

# How To Coach Young People For An Active Life

Helping young people positively change their sporting and physical activity behaviours



SUPPORTING PDF

# What is 'behaviour change'?

Behaviour change is changing how people behave through helping them transform or modify their existing behaviours.

Often behaviour change is achieved through a broad range of approaches that focus on them as an individual, as part of a group or community or when they are in different environments. The purpose of behaviour change is to help people make better choices. Some of these choices will mean doing more of a certain behaviour (like becoming more active) or doing less of the behaviour (like eating less sugar or chocolate).

Helping young people become more active is part of a coach's role.

Coaches can increase the likelihood of sustained positive behaviour change if they can:

- provide information that is easy to understand and at time when young people are likely to be responsive
- highlight that it is normal to take part and be active
- support young people to plan what to do when challenges occur that threaten continuing to be physically active
- help young people feel positive about the benefits of any behaviours changed
- use simple tactics and strategies that support young people.

Some behaviours are more resilient than others and therefore can be difficult and require a lot of effort. Changing inactive sporting or physical activity behaviours to becoming more active is effortful and complex.

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# Understanding the journey to changing behaviours

Starting a new or changing a behaviour requires young people to go on a journey of change. Not all of the journeys taken will be easy, simple or quickly successful. Some young people will find ways to make the journey smoother and others will find the journey takes more effort and is a bumpier ride.

It can be useful to think about the journey of becoming more active like playing a game of snakes and ladders.

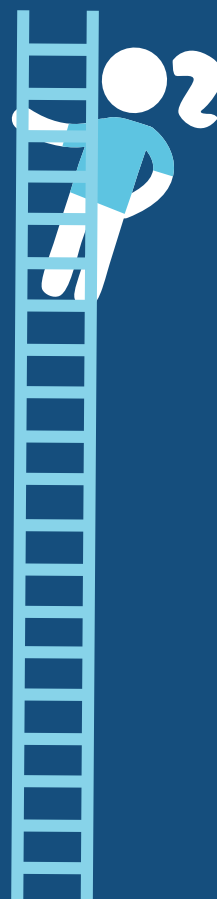
Young people will progress in the game and sometimes get a boost when they come across a ladder. A ladder might represent a barrier being removed or some support from an influential person like a parent, coach or friend.

Just like in the game, there are also snakes that can knock a young person off their journey to becoming active and cause them to stop taking part or relapse for a period of time.

The snakes represent a lapse cause by other commitments (exams, other hobbies), losing interest because the reason for taking part isn't being satisfied, getting injured or a break for holidays.

Lapsing away from the new behaviour is very common and a normal part of behaviour change and life. And this can happen many times. Just letting someone know that this journey of 'change in behaviour' and 'lapse in behaviour' is normal can be helpful.

It is a coach's role to build more ladders and reduce the number of snakes. A coach can also help young people understand how to stick with the journey they are on by sharing strategies and tactics that will help young people get back into activity if they have a relapse.



# What can coaches do to help young people change their sporting and physical activity behaviours?

There are common stages to the journeys of young people when changing their behaviour. There are many things that coaches can do to support young people through the stages.

The first thing is for coaches to understand is that there are three common stages that young people may go through when changing their behaviour. These stages include:

## 1. Starting out

Young people are just getting involved and trying things out while experimenting what works for them. Many young people may be at this stage because of:

- Something being advertised in their local area or a visitor has been in promoting.
- An influencer has suggested it (friend, family, teacher, role model).
- Trying the activity in a taster session.
- Change of location provided more opportunity (moving schools or to university).

## 2. In and out

Young people are active and then stop for a while before restarting again.

You may recognise the young person as they:

- Are still asking lots of questions about taking part.
- Might be seeking early recognition or success for their efforts.
- Require additional nurturing and support to be involved.

You might spot people at this stage saying:

'I enjoy going when I do go'

'Am I doing ok?'

'I can see I am getting better and starting to be part of the group'

'What happens if I miss a session'

'Who do I pay?'

