

POSITIVE BEHAVIOR GUIDANCE: RESPONSIVE INTERVENTION

Not all behavior issues are preventable. Even the most seasoned and prepared coach can struggle.

These players can often take your attention away from the team and lead you to feel frustrated.

What is critical to remember when encountering behavior challenges with your players is that young people usually don't misbehave just to break the rules or cause problems.

Personal experience and trauma directly impact how kids show up to our practices. Kids who have faced strong, frequent and/or prolonged adversity, as well as collective traumas like racism and community violence without supportive adults in their lives, can experience toxic stress. This excessive activation of the stress-response system can lead to long-lasting wear and tear on the body and brain.⁽¹⁾

As a result, kids often exhibit effects of serious trauma exposure, such as the inability to control impulses, aggression and heightened sense of fear.⁽²⁾ What does this look like for a kid playing sports? A minor foul escalates into a fight with teammates, a lack of focus, or the inability to handle competitive pressure. While this can be frustrating from a coach perspective, we encourage you to remember two essential components in supporting kids: 1. Always assume kids' disruptive behavior is the symptom of a deeper harm, and 2. For kids to manage their behaviors and emotions, they need support from a calm and supportive adult.⁽³⁾ By responding with empathy and from a place of understanding, you will be in the best place to support young athletes.

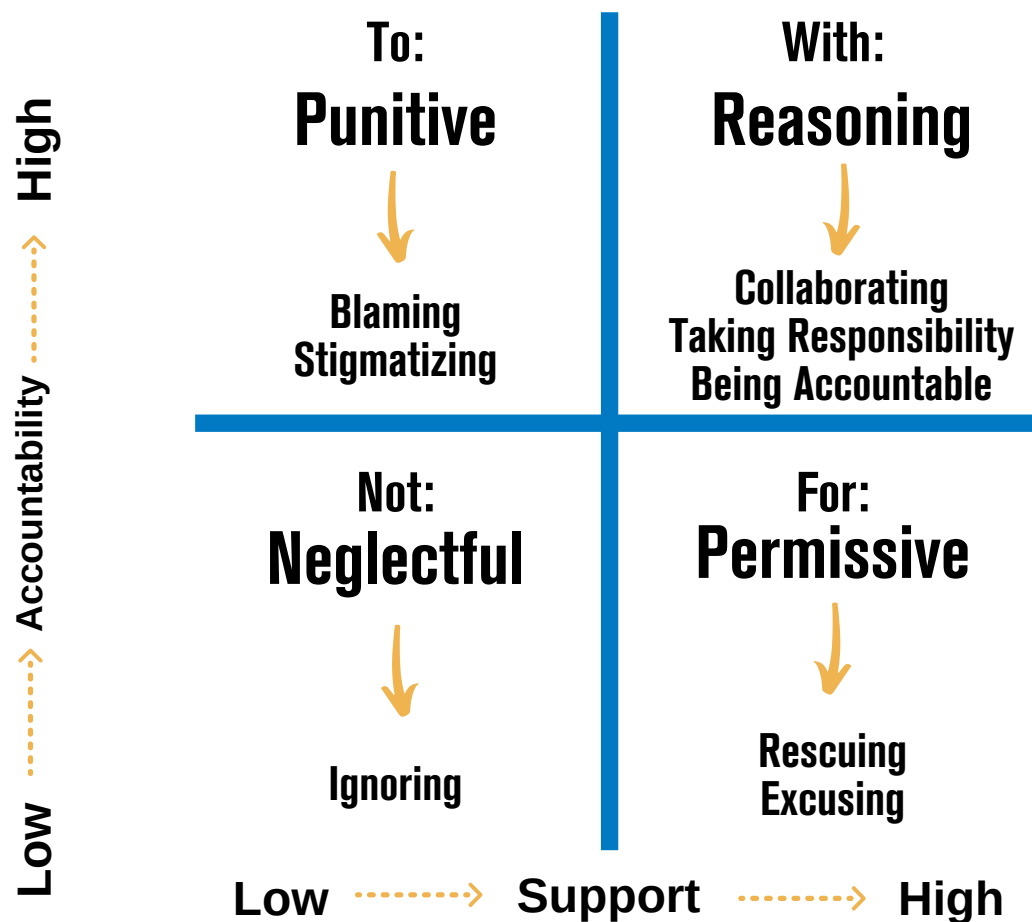
1. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/aces-and-toxic-stress-frequently-asked-questions/>

2. <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>

3. Perry, B. and Maia Szalavitz (2017). The Boy Who Was Raised As A Dog

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The **Social Discipline Window** is a restorative justice framework that describes four basic approaches to maintaining behavioral boundaries. The fundamental hypothesis of restorative practices is that human beings are happier, more cooperative and productive, and more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when those in positions of authority do things with them, rather than to them or for them.⁽⁴⁾



- Accountability and support axes refer to how much support the coach is giving the player and how much they are holding the player accountable
- Ideally a coach should use strategies that land in the Reasoning quadrant

4. <https://www.iirp.edu/defining-restorative/social-discipline-window>

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A coach who is **Punitive**:

- Does things **TO** players
- Holds players very accountable for their actions
- Spends little time supporting kids or trying to identify the story behind their behaviors
- Shames and blames players, even if unintentionally
- Believes using punishment changes players' behavior (e.g., running four laps is so undesirable that it will make players listen to me when I speak)

In the **Punitive** approach a player is often left feeling victimized or resentful, therefore it is very difficult for them to learn a new way of responding.

A coach who is **Neglectful**:

- Does **NOT** do anything
- Does nothing to step in and provide healthy boundaries or support

The **Neglectful** approach gives players the very harmful message that the coach has given up on them.

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A coach who is **Permissive**:

- Does everything **FOR** players
- Feels badly for young people

The **Permissive** approach does not help young people learn new and more appropriate ways to express their needs.

A coach who is **Reasoning**:

- Works **WITH** players to ensure they are supported to learn and grow
- Understands that trauma impacts young people's behavior
- Helps players take responsibility for their actions while also uncovering underlying needs

The **Reasoning** approach can make players happier, more cooperative and productive. Players are more likely to make positive changes in their behavior when coaches do things **WITH** them, rather than **TO** them or **FOR** them.

The Social Discipline Window is courtesy of International Institute for Restorative Practices (IIRP). Much of our work on positive behavior management and, specifically, the concept of responsive intervention, have been greatly influenced by the work of IIRP. For more information, visit iirp.org