

# 10 TIPS FOR GROUP MANAGEMENT

- 1) **DON'T TAKE CHAOS PERSONALLY.** Sometimes PA creates a recipe for chaos. Students may not be used to working in groups, much less democratic groups. Coaches are typically new to students and they may try to test your limits. While there is no single magic bullet, by working on the right combination of smaller elements, a group can learn to work together. In fact, one of the things that makes PA work is that the coach and group have to figure out together how to work as a group.
- 2) **LISTEN AND PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR GROUP.** It is remarkable how kids will respond when they know they are being listened to. Pay attention and get to know your kids as individuals and as a group. Try figure why certain behaviors are called into being.
- 3) **CLEAR EXPECTATIONS.** Ask your team members what they expect from you and each other. Tell your group what your expectations are for yourself and them. It is good to be explicit about expectations from the beginning (you can always re-negotiate later).
- 4) **HAVE YOUR GROUP MAKE THEIR OWN RULES AND CONSEQUENCES, AND MAKE SURE THAT THEY ARE ENFORCED.** If a rule is broken, bring it to the attention of the group and ask them what should be done. Remind them that they chose to do this group and that they made, and agreed to abide by, their own rules. It is difficult, but you can exercise your authority in a democratic way.
- 5) **ADDRESS DISRUPTIVE OR DISRESPECTFUL BEHAVIOR IMMEDIATELY.** It is O.K. to say "NO, that is not acceptable behavior." The trick is to not get into power struggles with kids. Be sensitive as to when it is better to address problems with the group or when it is better to pull people aside and address them individually (think of the public/private distinction).
- 6) **HIGHLIGHT THE GOOD THINGS.** Name good behavior, and name important things that people have said. It is always good to remember the good things that kids who are giving you trouble have said, you can bring them back into the group by saying, "Remember last week, when you said ... that was really important."  
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- 7) **ESTABLISH A STRUCTURE AND ROUTINE TO MEETINGS, INCLUDING ROLES AND REGULAR EVALUATION.** An agenda is an excellent way to establish routine (see Building Worlds). Ideally, the team will have come up with an agenda "things to do" and goals at the last meeting. Honestly evaluate how you and the team members think the group is going, ask what can we do about it. Give group members roles (facilitator, time-keeper, evaluator, recorder, etc.) rotate roles.
- 8) **ALWAYS HAVE SOMETHING TO DO.** "Discipline" problems are not just about behavior, but are related to being on task and working within the allotted time frame. Pay attention to the attention span of your group, younger groups will need shorter activities.
- 9) **WORK ON GROUP DEVELOPMENT.** Do team building activities, establish a team identity, etc. Games work really well for this, especially if you use a game to address a specific problem.
- 10) **ASK FOR HELP.** The Site Coordinator, Coach Coordinator, teachers, or principal can help you with discipline. People at the school can talk with students during the week to address problems. Ask other coaches what have done or would do in similar situations.

## TIPS FOR ADDRESSING PROBLEMS

1. Figure out the dynamics of the problem. What calls this behavior into being? Is it someone in the group, you, something happened in the group, something happened outside the group between group members that is being brought into the group, something that is going on in their lives?
2. What is the best place, time, way to address the problem?  
at the moment the incident happens / during evaluation / after the session  
with the whole group / with a single individual / with the parties involved  
through talking / writing / drawing  
separating kids from group
3. Use quiet writing / drawing / reflection as a time for involved parties to cool down and think about the incident.
4. Honestly evaluate incident with involved parties, and if relevant, entire group.  
What did you (each individual, and not other person) do to create problem?  
What can you (each individual) do to prevent this from happening again?  
What did I, as the coach, do or not do well?  
What can we do to work better in the future?