



SOCIAL COMPETENCIES

TRUST

SHARINGOALS

THE SYSTEMIC COACHING MANUAL
FOR FOOTBALL COACHES
AROUND THE WORLD

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1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Martinez and Zeelemborg (2015, cited by Kamena & Potter, 2016) define trust “as the belief that others will prioritise fairness and social welfare over their self-interest.”

1.1. Scientific research

1.1.1. Definition

Developmental psychologists agree that socialization highly depends on developing trust in early childhood. Trust implies various cultural, social, psychological, and multi-dimensional meanings. Addesa, Rossi, and Bove (2017) believed that trust is a general expectation that an individual admits that another person's words, promises, and oral or written statements are reliable. Depetris-Chauvin and Durante (2017) conclude that trust guarantees that both parties fulfill the entrusted obligations and responsibilities in interpersonal communication. Martinez and Zeelemborg (2015, cited by Kamena & Potter, 2016) define trust “as the belief that others will prioritise fairness and social welfare over their self-interest.” In The Book of Trust (Solomon, 2022), trust is described as the extent to which you are willing to risk potential adverse outcomes by handing over control of something you value to another party, anticipating that they will be capable, and making every effort to prevent those negative outcomes.

Rothhouse (2020) believes team trust can be divided into cognitive and emotional. Cognitive trust emphasises the cognitive evaluation of the trustor's responsibility and ability to establish trust. Only after information is collected and analysed can the trustor decide whether to establish and develop a trust relationship. Ajam et al. (2020) believe that emotional trust emphasises the emotional bond between two parties to establish a trusting relationship, usually through mutual attention and care.

Cognition-based trust is established through deliberate evaluation of others' credibility and judgment of benefits and risks. The more people use trust in a team, the stronger the trust relationship will be. Obuswan et al. (2021) believe that all kinds of relationships in sports teams are always intertwined with emotional and cognitive trust. Once emotional trust is generated, it will help the formation of cognitive trust, and cognitive trust will also strengthen emotional trust. The two are inseparable and interdependent, but different types of trust will dominate the trust relationship in different situations.

Trust, as the basis and premise of cooperation among sports team members, promotes the coordination between team members and reduces team conflicts (Parks, Joireman & Van Lange, 2013). In 2020, Józefowicz found that trust is the foundation of group relationships, determined cooperation, teamwork, and effectiveness; thus, it should be considered an exciting research field in team sports. However, empirical evidence on trust with sports teams is not popular in scientific literature. Their research discovered significant differences in overall trust in teammates and trust in coaches, concluding that those are to be seen as separate relationships. Furthermore, Adham (2023) found that research emphasised building trust among team members. This is aligned with the conclusion from Józefowicz's research on trust, which is to pay further attention to trust-building skills development in coaching education.

1.1.2. Impact on performance

As Gulak-Lipka (2016) reveals, trust positively impacts the attitudes and behaviors of group members and their own performance. Mohsen et al. (2023) found that trust, as the basis and premise of cooperation among sports team members, promotes coordination between team members and reduces team conflicts. Furthermore, it creates excellent team performance. They further state that the improvement of trust among team members and their loyalty to the organisation is of great theoretical and practical significance to the construction of high-performance sports teams. However, building relationships is a very important aspect of coaching, and empathy, building trust, striving to serve their athletes, and exhibiting humility are expected behaviors of coaches. Rami demonstrated that athletes playing for high-scoring coaches reported significantly more prosocial teammate behaviors than athletes playing for low-scoring coaches. To conclude, trust plays a major role in establishing an environment where athletes feel safe to express feelings, ideas, concerns, and beliefs. Only when the relationship between team members and the coach is trustworthy can their performance thrive, and they can unleash their full potential.

1.1.3. Impact on social cohesion

Interpersonal trust is a keystone for societies (Rotenberg, Fox et al., 2005). At the individual level, it can be considered an essential indicator of positive development in children.

Adham's (2023) research highlighted problem-solving skills, active listening, empathy, consistency, clarity, and conflict analysis skills as valuable assets for addressing conflicts effectively and finding mutually beneficial solutions. Trust acts as a boundary that allows team members to feel secure in sharing their thoughts and ideas, ultimately leading to more collaborative decision-making processes.

Józefowicz's (2020) research discovered results that confirm the distinctness of horizontal and vertical trust within sports teams. The explanation could be that in sports teams, the leadership of a leader-coach is often limited because the coach is focused on tasks and the results, excluding human relations (Gulak-Lipka, 2017, p. 48).

Malloy, Yukymenko-Lescroart, and Kavussanu (2022) extend previous research with their study by demonstrating the indirect role trust plays in the relationship between authentic leadership and perceived teammate prosocial behaviour. Kao et al. (2019) revealed that team trust enhances the positive relationship between coach transformational leadership and task/social cohesion.

Mohsen et al. (2023) conclude in their research about winning teams that team trust emerges as a crucial element, impacting not only the level of cooperation and communication among team members but also influencing team cohesion. Malti et al. (2016) found that children who are more stable in their prosocial behaviour were perceived as more trustworthy by their peers and had more trust beliefs in their peers than those who were less stable in their prosociality.

Researchers agree that trust is an important factor impacting the togetherness of teams, influencing their prosocial behaviour and their feeling of safety of expression. Trust also plays a crucial role in providing a platform where creativity can thrive and children can freely explore.

1.1.4. Solomon's New Model of Trust

The coach can play a significant role in improving trust among team members, yet to build that trust within the team, the relationship between coach and player needs to be established first.

