

Guidance for coaches to enhance their  
interaction with children in the sports arena,  
based on the International Child Development  
Programme: A pilot project in cooperation  
with Vålerenga football

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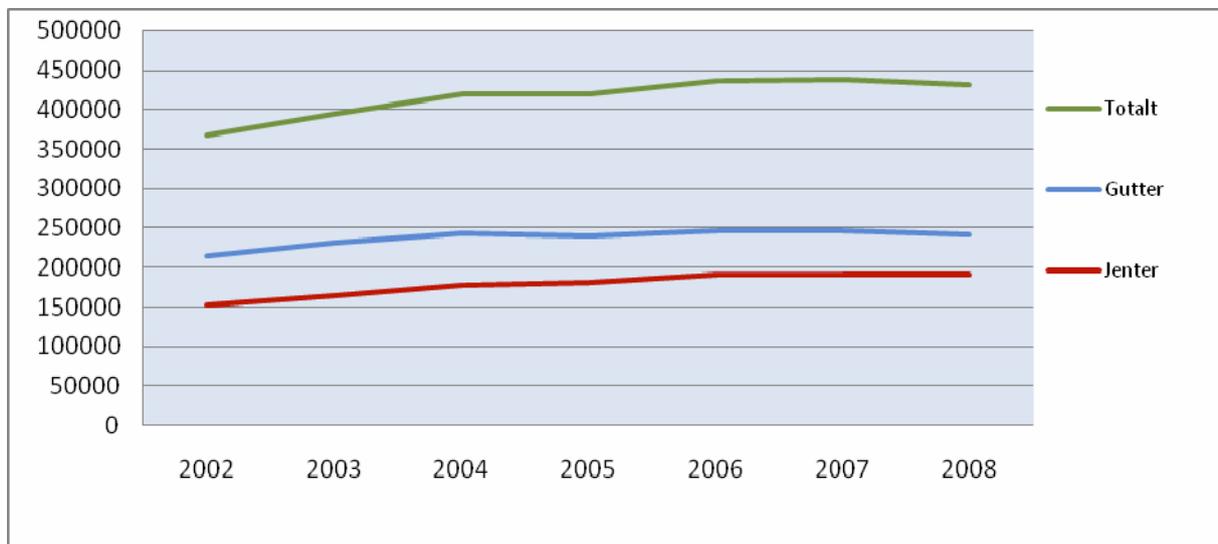
## **Acknowledgement**

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## Sports for Children and Youth in Norway

Sports have an important social role in a society. Seippel (2006) puts it as follows: "NGOs (non governmental organizations) are an important part of our democratic society and organizations are an important arena for learning and developing of skills." Many children (defined as children and adolescents up to the age of 18) participate in different forms of amateur sport, and in Norway there has been a gradual increase in participation rates. In the age group 8-15, around 50 % attend some form of organized sports. Figure 1 from Norges Idrettsforbund, NIF (The Norwegian Olympic and Paralympic Committee and Confederation of Sports) shows the number of children in organized sports in the period 2002-2008.

Figure 1: *Children aged 6-12 years in organized sport* (NIF, reprinted in Ingebrigtsen & Aspvik (2010))



The children's sport in Norway relies on volunteers. Figures from Oslo in 2006 show that an average of 96 volunteered hours are committed every week in each club, which is equivalent to 1775 full time positions a year. In Oslo, 76 % of the teams are run by volunteers alone, compared to 66 % for the country as a whole (Seippel, 2006). Coaches for the youngest athletes are often parents of athletes.

Both parents and coaches assume that sport has positive short-term and long-term effects on children, both physically, mentally and socially. Ingebrigtsen and Aspvik (2010) ask, "What does the literature say?" about the focus on children's sport. By searching the words "children

and sport" in Bibsys (supplier of library services) by year of publication, they found two matches in the decade between 1950 and 1960, seven the next decade and then an increase to 70 matches in the 70s, 185 in the 80s and about 200 in the next two decades. This suggests an increased level of interest in the topic, with social factors, well-being and coping as words that recur in these publications (Ingebrigtsen & Aspvik, 2010). In a Norwegian study including 15 coaches and 232 athletes from primary and secondary school, coaches unanimously stated that athletes' well-being was their main task, with the following quotes as representative: "Praise from the coach", "To be in a good social environment", "Experience mastery" and "High degree of activity" (Aspvik & Ingebrigtsen, 2010).

