

**What motivates  
young people to**

# **BE ACTIVE?**

**Each young person will have a different  
reason or motivation for taking part in  
your session.**

## To help you keep the young people you coach engaged in sport and activity, it is essential to:

- 1 find out why young people turn up to your session
- 2 plan and deliver sessions to meet motivations
- 3 recognise when motivations have been fulfilled.

This document and associated animation aim to give you some initial ideas of what you can do as a coach linked to the three steps above.

### So what is motivation?

Motivation can be described as the reason for our behaviour. There is always a reason why people do everything. Sometimes, when you ask people what motivates them, they may actually tell you what their goal is instead. Motivations and goals are sometimes confused with each other.

Here is an example to show the difference:

**Goal** is a person's objective, ambition, aim or desired result (eg to run a half marathon or lose 20 pounds).

**Motivation** is the reason for acting or behaving in a particular way, a stimulus or inspiration (eg to be fitter or more active, or to feel good about themselves).



## When asked why they take part in sport or activity, research shows young people often give the following reasons:

- meet new people
- hang out with friends
- get in shape
- be healthy
- for fun and enjoyment
- learn new skills.

Everyone is different and will therefore have different reasons for taking part based on different experiences, personality, and lifestyle factors including family and friends. Young people can have more than one motivation at the same time.

Further research from **Sport England** shows that how active a young person is depends on how they either think or feel about sport. Deciding to take part is generally a mixture of emotional influences and thought out choices. Every young person thinks and feels differently about sport. Often, it can be a combination of both emotional and rational reasons that help them decide whether to take part.

**Emotional** – someone who loves doing sport – they have a more intrinsic and unconscious reaction to sport and exercise.

**Rational** – someone who recognises the benefits of doing sport – often, why they take part has been well considered and thought through.

### Motivations change

Motivation can change or dip over time. A dip in motivation may mean the reason for taking part is less important than it may have been previously.

Another likely scenario is their reason for taking part might have changed. For example, a young person might have started coming to your session to meet new people, but after a while, when confidence builds, they might want to start getting better and learn new skills.



# Steps to deliver a meaningful session

## 1 Find out why young people turn up to your session

Young people take part for lots of different reasons. The first important thing you can do as a coach is to understand the different motivations of the young people who come to your session. You need to understand what makes your session meaningful for those turning up.

Here are some questions you can use, to help you understand motivations:

**What attracted you to this session?**

**How did you find out about the session?**

**What type of session were you looking for?**

**What do you enjoy doing?**

Be wary about asking questions such as *What do you want to achieve?* This might come across as too goal-oriented and formal.

Don't ask *Why are you here?* It might all too easily be heard as a judgement of *Why are you here?*, particularly if any other attributes such as anxiety or low confidence are present.

### Consider how you ask the questions

- Ask the questions of the whole group, but be cautious – you might not get an honest response!
- Ask the questions one-to-one to different young people during your session, particularly when new people first start.
- Ask the young people to write their reason down at a convenient point in the session, such as a water break. This might help those who don't feel confident talking in groups situations.
- Use social media during or after the session for group messages. This might be a method of communication that the young people feel more comfortable with.

The motivations for those you coach may change. Think about asking the above questions at different times throughout the year.

A young person's current motivation might be triggered by something going on in their life. For example, they might have a prom or holiday approaching that they want to get in shape for.

When someone starts an activity for the first time, they often enter with high levels of enthusiasm and drive. As they come across difficulties, they can feel daunted, and their motivation fades. As a coach, you need to ensure you are building confidence to keep motivation and engagement high.

## 2 Plan and deliver sessions to meet motivations

Create a session plan, focusing on the reasons why young people turn up to your session. Below are some ideas you could try during your sessions.

| Motivation                   | Ideas to Try  |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Meet new people</b>       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use names all the time.</li><li>• Use a warm-up game where people can learn something about each other.</li><li>• Buddy up newcomers with someone else who will make them feel welcome.</li><li>• Help young people find something in common as soon as possible.</li><li>• Include lots of group activities, and change groups from time to time.</li><li>• Encourage work in pairs where people get a chance to get to know each other one-to-one.</li><li>• Encourage time for talk and chit-chat during your session. Help out if conversation stalls.</li><li>• Build in social time before, during or after your session.</li><li>• Use social media to demonstrate to potential newcomers how social and friendly your session is.</li></ul> |
| <b>Hang out with friends</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Include lots of group activities.</li><li>• Let the young people pick their own groups.</li><li>• Where possible, keep friendship groups together.</li><li>• Encourage more friendship groups to form during your session by creating bigger groups or buddying up new players.</li><li>• Support people to socialise. Plan for this within your session so they are standing up, moving around, practising or playing when they socialise.</li><li>• Encourage a longer drinks break so your groups have time to chat and socialise.</li></ul>   |