Józefowicz (2020) concludes in her study that building relationships is a very important aspect of coaching, empathy, and trust. Striving to serve athletes and exhibiting humility are required behaviors of coaches. As a foundation for coaches who want to further improve their trustworthiness as coaches, the author of this text has adapted the six components of trustworthiness (Solomon, 2022) to the sports team context. Coaches should aim to develop their trustworthiness continuously and can use reflection questions to further improve their interpersonal trust relationship with their team.

The six relevant components of trust are competence, personality compatibility, symmetry, positivity, time, and intimacy. Below you can find Solomon's new model of trust (figure 1), which consists of two areas: who you are, including your competence, your personality compatibility with others, and symmetry. The second area shows the three things you can do to impact your trustworthiness.



Figure 1. Solomons' new model of trust (2022)

The next part gives an overview of all six components for coaches, with two major areas that can be influenced: who you are and what you do. The components are combined with reflective questions to further improve and build a trustworthy relationship between coaches and their players. The reflection questions are adapted to the sports environment. All relevant components that can be used to be considered and perceived as trustworthy can be influenced and improved upon.

The Eight Laws of Trust

The Eight Laws of Trust help us to better understand the characteristics of trust and how we can develop our trustworthiness as coaches and role models for our players.

1. Trust is continuous

Trust is built over time. Any positive contribution will build trust. I want to be more trusted by my teammates and will do everything I can to make them feel safe.

2. Trust is contextual

I'm trying to be more trusted doing something specific. I cannot improve and be good at everything. I will identify an area in which I'm not trusted enough by that person. They might trust me enough in other areas, but not this one, so I will focus on this area.

3. Trust is personal

I'm trying to be more trusted by someone specific, but not by everyone. I will never be trusted in the same way by everyone, even when doing the same thing. Therefore, my focus will be on one relationship.

4. Trust is asymmetrical

It doesn't matter if I trust the other person. What matters is that they trust me, and thus I will leave their trustworthiness alone. As a pilot, I must be trusted by the passengers to land the plane. In football, the captain has to be trusted to represent the team's best interests. It doesn't matter if the pilot/captain trusts the passengers/players. I trust them to do the same (or to do anything else other than not causing a disturbance) or not.

5. Trust is transferable

Transferable trust allows me to start trusting someone I have never met before because someone I already trust trusts them.

6. Trust is reciprocal

When I trust another person, I am willing to be vulnerable with them. I am less afraid of what they will do when I show my vulnerability. Some authors and researchers use the terms trust and vulnerability almost interchangeably, but if I show vulnerability to another person, it will cause them to trust me. So, while this is a different kind of trust (them trusting me versus me trusting them first), it is still a reciprocal relationship.

7. Trust is dynamic

Trust doesn't stand still. It declines between interactions as a subconscious defence mechanism that protects us from a possible unobserved reduction in the other person's trustworthiness. During interactions, it changes (up or down) based on the behaviors and our observations of the other person that are different from what we thought. Our thoughts were only accurate up to the moment that interaction started.

8. Trust is two-sided

The amount of trust I'm willing to extend to you is the product of my willingness to trust other people in general and your trustworthiness.



Development of Trust

The process of improving trustworthiness can be modeled by coaches (see part 2.1. Coaching Style) to inspire athletes. Some of the theoretical knowledge about the development of trust should be shared with the players so that they can continuously work on their trustworthiness within the group. The suggested reflection questions below are designed for players to reflect on their trustworthiness.

Who you are	Reflection Questions
Competence (technical skills, physical abilities, cognitive abilities, emotional and social competences)	Am I considered a competent player by my team/players? If not, what can I do to be considered competent?
Am I considered a competent player by my team/players? If not, what can I do to be considered competent?	Am I able to connect with some of my teammates? Do I know what other players care about? Do my teammates know what I care about? Am I demonstrating positive behaviour as considered by my team? Are we compatible (similar, complementary, or different) in areas we care about?
Symmetry (situational, perspective)	If I connect with a teammate, do we both contribute to our relationship? Do we share the same goals? Are we all contributing equally? Are we being treated equally by our coach and club?

What you do	Reflection Questions
Positivity (transactional, levels of BS* and empathy) *The author uses BS instead of "bullshit" in his explanations.	<i>Every time I interact with my teammates, am I doing things that would be considered negative by them? If so, what can I do to reduce those? Am I focused on myself more than on my players in my interactions with them? What is the degree of BS I use in my interactions with my players?</i>
Time (transactional)	<i>Do I spend enough time with my teammates? If not, how can I increase the time I spend with them? Do I interact with them frequently enough? Are my interactions predictable enough?</i>
Intimacy (transactional)	<i>Do I meet the other person face-to-face enough, or do I mostly communicate over social media, email, and text messages? How can I increase the amount of in-person time with my teammates? Do I say what I mean?</i>

1.2. Window of opportunities

A window of opportunity describes a period during development when a competence, or the components underlying it, is especially receptive to training — not because learning is impossible outside that period, but because the same coaching input produces disproportionately larger gains during it than before or after.

Trust begins as a relational expectation rather than a judgement. Erikson (1950) described the earliest psychosocial task as one of basic trust versus mistrust, and attachment research showed that consistent, responsive caregiving produces internal working models of others as reliable (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth et al., 1978). These expectations are largely formed before a child reaches organised football, and they shape how later experiences of fairness and reliability are interpreted.

Across middle childhood, trust becomes evaluative. Children begin to assess whether promises are kept, whether rules apply equally, and whether words match actions, and their trust beliefs become measurably linked to prosocial behaviour and to the quality of their friendships (Carlo et al., 2010). This is the period in which a coach's consistency stops being merely felt and starts being judged.