### **The coach in a development-oriented perspective**

Following this, it is natural to ask: What does the research say? Research in developmental psychology has shown that children develop in close interaction with their environment, and that parents in particular, but also other caregivers play an important role in the child's overall development. The coach has an important role in a sports club, with several training sessions a week and matches, suggesting that coaches represent important adults in the children's lives. Coaches may as such influence the children's mental health and social development in addition to athletically (Kjellstadli, 2004). For example, such "significant others" may have an important role in a child's development of self-confidence. The child's global self-esteem, which refers to its overall sense of self-worth, is through self-assessment affected by collaboration and interaction within the family, with friends, in school and social groups such as a football team (Rosenberg, 1979). The family and the school has been the focus of much research in this context, while organized sporting groups have not (Smoll, Smith, Barnett, & Everett, 1993).

However, knowledge and recognition about the significance of coaches and amateur sports for children and adolescents, is increasing. For example, several point to the potentially negative impact that coach behavior based on pressure and control potentially can have on young athletes, including inhibiting their sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness, which in turn undermine young athletes' self-determined motivation (Bartholomew, Ntoumanis, & Thorgersen-Ntoumanis, 2009). On the other hand, it is assumed that coach behavior in terms of autonomy-supportive behavior, structure and involvement has a positive effect on young

athletes' needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness, which in turn supports the children's' inner and self-determined motivation (Mageau & Vallerand, 2003).

The fact that many children and young people spend much of their leisure time in sports arenas have resulted in increasing the recognition of the need to implement different programs adapted for coaches, in order to increase their ability to fulfill their role as a "significant other" in the best possible way. In one study, the effects of a cognitive-behavioral approach to enhancing relationship skills in coaches, implemented in a two hours session two weeks before the start of the season, showed positive results. The program provided reinforcement, encouragement, corrective instruction and technical instruction. The group of coaches who received the program were more positively evaluated by the young athletes, they had more fun, and the team was considered more attractive, although the teams did not win more games than the control group (Smoll et al., 1993). Another study that measured the impact of the coach's behaviour on children showed that children with low self-esteem responded most positively to coaches that reinforced and motivated, and most negative to coaches who scored low on this. The authors point out that these findings are consistent with "self-enhancement theory" (Smith & Smoll, 1990), which argues that people have a basic need to look at themselves in a positive way, and receive positive evaluations from others.

### **What do the “Children’s rights in the sports arena” say?**

Last but not least, you might ask: what do the “Children’s rights in the sport arena”, say? These rights, prepared by the Norwegian Confederation of Sports (2007) include many of the factors we have looked at above, by pointing to several conditions that should be followed in sports for children:

#### **1. Safety**

Children have the right to participate in a safe training environment free of pressure and exploitation. Children under six years must be accompanied by an adult on activities. Damages shall be prevented.

#### **2. Friendship and wellbeing**

Children have the right to participate in training and competition activities where they can develop friendship and experience solidarity.

#### **3. Coping**

Children have the right to experience success and learn many different skills. They will also have opportunities for variations, exercises, and interaction with others.

#### 4. Influence

Children have the right to express their opinions and to be heard. They will have the opportunity to participate in planning and implementing their own sport activities together with coaches and parents.

#### 5. Freedom to choose

Children have the right to choose what sport or how many sports they want to participate in. They decide how much they want to train.

#### 6. Contests for all

Children have the right to choose whether to participate in contests or not. Children who join the transition from a club within the same sport shall have full right to participate in competitions for a new club immediately after transition.

#### 7. On children's terms

Children have the right to participate in training and competitive activities appropriate for their age, physical development and maturation level (NIF, 2007, page 4).

Olympiatoppen (2011) points out that children need diverse movement challenges and varied physical challenges, and further:

- Stable and lasting social relationships to develop friendship, unity, cooperative and social skills
- Athletic professional guidance, boundaries and requirements in line with age and developmental level
- Ideals, good and close role models.