## 3. Sticking with It

Young people are already involved regularly but are still at risk of dropping out. Spotting young people in this stage is easier as they are likely to:

- Be already involved but still at risk of dropping out.
- Ask questions about the specifics of your session.
- Refer to themselves as a participant of the session.
- Attend regularly.
- Make up sessions they have missed  
"What time, how much, will it be OK for...?"  
"So at the next session what will "We" be doing?"

Your role as a coach is to keep young people in this stage for as long as possible. Your role in helping people with active behaviours doesn't stop, however what you do may need to change to keep young people involved

# Six tips that will make a difference

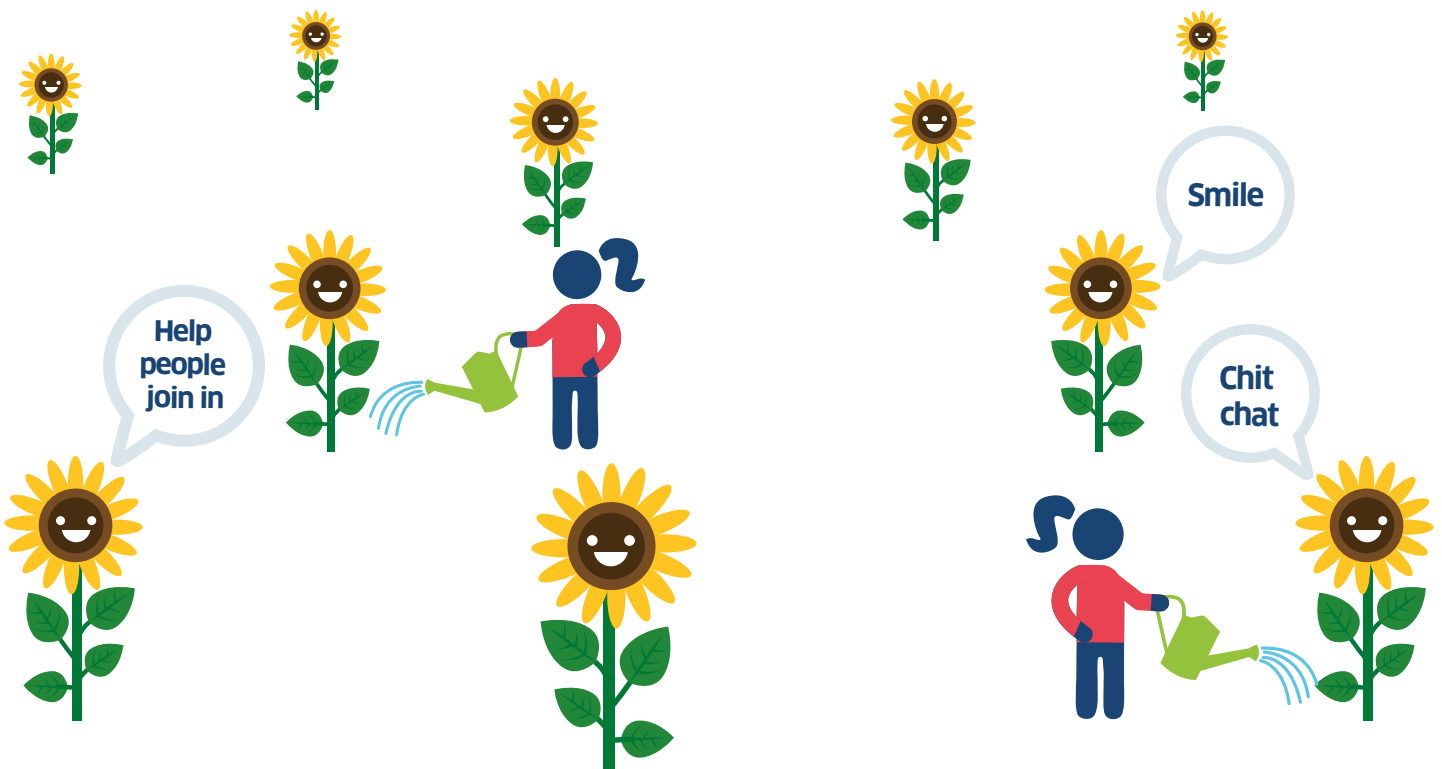
After understanding the journey young people go on towards getting active, coaches can then include a variety of strategies to help them make positive change their behaviour.