Adolescence changes the basis of trust rather than simply increasing it. The relational centre of gravity moves from adult-child relationships towards peers, and trust becomes conditional. Adolescents with a stronger tendency to take another person's perspective extend more trust in cooperative exchanges, but they also withdraw it more sharply once a partner behaves unfairly (Fett et al., 2014). Trust at this age is both more generous and more fragile than before.

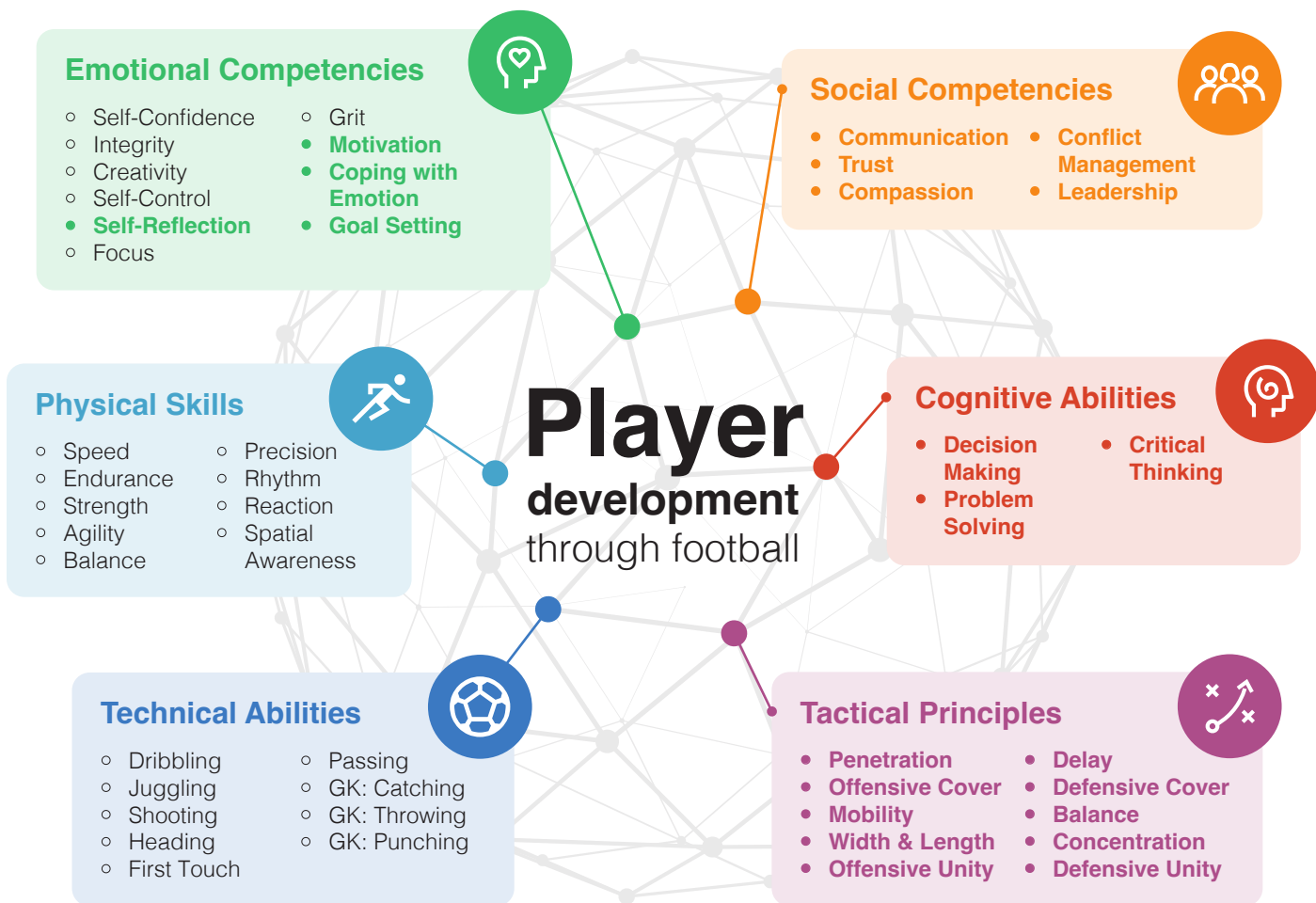
The most useful developmental finding for coaches is that trust does not peak and settle. In a trust game spanning six age groups, from eight-year-olds to retired adults, trust increased almost linearly from early childhood to early adulthood before levelling off, while trustworthiness was present in every age group (Sutter & Kocher, 2007). The whole of the Sharing Goals age range sits on the rising part of that curve. There is no narrow window to catch, but a long slope on which each season contributes.

Football suits this development because trust is tested constantly and at low stakes: a pass that may not come back, a teammate covering a defensive gap, a rule applied to the most talented player exactly as it is applied to everyone else. Because coaches occupy both the authority relationship and the setting in which peer trust is built, they influence both directions at once.

Trust therefore warrants consistent attention at every stage, with the emphasis moving from predictability and fairness in the early stages to reliability between teammates and repair after betrayal in the later ones.



1.3. Correlation with other skills and competencies



Correlation with Emotional Competencies

Trust is closely linked to emotional development. Self-reflection helps individuals recognise how their actions influence relationships with others. Motivation encourages commitment to the group, while goal setting aligns individual and collective objectives. Coping with emotions supports reliability and openness, especially in challenging situations.

Correlation with Physical Skills

While no direct connection is identified, trust can indirectly support physical performance by increasing confidence in teammates. This enables individuals to cooperate more effectively and participate fully in physical challenges and activities.

Correlation with Technical Abilities

While no direct connection is identified, trust can indirectly enhance technical development by creating a safe environment for learning. Players are more willing to take risks, accept feedback, and support each other's improvement when trust is present.