Key qualities of the coach are also described (Olympiatoppen, 2011):

- Knowledge of the child's basic needs, growth, development and maturation and the ability to apply such knowledge in practical training activities
- Knowledge of social conditions that influence the child's upbringing
- S/he is committed to be a facilitator and activity leader
- Create access to various activity venues
- Is committed to create lasting groups of children in the same age
- Is able to create a basis for children to experience success in various activities/contexts

- Have good general knowledge about physical and mentally stimulating activities
- Emphasize activities in groups and in pairs
- Have knowledge about the development of basic special skills; knowledge about how to apply important exercises that stimulate and reinforce elements of free play
- Provide opportunities for good role models
- Is aware of her/his own importance as a role model

Therefore there are, both high ambitions and high expectations from the sports coaches for children. It is furthermore an aim to make children continue with sports "as long as possible", and become "as good as possible" (Larsen, 2011; Bjone & Vingdal, 2012). Despite this attention to the child's needs and the coach's role in relation to these needs within children's sports, there is no system to ensure, or at least facilitate, that the coach has the prerequisites needed to fulfill the rights of children as established by the Norwegian Confederation of Sports and "Olympiatoppens". At the moment, the courses that are offered to sports coaches of children and youth focus mainly on play techniques and on advising coaches how best to organize the training, including differentiation, planning and motivational activities (see for example, Oslo fotballkrets, 2012). Thus there appears to be an unmet need to provide guidance to sports coaches for children, by focusing on psychosocial factors.

### **International Child Development Programme (ICDP)**

The International Child Development Programme (ICDP) is a preventive early intervention programme that aims to improve the care and upbringing of children and young people through group-based guidance of the child's stable network of care ([icdp.info](http://icdp.info)). The program was developed by Professor Karsten Hundeide at the University of Oslo and colleagues in the 80s and is now established as a foundation with headquarters in Oslo and an international board headed by Lailah Nicoletta Armstrong, who also is one of the ICDP founders. ICDP is internationally recognized and used in about 30 countries, in collaboration with UNICEF, Save the Children, and the World Health Organization, among others (Hundeide, 2001; [icdp.info](http://icdp.info)).

ICDP is based on knowledge from developmental psychology, and has a humanistic, non-instructional approach. The program is formulated as three dialogues (the emotional, the comprehension and regulative dialogue) with underlying eight guidelines for positive

interaction, which acts as simple aids to sensitize caregivers about child development and children's needs as well as their own role in promoting a positive development (Hundeide, 2001; icdp.info).

In Norway, ICDP is implemented with parents and professional caregivers, mainly in kindergartens, by the Ministry of Children, Equality, and Social Inclusion. Professional caregivers who work with parents and/or children can be educated to become ICDP-certified facilitators who can hold groups for parents or other caregivers. ICDP has been used in pre-schools, primary schools, child welfare, prison, family centers and asylums. The aim in all projects is to improve the quality of care for children and adolescents.

### **Pilot project: ICDP tested in context of sports for children in Norway**

As we have seen, sports represent a big and important arena, which involves important adult figures in a child's life. Even though ICDP has been used among a variety of professional caregivers, the programme has never been tested within the sport area. The aim of this pilot project was to make a preliminary adaptation of the program to the coach-athlete relationship, and examine whether the interaction guidance based on the ICDP approach can empower coaches and strengthen coach-athlete relationships.

Vålerenga football club signed a contract with ICDP in January 2012 about applying the ICDP approach with football coaches for children aged 6-12. In line with Aspvik and Ingebrigtsen (2010) Vålerenga was chosen both because they have a large and well-run children and youth sports facility, but also because of their targeted efforts for inclusion and fighting racism and other negative culture. A meeting between ICDP International and Vålerenga was held in late January 2012 where the scope and focus of the pilot study was agreed upon. ICDP was adjusted to the coach-athlete relationship, and a draft manual was developed by ICDP International. Parents consented on paper format that their children could be photographed for the manual. The pilot study was postponed from May to September due to challenges related to recruitment. During October, 30 coaches registered for the course, however 13 were unable to attend on the set date.

The first workshop was held from 10 am till 4 pm, on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 2012 at the Vålerenga's office in Oslo. Two ICDP trainers with extensive experience led the workshop:

- Eli Ostberg Baardseth: Cand. mag. in social sciences from the University of Oslo. Broad experience in child and youth work, including orphanages, child welfare services, leisure and outreach youth work. Has participated in sports and has been coaching volleyball, swimming and skiing. She is an ICDP trainer from 2007.
- Bjorn Thomassen: Lecturer, majoring degree in sports, and basic course in child welfare. More than 40 years of work experience in schools, childcare, youth work, drug treatment and as a senior advisor in the Norwegian agency for children, youth and family affairs. He is an MST therapist (Multisystemic therapy) and an ICDP trainer since 2007.