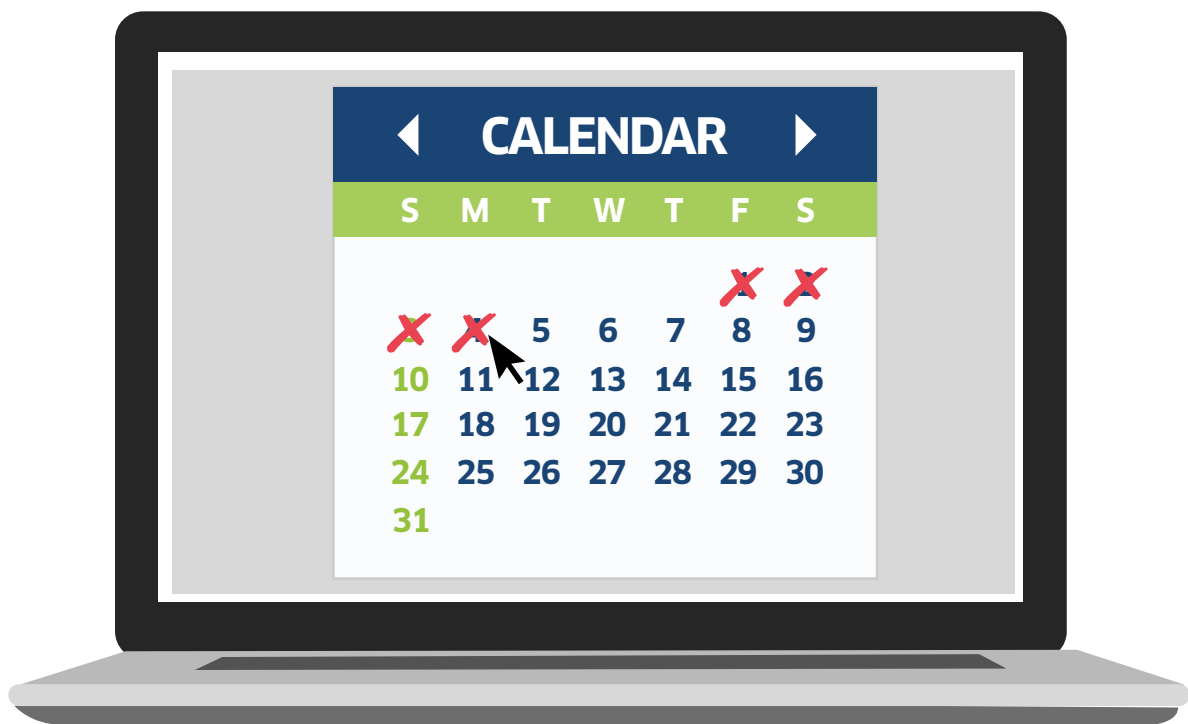
Here are six tips that will make a difference:

1. Create a positive environment.
2. Make an action plan together.
3. Plan for overcoming problems.
4. Help them make commitments they can stick to.
5. Track changes in behaviours and provide positive feedback.
6. Provide social support.

# Create a positive environment

- Let young people know that you are looking forward to them attending and how they can identify you when they come along the first time. 'We're meeting outside the pub/café/court. Come and say hi.' 'I'll be the one with red t-shirt on.' 'I'll look out for you too'
- Providing a warm welcome is paramount. Use young people's names and connect with them about what you may already know about them.
- Smile and make regular eye contact.
- Mixing newcomers with the group is a great way to make someone feel welcome. Consider using a 'buddy' system.
- Emphasis the basics needed to come along to enjoy their first experience. Avoid a long list of things to bring. Avoid asking for things that sound expensive or perceived to be sporty or technical.
- Ensure they are invited to the next session by you, their buddy could do this too.
- Let your existing young people know that some new people are coming along and that they are expected to make them feel welcome and be helpful.
- Many young people may be re-starting/returning from a relapse and are not brand new to activity or your session. Don't assume that they are complete beginners or have never taken part.





