3. Consider age and stage

It's crucial for coaches to understand that young people need to be in control of their own development so they can flourish as people. Jamie Williams, who coaches children's football, advises that considering the young person's age and stage when working with them is important.

"Start with the child in mind and explore the skills they feel most excited and interested to explore. It's always fun improving skills and getting better, particularly if the children feel excited, inspired and connected to the skills being practised. In order to gauge and appropriately plan for this I recommend carefully considering the age and stage characteristics of the children you coach. By starting with the child first, we can create practice and games to suit."

4. Listen to kids' voices

Involving children in planning by asking for feedback and input on a regular basis helps empower children and young people to shape their own sporting journeys.

"At the close of a session, it's good practice to ask what they enjoyed, what they got from the session, and what they want to do next week," says kids' coach Becky Evans. Make sure you actively listen to what they have to say so they know their input is valued, and be sure to get the views of the less vocal members of the group too.

5. Stay on the ball

Although being child-first in your coaching is all about empowering children and young to make choices for themselves, decide their own journey and have the freedom to play their own way, that doesn't mean the coach is any less important. Coaches need to stay on the ball, because child-first coaching must always be rooted in safe practice.

Trampolining coach Hermione Paul advises, "As a coach of trampolining and gymnastics, you have to be there to physically support them, if required. It can be a high-risk sport. You've always got to be switched on and be prepared in case an error is made because at the end of the day, they're children."

"You've always got to be switched on... because at the end of the day, they're children." Hermione Paul

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CHALLENGE YOURSELF

Ready to take action? Small steps adapting your practice to make sure the voices of your participants are heard will impact on their enjoyment and engagement in a session. Here are some child-first coaching resolutions that you might want to try in your next session.

1. Ask your participants what they would like to work on in the practice
2. Use a whiteboard to create a 'Shout-Out' space, asking the children to write down what they think is working well in the session and other in the group are doing well
3. Ask your participants to share ideas of what role you as a coach can play in the session to best support the practice
4. Encourage your participants to share what they would like to achieve in the next session, week and month
5. Challenge your participants to give you three pieces of feedback on how you coach
6. After your next session ask yourself if you have heard from each child. This will help you identify if there is support you need to give to the quieter ones to ensure they have an opportunity to be heard

5 TOP TIPS FOR CHILD-FIRST COACHING



1. Connection before correction

Coaches must invest time and energy to form connections with their athletes. Trust cannot be demanded; it must be earned. Scott Hann, Director of Coaching at South Essex Gymnastics Club, told us:

"It takes years to build that trust and respect and form strong personal connections that enable you to understand what that child needs and then align yourself with those needs, and really help them to grow."

Clear and open communication is essential for building trust and ensuring that the young person's views are acted on in a meaningful way is key to a lasting connection.

2. Give their imaginations a workout

Children and young people, whatever the age, have a right to play and to shape what play looks like for them. Play that is initiated by the kids themselves is an important part of development as it helps build confidence, social interaction skills, and decision making. Lorna Woodroffe, former British number one, and head coach at WimX Academy in Essex, talks about how she encourages play in her sessions.

"Children have got such great imaginations. A good example is to simply create a pyramid of balls in different parts of the court, then have the kids fire balls at them to knock it down. You paint a picture of the game and they'll tweak it and it will come alive."