The ICDP guidance course consisted of a theoretical introduction and activation of participants through role-play, group work and group discussions. The pilot manual was used in group work by reviewing the eight themes of good interaction. The ICDP trainers also shared experiences, and supported and inspired the participants as part of the sensitizing process.

After the first workshop, coaches went back to their coach activities to try out the ICDP guidelines in practice (self-training). During the second workshop, which was held at the Vålerenga office, from 10 am till 4 pm, on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> of September 2012, the coaches shared and discussed their experiences and reflections since attending the first workshop.

### **Coaches' experiences from ICDP courses**

Data were obtained from 17 coaches from 16 different training groups. All the coaches who attended the first workshop were requested to participate in the pilot study by providing information and feedback about their experiences in using the ICDP methodology, and all gave their consent to participate. Eleven of the 17 who attended the first workshop had the opportunity to attend workshop number two. Feedback from the six who did not have the opportunity to participate in the second workshop suggests that they had adopted the program and used it in interaction with the young athletes, but these participants are not included in the result section of this report. The 11 who also answered the second questionnaire represented 10 football teams with 139 children.

An application was sent for approval from the “Regionale komiteer for medisinsk og helsefaglig forskningsetikk” (the Regional Committees for Medical and Health Research),

who concluded that the study falls outside their remit. As the names of the participants had to be collected for linking pre-and post-study data, the pilot study applied for and received approval from the “Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste” (the Norwegian Social Science Data Services). All participants received oral and written information. All data were anonymized and stored in a locked cabinet and all names were deleted after the last data collection.

Two data collection methods were used. A questionnaire was developed with an aim to collect information about their coach style, their motivations and potential challenges associated with the coach role. The coaches filled in the questionnaire in advance of the first workshop (17 coaches) and again after the second workshop (11 coaches). The second questionnaire also contained questions about experiences related to the ICDP training and potential learning from the course, with a request to also provide feedback on the implementation of the course and the course content. A group interview was conducted with three coaches four months after completing the course to receive additional in depth comments.

### **Information about the coaches who participated in the ICDP courses**

The coaches who attended the first workshop were between 30 and 51 years of age, with an average age of 41 (SD = 7.43). Three of the coaches were women and 14 were men. Most had previously attended courses related to the coach role, two through the Norwegian Football Association, one through the Norwegian school of sport sciences, four had participated in activity leader courses and four had participated in courses other than those outlined. Five coaches had never previously attended any courses related to the coach role. Most courses had technical focus. The participants had been coaching the football team 2.38 years on average (SD = 0.5). The teams had between 1-4 coaches (M = 2.59, SD = .87). Most coaches had two training sessions a week with the football team (52.9 %), while two coaches had one training week, five coaches had three training sessions a week and one trainer had four or more trainer sessions a week with the football team. Linear regression analysis showed that the number of training sessions each week increased with the age of the athlete ( $p = .016$ ). The training had duration of between 1.5 to 8 hours each week, giving a weekly average of slightly less than four hours a week. The team was comprised of 8-20 players (M = 12.65) (see Table 1). The figures for the coaches who participated in both workshops (N = 11) are presented in Table 2.

Table 1: *Coach's age, number of coaches per child athlete, the age of the athletes, the number of children per team, number of training sessions per week, number of hours of training each week and the number of years as a coach (the group of coaches who attended the first workshop): Average (M), standard deviation (SD), highest and lowest answer response (minimum and maximum)*

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maksimum</b>
Age of the coach	17	41.18	7.43	30	51
Nr of coaches each team	17	2.59	.87	1	4
Age of the athlete	17	9.00	2.26	6	12
Number of children in each team	17	12.65	3.77	8	20
Nr of trainings each week	17	3.29	.77	2	5
Nr of training hours each week	17	3.971	2.31	1.5	8.0
How many years of coach experience	16	2.38	.50	2	3

Table 2: *Descriptive statistics for the coaches who attended both workshops*

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Minimum</b>	<b>Maksimum</b>
Age of the coach	11	40.55	8.53	30	51
Nr of coaches each team	11	2.45	.93	1	4
Age of the athlete	11	9.18	2.48	6	12
Number of children in each team	11	12.64	3.96	8	20
Nr of trainings each week	11	3.36	.81	2	5
Nr of training hours each week	11	3.955	2.36	1.5	8
How many years of coach experience	11	2.27	.47	2	3

### **Self-reported coaching style before and after ICDP guidance**

The analysis of 21 positively formulated questions, measuring the use of elements within the eight guidelines during a training session, showed that the coaches generally are active and positive, with a consistently high score before the ICDP course, from 3.55 to 4.82 on a Likert scale from 1 (very strongly disagree) to 5 (very agree).

