

Coaching So Kids Will Listen - tricks for getting kids to listen

Develop a listening posture. Have your swimmers show they are listening by, for example, getting out of the pool and sitting on their kickboards. Teach your swimmers early on that you expect them to show they are ready to listen by adopting this posture.

Practice listening. It may sound silly, but have your team practice coming quickly to you from the pool and getting ready to listen. Have them see how quickly they can hop out and get into the listening posture.

Reinforce listening with your attention. Most often we give our attention to the kids who are NOT doing what we want them to do. Make a point of focusing your attention on the kids who immediately get into the listening posture. Say something like: "Thanks, Jeanie and Teri, for getting ready to listen so quickly. We have limited time for practice so when you do that it helps the team." This will tend to cause the kids who are not coming quickly to do better next time in the hope that you will recognize them.

Develop a team signal to bring people together to listen. A specific whistle sequence can signal that it's time to come together (e.g., three shorts and a long). Some coaches give a visual signal that it's time to listen.

Find something you can take away. Kids like to have something in their hands and they will tend to modify their behavior to be able to keep it. For example, tell them to hold their pull bouys. When you ask for their attention, say "Hold the bouys." If a child doesn't stop talking, simply and matter-of-factly take the bouy away from them without any show of anger or irritation. They won't like this, and they will pay attention next time so as to not have their bouy taken away. They will quickly see that the way they get to keep the bouy is to hold it and listen.

Make it short and sweet. Many coaches talk too much at one time. Expecting kids who want to move to remain still for a long lecture is asking a lot. It's better to have several 3-minute meetings during the course of a practice than one or two 10-minute sessions. In general, the less a coach says, the more the kids listen.

Have conversations more often than lectures. Good questions can engage kids in a way that even the best speech can't. Ask them to help solve a problem, for example, "Any ideas on how we can improve our kicking at the end of each race?"

Listen to them! Being listened to fills kids' Emotional Tanks and kids with full E-Tanks are more likely to be able to listen to you.