dismissive of others' feelings. How do you react to this situation?  **Type:** Multiple selection  **Options:**   1. respect her decision and avoid verbally praising her from now on. 2. continue praising her using different statements every time, as you think that you have not found the right words for her yet, and that’s why she feels awkward. 3. continue praising her as her progress constitutes a great example for the rest of the team and you want to boost her teammates’ confidence. 4. stop verbally praising her, and you occasionally nod or smile at her to check whether she is comfortable with this type of reinforcement.   **Correct Answer:** A and D  **Feedback Correct Answers:** One of the key principles in working with people (both minors and adults) is respecting their boundaries, especially when they are so clearly expressed. Valerie has clearly expressed her desire not being praised verbally and you should take seriously into account her words, despite your objections. However, a subtle nod or smile when she acts in the preferable way, may be not out of limits. You can try checking this different approach and regarding her feedback, to continue accordingly.  **Feedback Incorrect Answers:** The tactic of keeping praising Valerie verbally and in front of other does not respect her boundaries and voice. Despite the benefits of praising someone, you should always consider their feelings and personal limits. |

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