After the ICDP course the coaches' scored in average slightly higher on 16 of the questions, gave the same responses before and after the course to two questions and scored slightly lower on three questions. A Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test showed that one of these changes was significant and two approached significant. A significant change from before to after the two-day ICDP course were found for the question "The player's confide in me if something is difficult" ( $Z = -2.236$ ,  $p = .025$ ), which may indicate a stronger emotional bond between the athlete and the coach. A non-significant trend in the data also shows an improvement from before to after the ICDP course on the question that measure whether "the children normally listen to what the coach says" ( $Z = -1.732$ ,  $p = .083$ ), and whether the coach "explains causes and the context of what is happening in the arena" ( $Z = -1.732$ ,  $p = .083$ ) (see Table 3).

Table 3: Average score ( $M$ ) and standard deviation ( $SD$ ) before and after the ICDP-course on questions measuring behavior, attitudes and characteristics of the football team, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. \* = significant at 5% (0.05) level (numbers in italic are approaching significant)

	Before/ after ICDP	N	M	SD	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Z	p
1. I follow the player's interest and provide joint attention to this	Before	11	3.55	.820	2	5		
	After	11	3.91	.701	3	5	-1.265	.206
2. It is important that the players get a feeling of mastery	Before	11	4.73	.467	4	5		
	After	11	4.82	.405	4	5	-1.000	.317
3. The player's confide in me if something is difficult	Before	11	3.73	1.009	2	5		
	After	11	4.18	.874	2	5	-2.236	.025*
4. I gather the players so that we experience something together (e.g. an exercise)	Before	11	4.45	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.73	.467	4	5	-1.342	.180
5. I am mostly in good mood during the training sessions	Before	11	4.45	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.64	.505	4	5	-1.414	.157
6. The children normally listen to what the coach says	Before	11	4.00	.447	3	5		
	After	11	4.27	.647	3	5	-1.732	.083
7. I give praise and recognition to the children	Before	11	4.64	.505	4	5		
	After	11	4.64	.505	4	5	.000	1.000
8. The children are rarely having small arguments during the training	Before	11	3.91	.831	2	5		
	After	10	4.20	.422	4	5	-1.134	.257
9. I explain and finds the explanation and full picture of what is happening on the field	Before	11	4.18	.603	3	5		
	After	11	4.45	.522	4	5	-1.732	.083
10. I show enthusiasm and engagement during the training session	Before	11	4.73	.467	4	5		
	After	11	4.64	.505	4	5	-.447	.655
11. I set boundaries for the children by explaining what is allowed and not	Before	11	4.82	.405	4	5		
	After	11	4.82	.405	4	5	.000	1.000
12. The coach/team leader team cooperates well	Before	11	4.64	.505	4	5		
	After	11	4.55	.688	3	5	-.577	.564

	Before/ after ICDP	N	M	SD	Mini mum	Maxi mum	Z	p
13. I show that I care about the players	Before	11	4.45	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.55	.522	4	5	-.577	.564
14. I seldom need to yell at the players	Before	11	4.27	.647	3	5		
	After	11	4.09	.539	3	5	-1.000	.317
15. I take into account the players wishes and opinions during training	Before	11	3.64	.674	3	5		
	After	11	3.73	.905	2	5	-.3333	.739
16. I work actively to create a good team atmosphere	Before	11	4.55	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.73	.467	4	5	-1.000	.317
17. I try to see each one of the players	Before	11	4.64	.505	4	5		
	After	11	4.73	.467	4	5	-.577	.564
18. I spend time talking with the players about the things they feel and think	Before	11	3.64	.809	2	5		
	After	10	3.90	.994	2	5	-1.414	.157
19. It is generally a good atmosphere in the team	Before	11	4.55	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.73	.467	4	5	-1.414	.157
20. I feel that I have mastered the coach responsibility	Before	11	4.27	.647	3	5		
	After	11	4.36	.505	4	5	-.577	.564
21. I spend time on showing exercises in practice	Before	11	4.55	.522	4	5		
	After	11	4.64	.505	4	5	-.577	.564

