

How Coaches Enable Athletes to use Alcohol and Other Drugs

As coaches, we try to do what is best for our athletes. But sometimes the things that we do actually make it easier for athletes to use mood-altering chemicals. This list includes enabling behaviors used by coaches that may actually encourage young people to use alcohol and other drugs.

Don't -- Pretend that you did not hear an athlete discussing plans for a party that will involve alcohol or drugs.

Do -- Immediately address the problem with the athlete and tell him or her that the plans are inappropriate and unacceptable for any member of your team. Tell the athlete that you are concerned and that you care. Ask if he or she needs any help. Tell him or her that drug use weakens an athlete's body and increases the risk of motor vehicle and other accidents. It's important for coaches to take an active part in their players' lives -- both on and off the field. Positive role models are needed in our children's lives, and coaches have a special opportunity to deliver a powerful and consistent message about the dangers of drugs.

Don't -- Choose to ignore the smell of marijuana.

Do -- Confront the athlete immediately. Make sure that he or she knows that you know. If you fail to act, the athlete may assume that this behavior is OK or that you don't care. Explain that marijuana is illegal and that the athlete can be arrested or suspended from school and sports for using it.

Don't -- Avoid enforcing rules -- or enforce them selectively.

Do -- Be firm, set limits, and stick to them. Be sure that the rules you set are helpful in changing an athlete's behavior. Don't alienate or stigmatize athletes; engage them in the rulemaking.

Don't -- Ignore drug use because the team "needs" a particular athlete to play.

Do -- Set rules and enforce them consistently. Once you look away, team morale will suffer, as will your leadership. By opting to look the other way, you also fail in your responsibility to the athlete. Emphasize that the same rules apply to all team members and that you, as a coach, have a responsibility to enforce rules consistently.

Don't -- Ignore drug use by the coaching staff. You are a role model.

Do -- Ensure that everyone on your staff sets a good example. Your players will heed not just what you say, but what you do.