

MY ATHLETE DOESN'T ASK FOR HELP

Why some athletes stay quiet, and how coaches can make asking for help easier.

WHAT TO DO

Not asking for help doesn't necessarily mean an athlete doesn't need it. The easy conclusion is "they should just ask," but asking for help is a skill, and some athletes haven't developed it yet.

1 DON'T WAIT FOR A RAISED HAND

Make it easier to spot confusion without requiring the athlete to announce it.

INSTEAD OF "Does anyone have questions?"

TRY "Tell me what you're doing on this rep" or "What's your first step?"

Coaching principle: don't make asking for help the only way to get help.

2 TEACH THE ATHLETE WHAT TO SAY

Some athletes aren't avoiding help. They simply don't have the words. Give them scripts they can actually use.

GIVE THEM "Can you explain that again?" "Can you show me?" "Can we go one step at a time?"

The goal is language the athlete can actually use in the moment.

3 MAKE ASKING FOR HELP NORMAL

If the only time an athlete gets attention is when they've made a mistake, asking for help can feel like admitting failure. When an athlete does ask, don't make it a big deal. Just help them.

Coaching principle: the less socially expensive it is to ask for help, the more likely athletes are to ask for it.

4 GIVE THEM A WAY TO ASK WITHOUT SPEAKING

Not every athlete will be comfortable asking publicly. Self-advocacy can look different for different athletes.

TRY A hand signal, a quick private check-in, a written question, or partnering with a teammate.

The goal isn't to force every athlete to advocate the same way.

5 DON'T RESCUE TOO QUICKLY

If the coach always notices the problem and solves it immediately, the athlete never learns to advocate for themselves.

INSTEAD OF "Here, I'll tell you what you're doing wrong."

TRY "What part are you unsure about?"

Move from solving the problem for them to teaching them how to solve it.

BUILD TOWARD INDEPENDENCE

NOTICE Coach notices the need.

ASK Coach asks the athlete what they need.

PROMPT Athlete identifies the need with prompting.

INDEPENDENT Athlete asks for help on their own.

FIGURE OUT WHAT KIND OF HELP

Before asking why they aren't asking, ask:

Can they do it?

SKILL ISSUE

Do they understand it?

INSTRUCTION ISSUE

Can they access it?

ACCOMMODATION ISSUE

Figure out what kind of help they need before deciding why they aren't asking for it.

QUICK COACH CHECKLIST

- ☐ Have I created opportunities for them to ask?
- ☐ Do they know what they can say?
- ☐ Have I given them another way to communicate?
- ☐ Am I rescuing them too quickly?
- ☐ Have I checked their understanding without putting them on the spot?

Don't tell an athlete to "just ask for help." **Teach them how.**