### Coach's feedback on open response categories

The coaches also had the opportunity to provide qualitative feedback about their coach role as well as about the usefulness of the course through the open response questions in the questionnaire. The responses showed that the coaches pointed to cohesion, good mood, and coping as key elements for players to enjoy the training session. To experience coping and development in the children were highlighted as particularly rewarding, in addition to experiencing joy from the children. When asked what they perceive as challenging in the coach role their responses were mainly linked to regulation, including how to get the children to receive instructions.

When asked about whether the ICDP course had any impact, the feedback from the coaches showed that the course had been helpful and they had already adopted several elements during the training session. They pointed out, among other things, that they had become more aware of how they talked to and interacted with the children.

When asked whether they experienced changes in their own homes/personal relationships after participating in the ICDP course, all but two reported changes:

"Yes. I have become more conscious of using the themes we have gone through."

"Yes. Thinking more of situations that might occur and think through possible solutions."

"Yes. You become more aware on keeping it positive."

"Yes. I am more responsive."

"Well, I do not know."

"Yes, it is probably more focused on what I have learned here."

"Yes, I feel like I have more focus on finding the positive features in the children."

"No."

"Yes, more aware of my actions. Better contact with the players."

When asked whether they feel that the course caused changes in the relationship between the coaches, six reported no change and three reported that they had become more coordinated, more positive and that they are talking together about their own children.

When asked about whether they noticed changes in the coach-athlete relationship, six reported that they had not noticed any changes, while four responded positively to this question; that children are listening more actively, that the children are excited by positive feedback and that the children show more commitment and interest.

All but two responded that they experienced that the course was appropriate and well adjusted for their coach role. The two that were a little unsure pointed out that the children on their team were a little older than the athletes from the other teams and that some of the elements of the course therefore seemed less relevant. The general feedback was that the programme is covering important issues, and that it is useful to discuss with others in the same situation.

The coaches reported increased levels of understanding and increased positivity. The responses to the question about relevance of the course provided the following responses:

"No. It is for younger athletes, I think. The children at my team are 12/13 years of age. Still, I did take a lot with me from the course."

"Yes and no. We train older youths, so much can be used and something falls a bit on the side."

"Yes. I would have liked more time to see what effects the ICDP course would have on the players."

"Yes. I have received good guidance on how to "behave" on training/match."

"I have also received positive feedback from other participants about different ways to handle situations."

"Yes. These topics are so important that it is important always to talk about it, discuss it, and hear the experiences from others."

"Yes, I think so. It gave me a deeper understanding. A little wake up situation."

"Yes. Many new ways of thinking; the importance of communication; body language."

"Yes. We can discuss challenges with people (coaches) in the same situation and find solutions."

"It has helped to put a more positive focus, particularly in relation to the "weak" players. Generally positive for everyone."

"Can not praise ICDP enough! Everybody should have this course! Both parents, teachers, coaches, and anyone who has to do with kids!"

The self-training was perceived as positive: "Get a better focus, more positivity", "Fun to see that it actually works." When asked what could possibly be arranged in a different way, the feedback was that they would have liked to have had more time. One pointed out that this is a process, another that it is easy to be falling back into old habit patterns, which also supports the stated need for more time to discuss the guidelines.

As one can assume that participants will benefit from the program in their personal relationships, the coaches were also asked if they notice changes in relation to their own children. All except one reported changes in the relationship with own children:

"Yes. Show that I appreciate my son, and give lots of praise."

"Yes. One thinks more through how one behaves and what you say."

"Yes. One try to be positive."

"No."

"Yes. No difference between own children and the children of others. This fits all and especially all types of communication."

"Yes. Listen more - understand the child, why s/he acts as s/he does. Understanding."

"Yes, more receptive, more humbled, more positive towards everybody."

"Yes, use guideline 1-7 daily."

"Well, I try to have a more positive focus."

"Yes, more positive feedback."

"Yes, show positivity, talk together a lot"

On the question of whether anyone had other comments, the coaches said that the course had been great, but that it could have been longer, and some pointed out that there should be more focus on older children and more focus on girls:

"An incredibly informative course. Incredibly good presenters".