## Make an action plan together

- Find out about the reasons why they have decided to come to your session. What do they want to get out of taking part? Plan some ideas together for your sessions that meet their motivations.
- Set personal goals based around the reasons why they come to your session. This can be done informally as a conversation or a little more structured by making some notes.
- Plan time to review or 'check in' with the action plan to make sure you are meeting the needs of changing motivations.
- Give young people ownership: providing opportunities for young people to input into the sessions and freedom to choose what they do and how they take part; are their motivations being met to show that they are progressing?

# Plan for overcoming problems

## Be aware of common lapse points.

Lapsing with a new behaviour is very common and a normal part of changing a behaviour. Lapsing can happen many times before a habit becomes more regular. Lapsing may be for a short time or a longer time that can be triggered by times of change and routines.

Times to look out for might include:

- changing or leaving school
- injury or illness
- changing friendship groups or starting a new relationship
- moving house or starting a new job
- a long holiday like the six week school holiday or break form university
- achieving the goal that they were working towards like completing a charity event or improving health
- at the end of a season or introductory group of sessions.

## Plan for common obstacles and problems

Have conversation about what a young person could do if they had something happen in their life that might stop them from coming. Thinking about finding solutions allows young people to practise making a proactive decision to still attend rather than defaulting to not attending in the first instance.

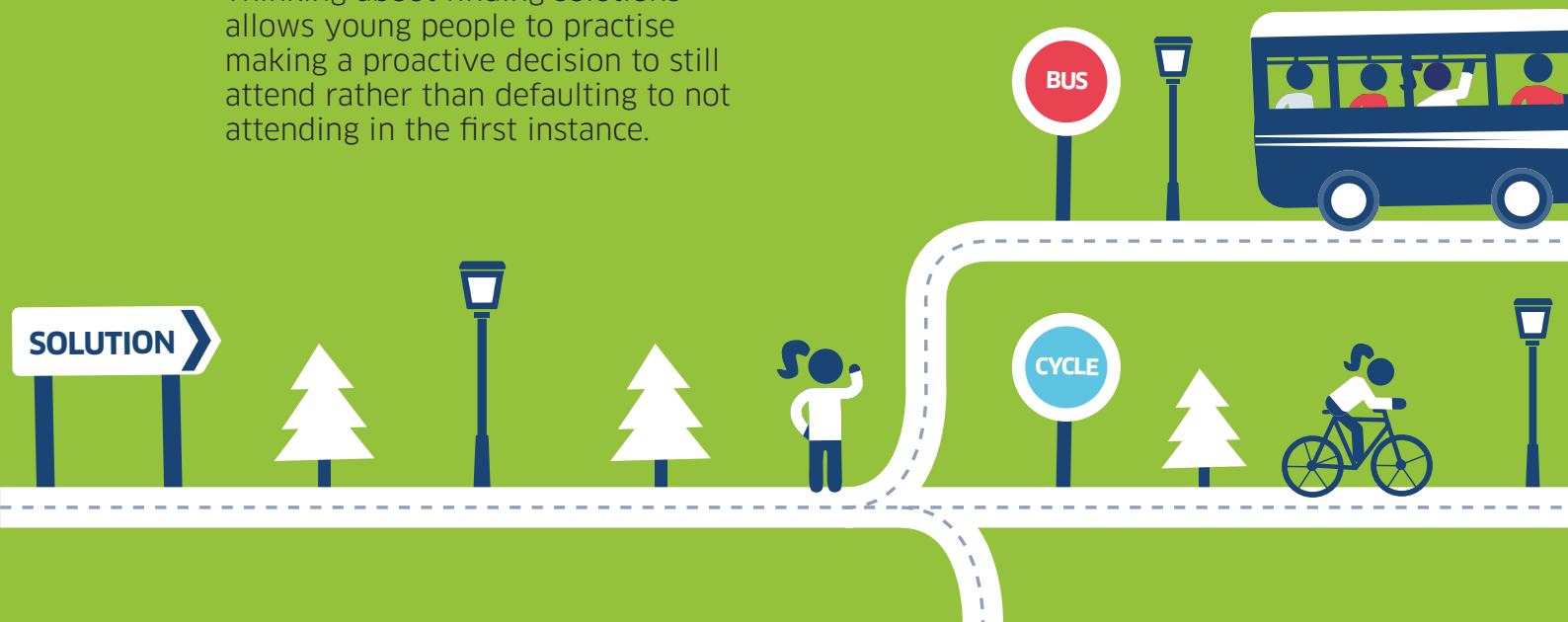
- What could they do if their dad couldn't give them a lift to the session?
- What might they do if their friend stopped coming?
- What might they do if they'd forgotten their trainers?