Correlation with Social Competencies

Trust is strongly connected to all social competencies. Effective communication helps build trust, while empathy and compassion strengthen mutual understanding and positive relationships. Trust also supports conflict resolution and enables leadership by creating confidence in others' intentions, abilities, and decisions.

Correlation with Cognitive Skills

Trust supports decision-making, problem-solving, and critical thinking, particularly in cooperative activities. Trusting others allows individuals to share information, consider different perspectives, and work together more effectively when solving challenges and making decisions.

Correlation with Tactical Principles

Trust supports the application of all tactical principles by strengthening cooperation, communication, and team cohesion. Players who trust one another can coordinate movements more effectively, make collective decisions with confidence, and adapt better to changing situations both with and without the ball.

1.4. Key learnings

- Trust is a general expectation that an individual admits that another person's word, promises, and oral or written statements are reliable
- Team trust can be divided into cognitive and emotional trust. Cognitive and emotional trust in sports teams are always intertwined.
 - Emotional trust emphasises the emotional bond between two parties to establish a trusting relationship, usually through attention and care.
 - Cognitive trust is established through deliberate evaluation of others' credibility and a judgment of benefits and risks.
- A trustful relationship is impacted by the following components:
 - Who you are: Competence, Symmetry, Personal compatibility
 - What you do: Positivity, Time, Intimacy
- Understand the eight laws of trust and their impact on the development of trust: Continuous (1), contextual (2), personal (3), asymmetrical (4), transferable (5), reciprocal (6), dynamic (7), two-sided (8)
- Team trust emerges as a crucial element, impacting not only the level of cooperation and communication among team members but also influencing team cohesion.
- Developing trust is a process



1.5. From science to practice

Stage 1 7-8 years



Safety, honesty, predictability

At this stage, trust is primarily grounded in feelings of safety and consistent care. Children experience trust through predictable routines, honest interactions, and fair treatment by adults and peers.

Trust is not yet reflective or relationally complex; instead, it is experienced as a sense of security that allows participation without fear of punishment or exclusion. Consistency and honesty from others form the foundation for early trust, enabling children to engage freely in play and learning environments.

Stage 2 9-10 years



Reliability, fairness, awareness of others

As cognitive and social awareness develop, trust becomes increasingly linked to reliable behaviour over time.

Children begin to understand that trust is built through repeated actions, such as keeping agreements and treating others fairly. They also start to recognise that trust is affected by how people behave toward one another, especially in group situations. Trust at this stage moves beyond immediate safety toward an early understanding of social responsibility and fairness within the team.

Stage 3 11-12 years



Responsibility, perspective, repair

Trust development now involves personal responsibility and the ability to repair relationships. Players begin to understand how their own actions influence trust and recognise that trust can be damaged and restored.

Perspective-taking allows them to see how mistakes, dishonesty, or inconsistency affect others. Trust becomes an active process, requiring accountability, honest communication, and intentional efforts to restore confidence after setbacks or conflicts.

Stage 4 13-14 years



Regulation, consistency, mutual accountability

With increasing emotional intensity and competitive pressure, trust becomes closely tied to emotional regulation and consistency under stress.

Players learn that trustworthy behaviour is especially important in challenging moments and that reliability cannot depend on mood or outcome. Mutual accountability emerges, as trust is maintained through respectful communication, calm conflict management, and shared responsibility within the group. Trust now stabilises team interactions in emotionally demanding situations.

Stage 5 15-16 years



Proactivity, influence, team culture

At this stage, trust becomes increasingly proactive and socially influential. Players begin to anticipate situations in which trust could weaken and act early to prevent breakdowns.

Peer influence plays a significant role, as individuals contribute actively to a trustworthy team culture through consistent behaviour and supportive responses. Trust is no longer only reactive; it becomes a deliberate contribution to group cohesion and emotional stability.

Stage 6 17-18 years



Leadership, reflection, performance impact

At the highest developmental stage, trust is fully integrated into leadership behaviour and reflective practice. Players understand trust as a key factor in team cohesion, communication, and performance. They recognise how honesty, reliability, and accountability influence collective functioning, particularly under pressure.

Trust now extends beyond interpersonal relationships to include reflection on its impact on decision-making, cooperation, and overall team performance.

2. COACHES' BEHAVIOUR

2.1. Coaching style

2.1.1. Scientific grounding

Research suggests that trust development in youth sport is strongly influenced by consistent adult behaviour, fairness, and relational safety (Oros, Chemisquy, & Vargas Rubilar, 2024; Solomon, 2015). Coaches support the development of trust by being predictable in their actions, communicating transparently, following through on commitments, and creating opportunities for players to take responsibility and experience autonomy (Solomon, 2015; Oros et al., 2024). The conceptual understanding of trust in this curriculum is based on Solomon's (2015) model of trust, which was adapted to the sport and team context by Bauer (2025). As educators, coaches play a crucial role in the social and moral development of children and adolescents, particularly in contexts where peers and non-parental adults increasingly shape values and behaviour (Silke et al., 2023).

Silke et al. (2023) highlight that adolescents identify a broad range of influential figures beyond parents, including teachers and community members, in shaping social development. Trust, like empathy, is largely learned through lived interpersonal experiences rather than explicit instruction (Silke et al., 2023; Solomon, 2015). Interestingly, coaches were not explicitly mentioned by adolescents as key figures in trust or empathy development, suggesting that the influence of coaches may often be implicit rather than consciously recognised. This underscores the importance of intentional coaching behaviors that foster trust through everyday interactions.

