

Dealing with Anger and Grief in Sports

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Understanding “Anger”

- * Anger is a “normal” human emotion...there is nothing “wrong” with feeling anger
- * Learning how to manage the emotion of anger a healthy and positive coping/life skill
- * Anger “behaviors” are mostly inappropriate and often have negative consequences
- * Anger management strategies help to modify both thoughts and behaviors related to the emotion of anger

Anger in Sport

- *Sport and athletics evoke many emotions...joy, happiness, sadness, confusion, and anger...to name a few
- *Aggressive behavior is rewarded in the sport context
- *Aggressive/angry behavior can disrupt an athlete's/team's performance; consequences can impact a performance outcome
- *Teaching how to be an “assertive” athlete is key

Dealing with Anger (athletes)

- *Teach composure skills
- *Create clear consequences for inappropriate anger behaviors...and apply to all equally
- *Coaches must “model” effective anger management or else they are teaching how “not” to manage anger
- *Use calm instruction and teaching...especially in high energy situations
- *Reinforce and reward “positive” behaviors used when feeling angry

Dealing with Anger (Parents/Fans)

- *Establish pre-season meetings and communication to CLEARLY state expectations, consequences, and positive behaviors (related to anger)
- *Model and demonstrate effective anger management...once you've "crossed the line" you have created a confusing model to follow
- *Address anger behaviors immediately/shortly after...it is ok to "feel angry", but to engage in anger behaviors (e.g. Cussing, berating) is inappropriate

Managing Emotions in Difficult Events

- *Understand that “grief” is associated with any form of “loss” (loss in competition, injury loss, traumatic event)...the intensity, duration, and experience of grief differs amongst individuals (and teams)
- *There is no “right” way to manage grief/loss
- *Simple process of grief....shock/denial, anger, bargaining, depression/sadness, then acceptance...not so simple in sport or traumatic events
- *Respect individual differences

Managing Emotions in Difficult Events

- *Have a prepared group of providers (counseling, pastoral, and family)
- *Early stages....most support (social)
- *Later stages....maintain contact and support as some individuals may struggle months after....normalize “help-seeking” behaviors
- *Self-care for providers important
- *Provide multiple opportunities for processing and exploring grief responses...respect silence