Share what the common things might be in your group already and how other young people overcome similar obstacles.

Encourage young people to share ideas and experiences with each other.

## Minimise the time young people stop or take a break

- Listen to young people about why they are stopping. Find out what would they like to do to take part again sooner?
- Let young people know 'It's OK to take a break'. Don't put pressure of young people or make them feel bad about stopping for a bit.
- Guide towards other community sessions offered at more suitable times during the week.



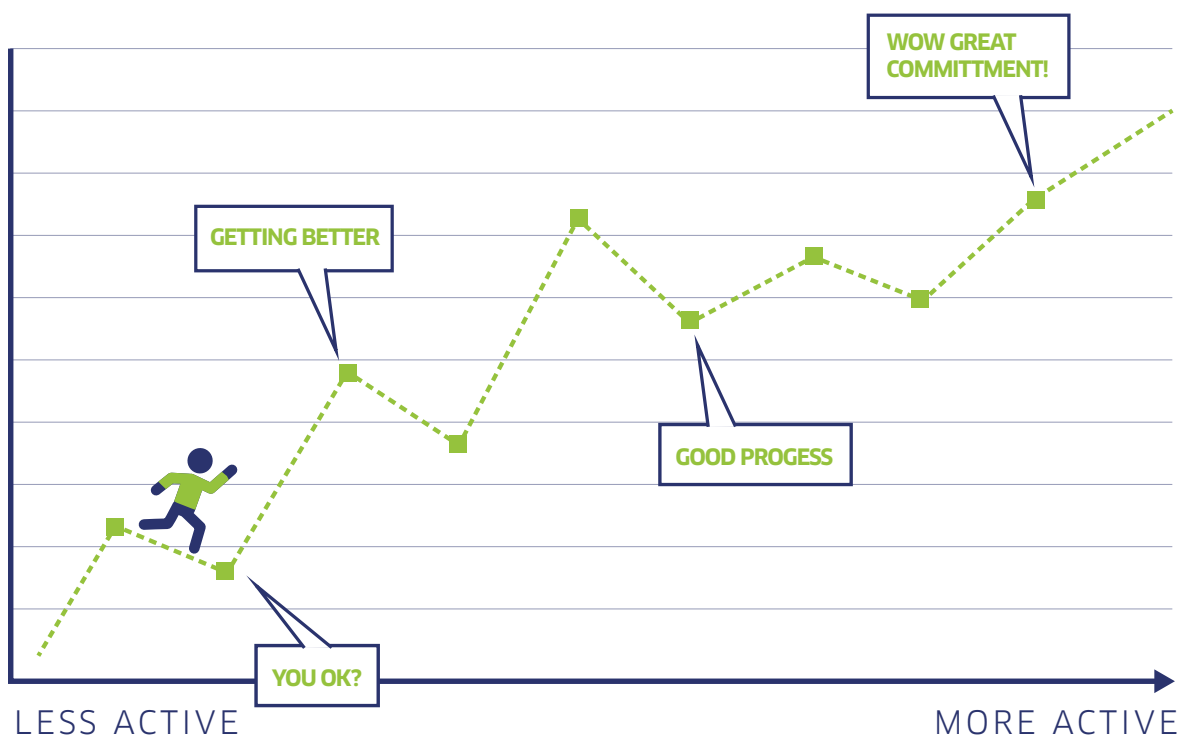


# Help young people make commitments they can stick to

- Don't assume a few attendances means that they now have a habit of being active.
- Share what is happening in the next session. Share a video or link to something you think the young people who attend your session will like (make it relevant to your session).
- Check they are coming to the next session and find out if anyone needs some extra support to do so. Ask 'Who's coming next week?'
- Include opportunities for young people to take part in a competition or special events as a group.