"Have been an ok offer, but feel that it is aimed at younger children."

"The last exercise in the group the last day was perhaps unnecessary as we had already been working on these issues; should have been a little more focused on one specific topic."

"I think this course was very inspiring and I do not normally like courses. Very good! Thank you."

"Maybe a bit too much to go through in two days. More focus on girls!"

"Keep up the great work you are doing today because this is really something that deserves more attention."

"Very good course!"

"We have tried to use many of the elements from the course in our daily life"

### **Interviews four months after the last workshop**

The eleven coaches that had participated at both workshops were invited to participate in an interview four months after the last workshop. Three of the coaches were able to participate on the suggested day. The aim of the interview was to get feedback from the coaches on whether they still used elements from the course. The interview was non-structured, and the coaches did comment on what they wanted. They were first asked about what had happened since the last workshop.

Coach 1: (...). "I've received feedback from parents that it's so good to have me there because I take time, and take time to talk with the children. The previous training, a tot who has struggled a bit came to me and said, "It's so good to have you here."

- Interviewer: "Is this something that happened after ICDP?"

Coach 1: "Oh yeah. I have been a bit busy for a while, so I had to take a little break. Therefore, at one of the training I came half an hour late. Then the guys came to me and said it did not work without me: "The other coach just roars and screams and is not interested in us and does not respect us." Therefore, it is important in children sports that the trainers know these things. So, if I had decided, I would say that this should be a requirement. (...)."

Coach 2: "To think this way, you have to try every day to use the right words, and it is a process, and this helps to emphasize this. I have improved. Without thinking about it. Also in interaction with my own children. I have become more careful about what I say, more human, there is less resistance and more cooperation. (...). You might get a little more confidence, and then it flows better. It becomes less stressful. More positive thoughts. It is a process. Everything has improved; more clear and more confident.

Coach 3: "For me it's a process. Even more positive, and more concerned about values. It is important in sport. Without values, then it is nothing. (...). Some children do not receive any kind of care during a day, and you are the only one that offers this type of care, so it's important."

To the question of what it was like to meet other Vålerenga coaches, it was highlighted that it was nice to get to know new people and that it strengthens the feeling of unity in the football club. The usefulness of sharing experiences with others in the same situation was also highlighted, and one coach pointed out how the support of others contributed to increased confidence in the coach role, which again can make them a better coach, which again creates better football players:

Coach 1: "It's good to hear that others have the same opinion as you. If you are alone, you can only try; you could be on thin ice, but by having the support of others, you are safe. When

parents come to you and say that this and that is wrong, you know you are right. If you are unsure, it rubs off on others. I think that more focus on this will create better football players and less drop outs."

Finally, in the summing up, after the last workshop, one of the ICDP trainers expressed admiration for the work the coaches do for the children:

"I am so impressed with their commitment. I have had many groups with others, but you sit here on overtime and without being paid, and give so much of your leisure. I 'm really glad on behalf of the children who are surrounded by adults like you."

### **Summary and recommendations**

Organized sports have gained an increasing importance in children and young people's life, and in line with this, there has been an increasing focus on how this might influence the child's social and psychological development. In this regard, there has also been a growing focus on the importance of the coach-athlete relationship. The coach is an important authority figure for the young athletes, who on average spend several hours a week in this setting. In addition to providing athletic guidance, the coach should also contribute to pleasure and individual growth, psychologically as well as physically. Good coach-athlete relationships and good communication is important for the children to enjoy and experience coping. There is thus a need for more knowledge about the coach-athlete relationship, and about the possible effects of programs addressing this.

This pilot study examined the impact of participation in a two-day ICDP course focusing on emotions, interactions, communications and regulations on football coaches. The coaches were generally involved in the children's development both on and off the field, including their football technical development and their experience of coping and well-being. Yet, there was a consistent pattern of change that appeared in the coaches responses from before to after participation in ICDP. The average scores increased for 16 of the 21 questions from before and after the ICDP course. A significant change in the question of whether the coach feel that the children trust them if s/he is experiencing something difficult suggests that children rely more on the coach, which can be an important preventive factor for children who are experiencing different types of problems. Furthermore, there is a trend in the data suggesting

that the coaches use more time on explaining what happens on the pitch, and that children listen more to the coach.

