

LOCKER ROOM POP-UP

***BUILDING STRONG
TEAM COHESION***



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EXERCISES FOR COMMUNICATION, RESPECT, AND COLLABORATION

Team cohesion and a positive club culture are essential for success in sports. Beyond enhancing athletic performance, these qualities foster a safe and respectful environment where all team members feel seen, heard, and valued. Coaches and team leaders play a critical role in cultivating this sense of community, with a focus on collaboration, mutual respect, and effective communication.

To support this, we in the WELLcome-project have developed the Locker Room Pop-Up concept, a set of short exercises that can easily be incorporated into daily training routines. These exercises are ideal for kickstarting training sessions and building a consistent practice of teamwork and respect.

By regularly integrating these activities, coaches can enhance group dynamics and ensure every individual feels included and appreciated. The exercises address themes such as trust, safety, mutual respect, and teamwork, aiming to strengthen both internal team relationships and respect for opponents and spectators.

Thank you for your valuable work!



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EXERCISE 1: STOP

PURPOSE

The Stop exercise helps participants develop essential social skills by establishing eye contact and greeting one another. It fosters a positive, inclusive atmosphere and strengthens team cohesion.

Key Message:

Greeting each other provides an opportunity to be seen and heard, contributing to a safer and more welcoming training environment.

Objectives:

- Promote respectful interaction and team spirit.
- Teach the importance of greeting and polite eye contact.
- Help participants feel safe and included through acknowledgment and a welcoming approach.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Introduction:

Explain the purpose of the exercise: to foster a positive atmosphere through greetings and eye contact. Demonstrate a friendly gaze (avoiding staring) and proper handshakes. For younger participants or alternatives to handshakes, suggest optional greetings.

Setup:

Choose a defined space where participants can move freely.

Step 1 – Silent Walk:

Ask participants to walk silently for one minute, avoiding eye contact and collisions, while keeping their gaze on the floor.

Step 2 – Greeting:

Transition to a phase where participants move around, make eye contact, and greet each other with a handshake or alternative greeting. They should stop each time they meet someone to complete the greeting.

Continue the Exercise:

Allow the activity to continue until everyone has greeted each other at least once.

DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION

Gather the group to reflect on their experience.

Discuss:

- How did it feel during the silent phase versus the greeting phase?
- How did greetings and eye contact impact the atmosphere?
- What was the experience of being acknowledged and greeted like?

Encourage the team to create a unique greeting for regular use at training sessions. Emphasize the importance of greeting teammates and adults present at practices.

Duration: 5-10 minutes

Equipment: None

Participants: Coaches, team leaders, team members, and others actively involved in training.

EXERCISE 2: THE RESPECT ARENA

PURPOSE

The Respect Arena exercise encourages participants to reflect on how they want to act as a team and how they expect opponents and spectators to behave. It can also be used to establish team rules, fostering a respectful and positive atmosphere both within the team and during games or competitions.

Key Message:

Everyone involved in a game or competition plays a role in creating a pleasant and respectful environment. Treat others as you wish to be treated—this applies to teammates, opponents, referees and spectators alike.

Objectives:

- Build a shared understanding of how respect and good behavior strengthen team spirit and create a positive environment.
- Promote positive relationships on and off the field.
- Raise awareness of how participants' actions influence everyone's overall experience.

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Introduction:

Explain that the goal of this exercise is to develop shared guidelines for how the team should function and act during training, games or competitions.

Preparation:

Draw a sports arena relevant to your sport (e.g., a football pitch, swimming pool, or track field) on an A3 sheet. Divide participants into small groups of 3–5, providing each group with a workspace for developing their “Respect Arena.”

Step 1 – Home Arena:

Ask each group to discuss how they wish to behave as athletes and teammates. Have them write down words and phrases describing this behavior in the “home arena” section of the A3 sheet.

Step 2 – Opponent Team:

Encourage participants to consider how they want the opposing team to behave toward them and to record their thoughts on the A3 sheet.

Step 3 – Spectators:

Have the groups reflect on how they want the spectators and audience to act. Ask them to write down these ideas on the A3 sheet.

DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION

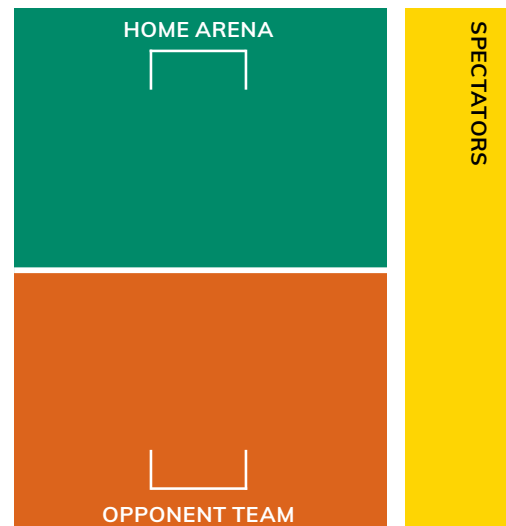
Conclude the exercise with a group discussion where each small group presents their ideas. Reflect on the similarities and differences in their responses, and explore ways the team can work together to maintain a respectful and positive atmosphere in the future.

A valuable complement to this exercise is developing shared team rules with players. Establishing such rules creates structure and a safer environment where expectations are clear. When players actively participate in setting these rules, they gain a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility. Shared rules encourage respect, collaboration, and fairness, providing a foundation for conflict resolution and strong team culture.

Duration: 15 -30 minutes

Equipment: One A3 sheet per small group and markers

Participants: *Facilitators:* coaches, team leaders, or others actively involved in training. *Participants:* athletes



EXERCISE 3:

KEEP THE BALLOON IN THE AIR

Duration: 10 minutes
Equipment: One balloon per group
Participants: Athletes, children, and youth

PURPOSE

To strengthen the collaboration and communication skills of children and youth.

Key Message:

By communicating and cooperating, we acknowledge one another and create better conditions for interaction and shared success.

Objectives:

- Improved communication and collaboration skills.
- An inclusive activity where each participant can actively contribute and "get in the game."

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Group Setup:

Divide the participants into smaller groups of 4–7 people each.

Instructions:

Explain that the goal is to keep the balloon in the air as long as possible without letting it touch the floor/ground. Everyone must work together to achieve this.

Rules:

- Participants must pass the balloon to one another without the same person touching it twice in a row.
- Decide which body parts they can use to hit the balloon forward (e.g., hands, feet). You can increase difficulty by limiting it to just hands or feet.
- Each group must stay within a designated area and cooperate within it.

Communication:

Before a participant hits the balloon to the next person, they should call out the name of the person who will receive it. This encourages interaction and inclusion.

Start:

Give each group a blown-up balloon and allow them to begin the exercise.

DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION:

After the exercise, gather the groups and discuss how they cooperated and communicated. Reflect on what worked well and how they can improve their teamwork further.

EXERCISE 4: LEADING EACH OTHER

PURPOSE

To build trust within the group and highlight the importance of interaction, calmness, and clear communication.

Key Message:

Everyone in the group is responsible for building trust and creating safety, both within the group and in the organization. Through presence, calm movements, and clear instructions, we can create a safer and more inclusive environment.

Objectives:

- Strengthen trust between participants
- Develop the ability to communicate calmly and clearly
- Create an understanding of responsibility and collaboration

STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

Preparation:

Create a simple obstacle route in a small area. Use cones to mark the ends of the course and possibly a cone in the middle to be circled. Place soft items on the floor or ground that participants need to step over. The course can be shaped like an "8."

Instructions:

Divide participants into pairs. Explain that one person in each pair will have their eyes closed and be guided through the obstacle course by their partner's instructions. The blindfolded participant holds the sighted partner's arm (not the other way around) to maintain control and safety. Emphasize the importance of calm and clear communication, as well as the responsibility the leader has for their partner.

Execution:

Let one pair go through the course at a time, ensuring they don't start too close to one another to avoid collisions. After one participant has completed the course, swap roles so both members of each pair experience both leading and being led.

DEBRIEF AND REFLECTION

Gather the group after the exercise and reflect on the experience. Ask participants how it felt to be led with their eyes closed and if it was hard to trust their partner. Discuss what it felt like to lead and the responsibility involved. Finish by emphasizing the importance of trust and clear communication in group collaboration.

Duration: 15 -30 minutes

Equipment: Cones and soft obstacles for the obstacle route

Participants: Athletes, children, and youth

RESOURCES AND INSPIRATION

This handbook was made in the **WELLcome – Wellbeing and integration through sports-** project. The exercises draw inspiration from the material at the website *O-lika.fi* (*o-lika.fi/2019/11/20/respekt/*), adapted to fit sports environments. They've been tested with various junior teams at Åbo IFK sports club and refined as needed.

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Project website: idrott.fi/wellcome-in-english/

You can find the video of the exercises here:
youtube.com/watch?v=53HEFqHVtRA