## Track changes in behaviours and provide positive feedback

- Build confidence by providing positive feedback and always recognising the progress being made. The progress might be:
  - being more confident to have a go at something new
  - feeling fitter, stronger, or more able to keep up
  - taking on some leadership roles within the session
  - contributing to conversations on social media with the group
  - improving at a skill or technique
- Highlight something positive about their personal contribution in the group.
- Value, recognise and reward their continued attendance.





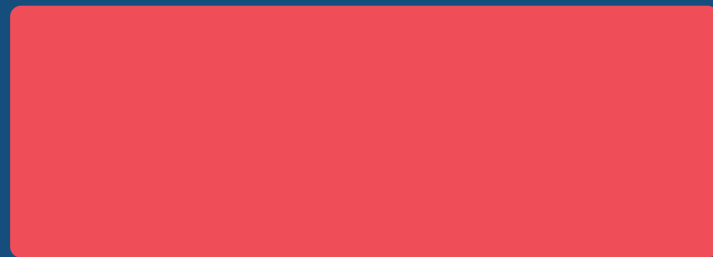
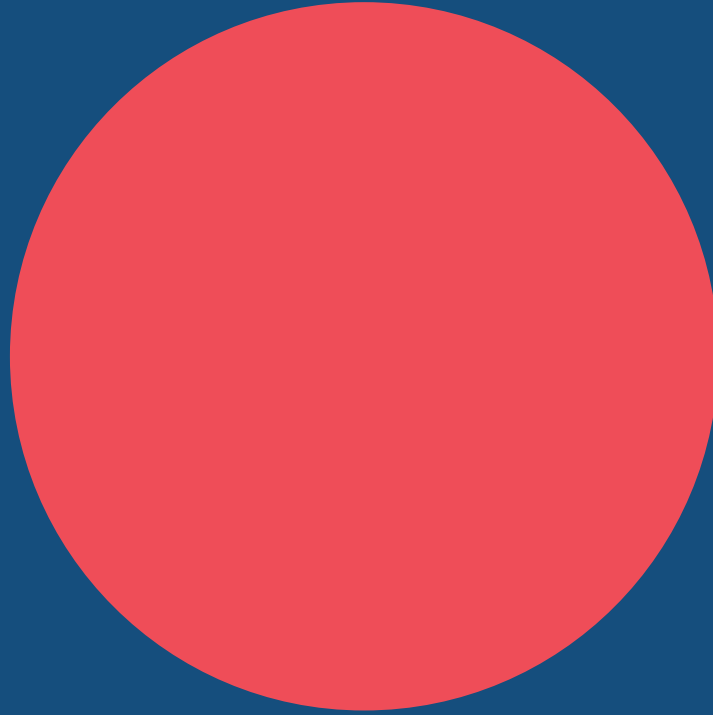
## Provide social support

- Including time within the sessions for participants to socialise and build friendships within the group.
- Encourage young people to keep in touch. Let them set up that way they would like to do this.

You may signpost them to existing ways of keeping in touch like the sessions Facebook page, WhatsApp group etc.

- Offer your support if they need anything until you next see them.





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