Leadership research consistently identifies trust as a foundational element of effective leadership (Solomon, 2015; Covey & Merrill, 2006). Leaders who struggle to build trust often face similar challenges to those described in empathy research: difficulty uniting individuals around shared goals and limited capacity to create psychological safety (Covey & Merrill, 2006).

Trust enables cooperation, risk-taking, and open communication, all of which are essential in environments that involve performance pressure and interpersonal dependency, such as team sports (Solomon, 2015). When leaders are perceived as fair, reliable, and respectful, followers are more willing to commit, communicate honestly, and remain loyal,

particularly in challenging situations (Covey & Merrill, 2006).

In summary, a trust-based leadership style is characterized by consistency, transparency, and fairness (Solomon, 2015). While trust is closely connected to empathy and compassion, it represents a distinct relational construct that focuses on reliability, safety, and mutual confidence within the coach-player relationship.

2.1.2. Practical implications

The coaching style that supports the development of trust is relationship-oriented, transparent, and reliable. Coaches act as trust anchors by behaving consistently, communicating clearly, and treating players fairly across situations.

Key characteristics of the coaching style:

- prioritising consistency and fairness over short-term performance gains
- explaining decisions openly and age-appropriately
- following through on promises and expectations
- responding to mistakes with predictability rather than emotional volatility
- encouraging player responsibility and shared ownership

The coach creates an environment in which players feel secure, respected, and confident that they will be treated fairly, even after errors or setbacks. Experiencing trust from the coach allows players to take interpersonal risks, communicate honestly, and gradually extend trust to teammates. In this way, trust becomes a learned relational norm that supports cooperation, accountability, and long-term team cohesion.

2.2. Choice of words

Language shapes how athletes experience reliability, fairness, and safety within the team. In trust-building situations, coaches' words should communicate consistency, predictability, and accountability. Over time, phrasing should gradually shift from reassurance and structure toward shared responsibility and integrity.

Stage 1 7-8 years



Language should be simple, reassuring, and focused on consistency.

Example tone:

- "You can count on me."
- "We keep our promises."
- "I said we start at five, so we start at five."
- "We do what we say."

Sentences emphasise predictability and fairness.

Stage 2 9-10 years



Language begins to connect trust with responsibility.

Example tone:

- "When you promise, you follow through."
- "How can you show your team they can trust you?"
- "Being reliable helps everyone."
- "We support each other."

The coach reinforces accountability within the group.

Stage 3 11-12 years



Language introduces awareness of consistency and credibility

Example tone:

- "What message does your behaviour send?"
- "Can your teammates rely on you in this moment?"
- "Trust grows when actions match words."
- "Be someone others can depend on."

The focus shifts toward behavioural consistency. communication.

Stage 4 13-14 years



Language supports reflection and integrity under pressure.

Example tone:

- "How do you stay reliable when it's difficult?"
- "Your reaction affects team trust."
- "Trust is built through small decisions."
- "Choose consistency over emotion."

The coach highlights self-control and reliability.

Stage 5 15-16 years



Language promotes ownership and leadership.

Example tone:

- "Your team depends on your consistency."
- "How do you repair trust if it's broken?"
- "Be accountable for your commitment."
- "Trust requires responsibility."

Athletes are encouraged to take active responsibility for team climate.

Stage 6 17-18 years



Language emphasises integrity and leadership.

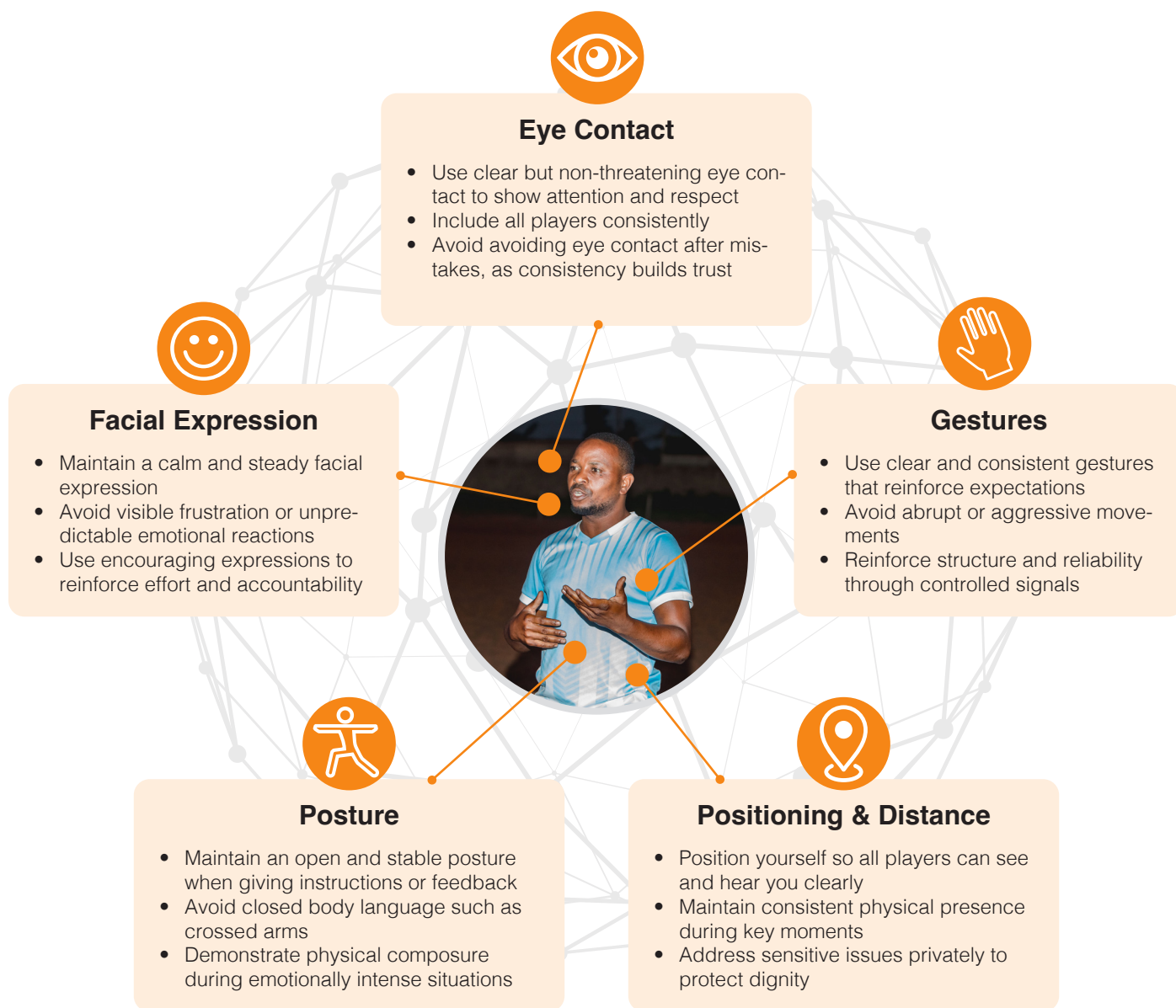
Example tone:

