

COACHING GUIDE

5 TIPS FOR WORKING WITH ATHLETES WITH ADHD

UNDERSTANDING ADHD

ADHD is a neurodevelopmental disorder that can affect attention, activity level, and impulse control.

For athletes, ADHD may show up as difficulty maintaining attention for long periods, excessive movement or talking, lower impulse control, or forgetting plays and equipment.

BY THE NUMBERS

11.7%

of U.S. children ages 3–17 currently have an ADHD diagnosis.

Source: CDC. Estimate reflects U.S. children ages 3–17 with a current ADHD diagnosis.

78% of children with ADHD have another co-occurring condition, such as a learning disability, behavior/conduct problems, or anxiety (Danielson et al., 2024).

5 TIPS FOR COACHES

1

Create clear routines.

Athletes with ADHD may benefit from knowing what is happening, when it is happening, and what comes next. Build consistent routines into practice.

Try:

“Warm-up -> Individual -> Group -> Team -> Conditioning”

A predictable routine can reduce the amount of information the athlete has to keep track of.

2

Show it. Don't just say it.

Use hands-on demonstrations and visual aids whenever possible. Don't rely entirely on a long verbal explanation.

Show the drill. Let them try it. Then correct it.

3

Check for understanding.

Don't assume that looking away means an athlete isn't listening. Some athletes with ADHD may have difficulty maintaining eye contact while still processing what you're saying.

Instead of: “Are you listening?”

Try: “Everyone, tell me what we're doing.”

This lets you check understanding without singling out one athlete.

4

Expect to be patient.

Sometimes the instruction didn't stick the first time. That's okay. Be patient.

Repeat the important information. Then give the athlete an opportunity to put it into practice.

“Explain -> Repeat -> Rep”

5

Help them remember.

ADHD can affect an athlete's ability to remember plays, equipment, or other responsibilities. Don't wait until the mistake happens. Build the check into your routine.

Before leaving: “Everyone check: jersey, cleats, equipment, water.”

That quick check could be the difference between an athlete being prepared and sitting out.

REMEMBER

ADHD doesn't mean an athlete isn't paying attention.

Sometimes they need a different way to access your instruction.

ACCOMMODATIONS TO THE FIELD

Every athlete learns differently. Every athlete deserves great coaching.