

Crisis Management for Athletes with Diverse Abilities

It is a myth that when challenging behavior occurs, it is a 'teachable moment.' Think about moments in your life where you have become so upset or angry that you have lost rationality (e.g., moments of extreme road rage). These are not 'teachable moments'; they are not moments when you are relaxed and able to hear feedback (e.g., your passenger's advice on how to be a better driver).

When crisis occurs, the priority is keeping everyone safe. Strategies for ensuring safety may include:

1. Give space.

Unless the situation requires physical intervention to ensure safety, the first thought should be 'take a step back.'

2. Remove the audience.

Move other participants away. Allow the individual to blow off steam without the need to 'save face' in front of peers.

3. Consider the physical environment.

Move objects that the participant might throw or kick (e.g., pylons, pool toys). Consider where the exits are and what you will do if the participant leaves the area. Have a plan in advance if this is a possibility.

4. Stay calm and wait. Reduce or eliminate verbal instructions.

Provide time and space. Watch for signs that the participant is regaining rationality (e.g., breathing rate returns to normal). Allow the participant lots of time and space to recover.

5. Have one person at a time talk.

If more than one coach/volunteer is on-hand to support the crisis, only one person at a time should be speaking to the person in crisis.

6. Consider the participant before returning to the activity.

Be aware that the participant may need some time before they are ready to return. Something about the activity did not work for the individual, so consider that before placing them back in the same situation.

7. Make a plan.

Think about what 'triggered' the crisis. Consider adjustments that could make the activity easier for the participant to manage (e.g., reduced duration or adapted skill level). You can also work on actively teaching and encouraging the participant to ask for a break when the first 'whispers' of frustration occur. Consult with other coaches/volunteers/activity leaders to ensure that everyone is aware of the plan. Invite parent collaboration.

The most effective way to deal with crisis situations is to learn to diffuse them before they occur. Learn about strategies such as rapport building, effective communication, motivation tools and frontloading. Visit canucksautism.ca for more information about how to access Canucks Autism Network's training.