- "Model reliability."
- "Protect the trust within this team."
- "Lead through consistency."
- "Your credibility shapes the group."

The coach increasingly shifts toward athlete-led trust culture.

2.3. Body language

A coach's body language strongly influences whether players experience stability and reliability. Non-verbal signals often communicate more than words, especially in emotional or high-pressure situations. Consistent and predictable body language strengthens credibility and reinforces trust within the team.



When body language remains stable and predictable, players experience psychological safety. This strengthens cohesion and allows performance to flourish in a reliable and structured environment.

3. TRAINING

The development journey of trust from foundation to maturity:



**7-8
years**

- 1 Admit when they committed a foul or made a mistake to help others feel safe
- 2 Encourage, include and help teammates to make everyone feel valued
- 3 Follow agreements fairly and consistently to build trust within the group



**9-10
years**

- 1 Guide, inform and reassure teammates with calm and consistent communication
- 2 Fulfil their agreed role by completing responsibilities and keeping agreements
- 3 Consistently keep their promises, maintain their effort and support teammates



**11-12
years**

- 1 Admit mistakes and take responsibility without making excuses
- 2 Encourage, reassure and support teammates after mistakes
- 3 Acknowledge teammates' feedback & perspectives and adapt accordingly



**13-14
years**

- 1 Adjust their communication according to the demands of the situation
- 2 Respond to conflicts by staying calm and focusing on solutions
- 3 Recognise what teammates need and respond accordingly



**15-16
years**

- 1 Adapt their communication to the needs of different teammates
- 2 Address blaming & negative language by reinforcing positive team standards
- 3 Keep agreements, show respect & support teammates consistently



**17-18
years**

- 1 Admit mistakes, apologise when appropriate and ask for support
- 2 Build trust by keeping promises, taking responsibility and supporting teammates
- 3 Consistently demonstrate behaviours that teammates and coaches can rely on

Training

7-8
years



3.1. Stage 1 (7-8 years)

3.1.1. Stage characteristics

In this age group, players need to learn to stay positive, independent of the difficulties they face individually or as a group. In this age group, the team aspects are not that important as children are still very much focused on themselves.

In their research, Oros, Chemisquy, and Vargas Rubilar (2024) claim that Interpersonal trust plays a decisive role in expressing healthy emotions and behaviours during middle childhood. This period is ideal for building trust between the coach and players, as this will be the foundation for all future interventions.

3.1.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, trust is experienced through safety, honesty and fair treatment rather than through reflection. Children cannot yet analyse trust, but they can act in ways that make it visible: telling the truth about what happened, including teammates, and holding to the agreements the group has made. What they receive, they return, so the behaviour a child meets is the behaviour they learn to give.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

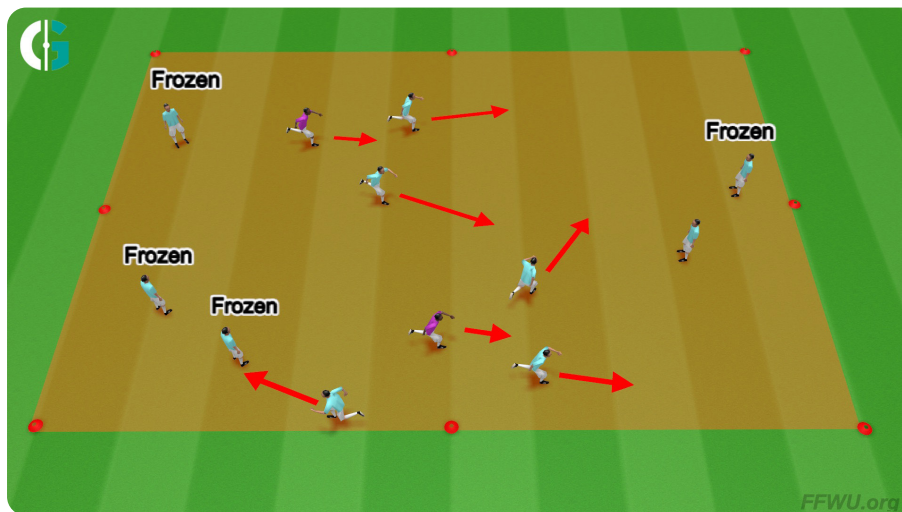
- 1 Admit when they committed a foul or made a mistake to help others feel safe
- 2 Encourage, include and help teammates to make everyone feel valued
- 3 Follow agreements fairly and consistently to build trust within the group

3.1.3. Coach insight

Trust begins with how we treat each other. Children this age feel trust before they can explain it: honest behaviour and predictable routines make them secure enough to join in, try things and make mistakes without fear. What they receive, they return — a child who is included includes others, and a child who is told the truth learns to tell it.