The program was positively evaluated by the coaches, and they experienced the course as a useful support, both in terms of interaction with the players, but also in relation to own children. Typical responses relating to the ICDP course was that they have become more aware on how they behave and how they talk with people and children in particular, as well as more positive and more focused on understanding children. The coaches who were interviewed four months after the last workshop told that the ICDP course had changed the way they relates with the children, by spending more time, being calmer, and their view of the child had generally changed. They also reported increased self-confidence.

The aim of ICDP is to raise the awareness of carers so that they can read the children's needs and respond to those needs in a way that will lead to the healthy development of children. It seems that these aims have been met in this project, and the results thus provide support for the implementation of the ICDP program in the context of sports for children. The coaches pointed out, however, that the course could have been longer. Most of the coaches had only boys in their teams, and one coach pointed out that it could have been more focus on girls. This should be taken into account in future courses. Furthermore, it was pointed out that the course was most suitable to the youngest players. This may indicate that the course should be divided by the age of the children.

There were no outliers in the data, meaning that no participants differed significantly from the others and thus affected the mean values. Nevertheless, there is always uncertainty when dealing with small samples and we had no control group, which affects the validity of the results and it is therefore not possible to generalize the findings from this pilot study. The data was limited to one sport, namely football, and the results here will not necessarily be able to say anything about sports for children in general. Nevertheless, in all sports for children there is a need for the coach to show care, to offer explanations, to expand children's understanding of the world and to set limits in a positive way. Thus, it is possible that one will find the same need for guidance on psychosocial issues in other sports and in other organized non-athletic activities for children. However, there is a need for larger studies and new projects to explore this further. Based on the findings from this pilot study, the recommendation is to implement

a larger project and to include the voices of the young athletes, through feedback about satisfaction and coach-athlete relationships and how this is influenced by ICDP guidance. It should also be examined whether providing such guidance to coaches will affect the dropout rate in the sports for children and adolescents.

In summary, the experiences and findings from this pilot study especially point out the following:

- 1: The coaches had a need and a wish for guidance and positive changes were reported.
- 2: ICDP should train coaches to receive ICDP certification so that they could run own groups with coaches. The ICDP coach education should follow standard procedures, including four-days of training. Then, pairs of coaches should start groups, educating new coaches (6-12 coaches in each group). The eight guidelines for good interaction should be discussed through eight group meetings. The coaches should receive two guidance sessions during this period. Finally, the coaches should write a report based on the ICDP training. Approved reports will lead to the accreditation as an ICDP facilitator. (The coaches who are attending the ICDP course will not become an ICDP facilitator but receive a course diploma).
- 3: The course offered to coaches should stretch over three full days.
- 4: The manual needs further adaptation for coach-athletes, and appropriate illustrative pictures and movies should be developed.
- 5: Evaluations should be carried out to capture short and long-term changes in coach's behaviour as well as possible changes in the children's athletic and psychosocial development.

As outlined in the introduction, most of the coaches in children's sports in Norway are volunteers, often parents. However, the use of parents as coaches has been requested. In November 2012 there was a discussion that took place in the newspapers and on national Norwegian television, where both professionals and athletes participated, about whether parents should act as sports coaches for children. The debate was started by a national coach in hockey who stated that "parents are destroying children and must be replaced by professional trainers" and that "several sport talents are lost" because parents are used as trainers (nrk.no). Many argued strongly against this, saying that the main aim of the sports for

children is not to create talents primarily, but to create an arena where children and youth can experience mastery and solidarity with other children and supportive adult.

As it is, both ICDP and those involved in sports for children are concerned about developing children as human beings. It is neither possible nor desirable for everyone involved in sports for children and youth to become professional athletes. Sports for children and youth are based on voluntary work, and that is a way of creating trusting bonds based on heartfelt motivation, potentially providing good and important role models for children. The fact that the coaches work on a voluntary bases, without payment, can in itself be important at a time when most things can be easily purchased. At the same time, there are no systems today to facilitate and ensure that coaches receive the support, strength and knowledge they need to meet the challenges that may arise from being responsible for a large group of children and young people. This pilot study suggests that by giving guidance, based on the ICDP methodology, to children's sport coaches, it is possible to provide the extra support they need in order to fulfill their role as coaches in accordance with "the children's rights in sports" outlined by the Norwegian Confederation of Sports and "Olympiatoppens" and in that way contribute to experiences of success, unity and healthy development of children, both in and outside the football arena.

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