**Remember** when planning your sessions, young people can have a mix of motivations at the same time!

## Motivation

### Get in shape/be healthy

## Ideas to Try

- Let young people choose the intensity they want to take part at – encourage individuals to go at their own pace.
- Limit the amount of time spent talking when people are being still – sitting, standing or lining up.
- Some young people might use wearable technology such as a Fitbit or a GPS device – can you use this in the session to help individuals set their own goals?
- Include a thorough warm-up and cool-down to help prevent injury and muscle soreness.
- Be less like a boot camp and more playful.
- Aim for any activity, game or skill practice to last at least 10 minutes. This is the minimum time recommended to be active that will provide health benefits. While some young people will work up to being active for 10 minutes at a time, let them know that, regardless of intensity or duration, some activity is better than none when getting healthier.
- Aspire to a minimum of 30–40 minutes' moderate activity in total within an hour-long session. This could be made up of 3–4 x 10 minutes.
- Make water the drink of choice in your sessions, and remind young people to bring some each week. Know where the drinking water is located at your session.
- Promote the message that getting out of breath is not usually a sign something is medically wrong. Feeling sore can be normal a few days after being really active.
- Talk about how long they have been active for and the benefits it can bring.
- Set challenges; for example, get the group active for a set amount of time to burn off the calories in a standard chocolate bar.
- Ask the players how the sessions is going for them; for example, ask them to rate the intensity on a scale of 1–10.
- Praise when you notice activity is at moderate levels; for example:
  - able to talk and hold a conversation
  - breathing becomes quicker and body feels warmer
  - heart rate will be quicker but not racing
  - face may have a 'glow'.

## Motivation

## Ideas to Try

### Fun and enjoyment

- Allow time for socialising.
- Don't interrupt activity too often. Having fewer interruptions allows activity to flow, and increases the likelihood of enjoyment.
- Keep the young people moving – create a session where everyone is active and not standing and waiting for 'their' turn.
- Keep your tone of voice light, and deliver sessions with energy and enthusiasm.
- Allow time to play. Where possible, include games that encourage the development of skills, rather than isolated skill development.
- Give young people control of what they choose to do – let them be creative and change things.
- Bring new ideas into your session regularly to stop young people from getting bored.
- Use music to change the environment.
- If practical, change the venue of your session occasionally to keep it feeling different.
- Praise effort over performance.
- Use competition wisely – it can be off-putting for some.
- Use technology to enhance your session (eg video clips or apps).
- Connect your sport to their other interests. For example, could you theme a session on the latest video game or reality TV show they like?
- Allow people to drop in and out during the activity.
- Find out what young people would find fun or enjoyable – what is fun to one person might not be fun to someone else.

### Learn new skills

- Let young people know they can ask you to show them something new any time they feel ready.
- Keep sessions high tempo/intensity.
- Share technical coaching points on how to improve their skills.
- Use effective questioning to help young people figure out how to improve their own skills.
- Let the young people pick their own skills to develop.
- Make time to watch and provide feedback to everyone.
- Structure sessions so sometimes the young people are providing coaching points to each other.
- Build in time for regular practice of new skills.
- Recognise and praise when a new skill has been mastered.
- Encourage young people to rest when needed. This is so the quality of practice remains high.
- Share YouTube or other video clips of a new skill or technique they can practise in their own time.
- Encourage those who want to develop skills to help out/volunteer in the session.
- Set achievable incremental challenges – a sense of improvement is key.

The above table gives you some ideas to try during your session, but don't forget there is a lot you could do before or after your session.

For example:

- Use social media to promote photos, videos or interviews of young people at your session. This would give newcomers a sense in advance of who they will meet and the welcoming nature of your session.
- Encourage the group to keep in contact post-session. This might help them to keep connected, or encourage them to work toward their motivation between sessions.

### During your session

Don't forget to check in with your young people to see if their motivations are being met.



Give yourself time to notice and observe. Try to recognise mood state and body language. This might give you a clue to how the young people are feeling. For example, do you have someone standing apart from the others – has there been a falling-out in their social group?



Ask questions to see how they are finding the session. Find out if they are enjoying it or want any extra help.



Listen to the chat among the group to understand how they might be interacting. Actively listen when they are giving feedback.



### 3 Recognise when motivations have been fulfilled

Young people want to take part in activities that are worthwhile to them. As a coach, it is your role to help them understand the personal value they can get from taking part. It is more powerful if it relates to their reasons for taking part.

*I like to invest time and dedication into things, it makes them seem worthwhile.*

It is important to get feedback from young people about your session. Find out:

- if they found the session worthwhile
- which parts they liked the best
- what happened that might make them want to come back next week.

You could ask for feedback at the end of your session, but there might be other ways you could gain feedback. For example, you could send a group message asking for feedback, or generally monitor any chat on social media. If they are using wearable technology such as a Fitbit or GPS device, they might want to share this information with you.

It will also be important that you help the young person reflect on their own achievements, and be careful with offering external incentives or rewards based on motivations.

Motivations can be considered as **internal** or **external**:

- **Internal** is when the individual is self-driven by interest in or enjoyment of the activity rather than relying on external recognition or reward.
- **External** is when the individual is motivated by an external source; for example, to impress a parent or you as the coach, or because they want to win or to be rewarded.

Internal motivation actually leads to a 'stickier' habit. If the young person is motivated externally, they could lapse from activity as soon as the source of their motivation is removed.

It is also worth doing your own self-reflection. Consider from a young person's point of view: Did the session meet their motivations?

Checking and refreshing young people's motivations and goals for coming to your session makes it more likely that they will continue to be active and attend your session.

This is just a starting point of some of our ideas. Join in the conversation and share your ideas on Twitter using **#UnmissableSport**.

Have you seen the 'What motivates young people to be active' animation that accompanies this guide?, you can view it **here**.

You can also see the first animation in this series 'What makes your session unmissable for young people' **here**.

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