EXERCISE

FREEZE & RELEASE



	Players	12+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	16 x20 m
	Equipment	2 bibs, 8 cones
	Duration	total: 12 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players play a tag game inside a marked area with two taggers. A new tagger takes over every minute.
- Players agree on three rules:
 - If you are tagged or leave the area, freeze with your legs apart.
 - A teammate releases you by crawling through your legs, and may be tagged until they start crawling.
 - Encourage teammates throughout the game.
- Each tagger counts their tags and shares their total score honestly. There is no referee

Coaching Tips

1. Praise **honest behaviour** whenever players admit being tagged, leaving the area or honestly report their score.
2. If a player breaks an agreement, **pause the game and ask**: “Which agreement did we make?”
3. Reinforce encouragement by **recognising players who help, include and support** their teammates.



Learning Objectives

1

Players admit when they are tagged, leave the playing area or make a mistake to **help others feel safe**.

2

Players **encourage, include and help teammates** throughout the game to make everyone feel valued.

3

Players follow the agreed rules **fairly and consistently** to build trust within the group.



Reflection Questions

- When was it difficult to admit you were tagged?
- How did it feel after telling the truth?
- When could you be honest like this again?

- How did you encourage a teammate today?
- How did your teammate react?
- How can you encourage others next time?

- Which agreement was the most difficult to follow?
- Why are shared agreements important?
- How can you help your group follow them next time?

Training

9-10
years



3.2. Stage 2 (9-10 years)

3.2.1. Stage characteristics

Parent and teacher relationships are crucial in the first years because children are still very dependent on adults. As Clarke, Sheridan, and Woods report (2009), the reinforcement of children's trust is strongly connected to parent-teacher trust.

This should also count for the parent-coach relationship; as Solomon says, trust is transferable. During this stage, the focus can be placed on building a trustful relationship between the coach and parents, with the potential outcome that the level of trust in the coach is transferred from parents to children.

3.2.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, trust becomes linked to what players do repeatedly rather than to single moments. Children begin to understand that keeping agreements, communicating consistently and treating others fairly build trust over time, and that one reliable session does not create it. The objectives describe behaviours a coach can observe across a whole session rather than in a single situation.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

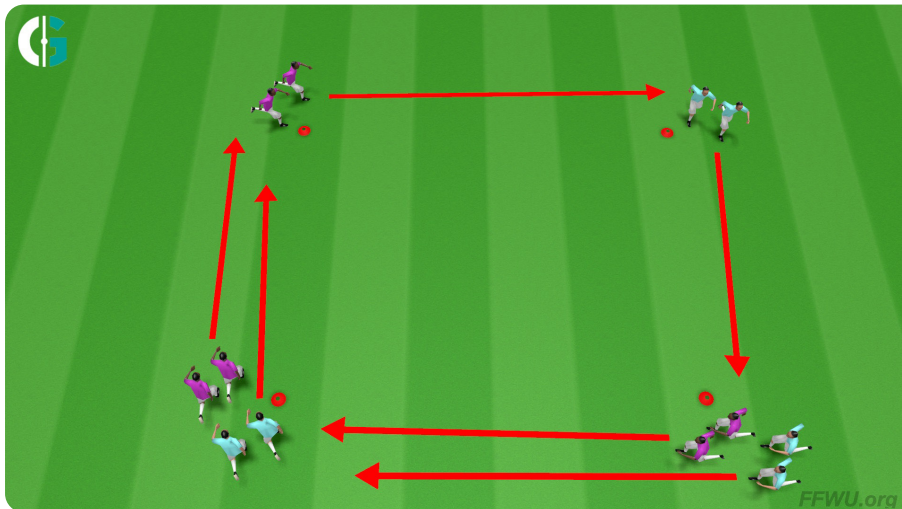
- 1 Guide, inform and reassure teammates with calm and consistent communication
- 2 Fulfil their agreed role by completing responsibilities and keeping agreements
- 3 Consistently keep their promises, maintain their effort and support teammates

3.2.3. Coach insight

Trust grows through repeated reliable behaviour. When players keep agreements and treat each other fairly again and again, trust strengthens; one good action does not create it, and one broken agreement rarely ends it. What matters is the pattern. Point players to what a teammate has done repeatedly rather than to a single moment, so they learn that trust is earned over time.

EXERCISE

BLINDFOLDED TRUST RUN



	Players	12+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	20×20 m
	Equipment	6 bibs, 4 cones
	Duration	total: 15 min play: 6× 1 min breaks: 1 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players work in pairs. One player is blindfolded while their partner guides them safely around the playing area.
- Rounds 1–3 are completed with the same roles:
 - Round 1: holding hands and verbal guidance.
 - Round 2: holding hands only.
 - Round 3: holding hands and verbal guidance.
- Players then switch roles and repeat the same progression for Rounds 4–6.

Coaching Tips

1. Praise **calm, clear and consistent communication** whenever players guide their partner.
2. After Round 2, ask players how the **absence of communication** affected their confidence.
3. Reinforce that trust grows through **reliable behaviour repeated over time**.



Learning Objectives

1

Players **guide, inform and reassure teammates** with calm and consistent communication.

