

# How do you coach young people when life **CHANGES?**

Young people's lives are full of change. These life changes are one of the main reasons why young people stop playing sport. This time of change can also be when a new sporting habit can be formed.

## **We want to help young people always have the option to take part and be active even when things around them change. As a coach, you can play a key part in this.**

Changes or transitions for young people can be varied, especially between the ages of 11 and 25. The changes could be emotional, physiological, social or physical (based on a place or environment they are in).

Here are examples of some of the changes faced by young people:

- starting school or changing schools
- leaving school
- change in friendship groups
- moving out of the family home
- starting college or university
- first job
- first exams
- starting own family
- going through puberty
- starting a new relationship
- passing their driving test and gaining new freedom
- increased independence; for example, getting their first mobile phone and/or a presence on social media
- parents splitting up
- bereavement.



**These changes can be a stressful time. Young people could feel a range of emotions including nervousness or anxiety, or they could be filled with excitement or anticipation! In some cases, the changes might present a new barrier for the young person to get over.**

In times of change, there is a need for information, emotional support and guidance. As a coach, you can help young people deal with change and uncertainty. This document and associated animation aim to give you some initial ideas of what you can do to help.

**Appreciate  
how it feels**

**Stay in  
touch**

**Engage  
influential  
people**

**Guide and  
nurture**

# Appreciate how it feels

**The most important thing you can do when those around you are faced with change is to understand how they are feeling. If you understand how they are feeling, you are much better placed to help them.**

- Talk to young people – get to know them and find out what changes are going on for them. Show that you care!
- Build trust in the relationship – ask for factual information before asking how it makes them feel. Use language that is appropriate to their age and stage of development.
- Recognise that periods of change can cause fear and anxiety but also can be an exciting time that young people might want to talk about. Sometimes, you just need to listen.
- Observe and look out for people being anxious – you might notice this through their body language or what they are saying.
- Help young people get to know you, as well as you knowing them.
- Create events and experiences that young people feel positive about and have stories to share as a result.
- Key questions to consider for you:
  - Are the young people more or less confident as a result of a change in their lives?
  - Have their motivations changed as a result of the change?
  - Are they more or less resilient as a result of this change?



# Stay in touch

**Life changes frequently for young people, and during this time, you could be a source of stability. Here are some ideas to support them by staying in touch.**

- When life changes for them, keep communicating. For example, you might wish them well in their exams.
- Regular contact helps young people feel part of something. Consider how you could use social media to help them stay connected. This could be something the young people set up themselves using their choice of social media. Or you could use social media to send a generic message to all of your group to help them keep connected. Ask young people how they would like you to engage with them on social media. Find out what they prefer to use, and don't assume it's the same as you as a coach.
- Consider short-term interruptions as they can impact on habit. For example, during bad weather, can you come up with a plan B or encourage the group still to meet?
- Let the young people know it is OK to take a break when they need to. Make it easy for them to come back to your session, and ensure they are not judged or penalised for missing sessions.
- Tell someone they are missed if they haven't been for a few weeks. You could ask a friend who might see them to pass on a message.
- After a break, think about how you will welcome people back. Send a group reminder before the session, letting them know you are looking forward to seeing them.
- Celebrate success at key changes. For example, send a congratulations card or message for their new job or passing their driving test.
- Digital communication with all young people must be safe and appropriate.

**See you  
SOON**

**Enjoy  
your break!**

**Good luck  
in your exams**

**Welcome  
back!**

# Engage influential people

**Young people are influenced by many different people; for example, friends, families or carers, teachers and you as a coach. It is helpful to consider how you can engage these influential people. When faced with changes, young people want a person who cares about them – a committed person from outside the family – this could be you!**

- Take time to understand who is important to young people and build relationships with these people. For example, for younger children especially, parents will be very significant and influencers on their sporting habit.
- Young people can be important influencers to each other. Help them create a strong social support network. This could include a social media group for them to use away from your session.
- Friendship groups are significant to young people. Encourage friends to stick together particularly when they first start. Consider how you can help them form new friendships by buddying up players.
- Influencers will change over time so you may want to consider how you involve new people. For example, welcome boyfriends and girlfriends to the session or acknowledge them as part of the young people's broader social network.
- Young people can also be influenced by celebrities, global trends and popular news media. Without trying to be too 'cool', how do you find out about what else can influence young people in the wider world?
- Find out who the young people look up to. Are there participants who have been coming for a while who could start to help out and influence others?
- Have open invitations to social events. Let the young people bring others along who are important to them.
- Be aware of what else is going on in their lives. For many young people, their connection to the wider world via social media (Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram and Facebook) is essential, and they feel uncomfortable going 'offline'.
- Consider how you can engage young people virtually as well as face-to-face.

# Guide and nurture

**Signposting, guidance and encouragement will help young people through changes. It is important to know when changes are coming so you can help them manage these more effectively.**

- Get young people to help each other. Find out if anyone else is facing the same life change and suggest they buddy up/support each other.
- If you know a physical change is coming – for example, they are moving away from home – offer to help find information that will encourage them to find a new place to take part. You might need to accept it might not be in your particular sport. Having a multi-sport habit is shown to increase the likelihood of young people staying active for life.
- Help young people deal with changes by developing their ability to problem solve. Examples of how you could support this include:
  - Encourage young people to share personal challenges with their peers and see if they can problem solve with or for each other.
  - Help young people think of different options through asking questions.
  - Help young people focus on what they can control and ignore what they can't control.
- Help young people know what they are good at so they feel more confident when facing a transition or change.
- Give young people opportunities to help out within your session. This can help them to feel they are making a difference. It might give them more confidence if they move on from your session.
- Help the individuals in your group set their own goals. If they have a goal to work on, this could be something they can continue away from your session. Internal goals and motivations can be a key way to prevent lapsing.
- Get young people to make a commitment. For example, if you know it is the last session with a group or an individual, encourage them to commit to carry on with sport or activity. It could be a pledge to you, a commitment to their friend or a challenge as a group.

This list is just a starting point of some ideas! We would love to hear some of your ideas on how you coach young people when life changes:

**@sportscoachuk #UnmissableSport**

Have you seen the 'How do you coach young people when life changes' animation that accompanies this guide? you can view it **here**.

Take a look at the 'What motivates young people to be active' animation **here**.

Don't miss the first animation in this series 'What makes your session unmissable for young people' **here**.

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