

# COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIP: REDUCING TENSION AND CREATING A SENSE OF SAFETY

## RELATIONSHIPS WITH TRUSTED ADULTS

Although they may sometimes seem distant or indifferent, adolescents are seeking trusted adults to feel safe, supported, and valued.

Parents, coaches, and teachers are all trusted adults for student-athletes and therefore play a key role in this relationship. Some of their actions help create a climate of trust and open dialogue, while others may lead young people to withdraw.

To build a trusting relationship, it is important to show genuine interest in the young person and what they are experiencing, without assumptions or judgment. Good communication is at the heart of a balanced relationship between the young person and the coach.

## Student-athletes' experiences: insights from the field

- **Weight of judgment:** Young people may feel that every word, choice, or performance impacts their future. This creates constant tension and limits their openness.
- **Emotional barrier:** Their desire to maintain a positive image in the eyes of adults makes it difficult to share doubts, fears, or struggles—even when they need help.
- **Climate of trust:** Adolescents need to feel that they are first and foremost a person, not just a player subject to evaluation. Reducing the sense of control helps create a space where they can open up and grow with confidence.



# CONCRETE ACTION

## Create a relational space separate from performance.

- Plan regular, informal moments where the coach positions themselves as a trusted adult.
- Ask simple, everyday questions to check in, for example:
  - “How is your season going?”
  - “How are things with your teammates?”
  - “How are things at home?”
- Use your observations to guide the conversation. For example, if you know their parents are separating, take the opportunity to ask how they are experiencing that situation.
- Welcome their responses without judgment and without immediately linking them to sport.
- Encourage the young person to suggest solutions or express their needs so they feel they maintain control over their life and choices.

By consistently showing interest and inviting simple, genuine conversations, young people learn to separate the person (coach) from performance and build a trusting relationship where they feel heard and understood.