2

Players fulfil agreed roles by supporting teammates, completing responsibilities and **keeping agreements**.

3

Players **consistently keep their promises**, maintain their effort and support teammates.



Reflection Questions

- Which round made you feel most confident, and why?
- How did communication influence your trust?
- How can you communicate more consistently?

- How did your partner help you feel safe?
- Why does responsibility matter when someone depends on you? How can you be more dependable?

- What changed when communication stopped?
- Why does trust grow through consistent behaviour?
- How can you show reliable behaviour in your next activity?

Training

11-12
years



3.3. Stage 3 (11-12 years)

3.3.1. Stage characteristics

Children or adolescents during this stage spend an increased amount of time with their peers, and friendships hold a high value in their lives. Research by Brugman and Out (2014) revealed that peer interactions offer more opportunities for social perspective-taking than adult-child interventions, enhancing the understanding of fairness and trust.

3.3.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, players can take responsibility for their part in trust and respond when it is damaged. Mistakes and disagreements are inevitable, and what follows them matters more than the mistake itself. Trust also runs in both directions: a player who expects to be trusted has to extend trust to others and act on what they hear.

In the reflection phase, we want the children to be able to:

1

Admit mistakes and take responsibility without making excuses

2

Encourage, reassure and support teammates after mistakes

3

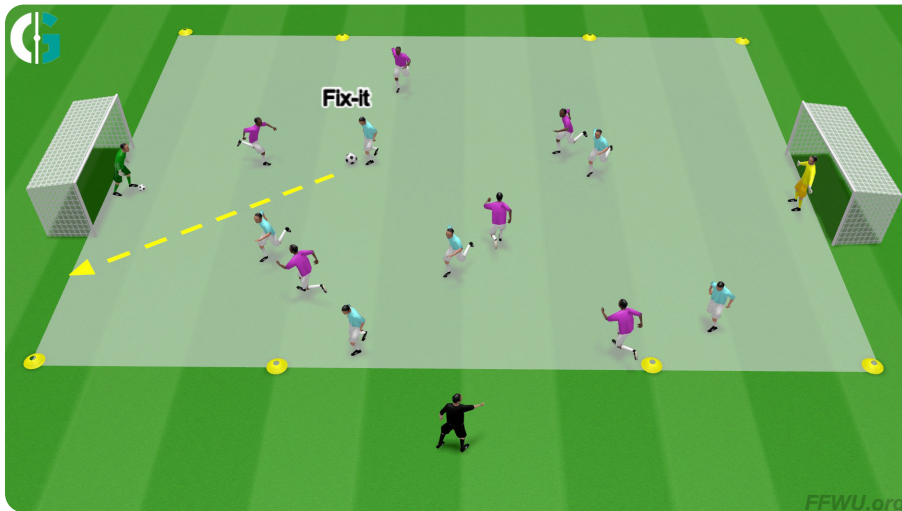
Acknowledge teammates' feedback & perspectives and adapt accordingly

3.3.3. Coach insight

Trust depends on how players behave and on how they respond when trust is challenged. Mistakes and conflicts weaken it, but responsibility, honest communication and support can repair it — what a player does after a mistake matters more than the mistake itself. Trust also runs both ways: a player who expects to be trusted has to extend it to others.

EXERCISE

FIX-IT GAME



	Players	14+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	30×50 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 2 goals, 8 cones, 7 bibs
	Duration	total: 30 min play: 3 x 8 min breaks: 3 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players play a 7v7 game with normal rules. Mistakes and disagreements are allowed to happen, and play continues whenever possible.
- Each team has seven fix-it calls, one per player. Only the player who made the mistake may call theirs, and only once.
- A player calls “Fix-it!” straight after their own mistake and play stops at once.
- The player says what went wrong and one teammate gives a single specific suggestion.
- Players return to their positions at the moment of the mistake and replay it. The replay counts, so a conceded goal is cancelled.
- There is no referee – each player tracks their own call honestly.

Coaching Tips

1. Model a **fix-it yourself early in the first repetition** so players see how to stop play, say what went wrong and replay the situation.
2. Recognise **the call itself**, not only a successful replay. A player who owns a mistake in front of the team has already met the objective.
3. Keep feedback to **one specific, positive suggestion** so the game keeps flowing, and encourage a different teammate to give it each time.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players admit misplaced passes or defensive mistakes and take responsibility **without making excuses**.

- What happened in your fix-it situation?
- How did it feel to stop the game and admit the mistake?
- When can admitting a mistake help your team?

2

Players **encourage, reassure** and support teammates after mistakes instead of blaming or criticising them.

- How did your teammates react when one called a fix-it?
- What feedback helped you most?
- How can you support a teammate after their next mistake?

3

Players listen to feedback, acknowledge teammates' perspectives and **adjust their behaviour**.

- Which suggestion did you use in the replay?
- How did the replay change after the feedback?
- What will you do differently next time?

Training

13-14
years



3.4. Stage 4 (13-14 years)

3.4.1. Stage characteristics

Szcześniak, M., Colaço, M. and Rondón, G. (2012) conclude that children must feel they can talk with their educators. Teenagers especially appreciate those teachers who let them know that they trust them. During this period, the peer group experience is key in their personality and socialization enhancement, a significant source of interpersonal trust among children, preadolescents, and adolescents (Harris, 1995; Jones et al., 2008).

3.4.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, players meet situations where trust is tested differently — a close score, a disagreement, a teammate losing composure. They recognise that what a situation demands changes, and that trusting a teammate to organise the defence is not the same as trusting them to stay calm. The objectives describe how players read a situation and adjust what they do.

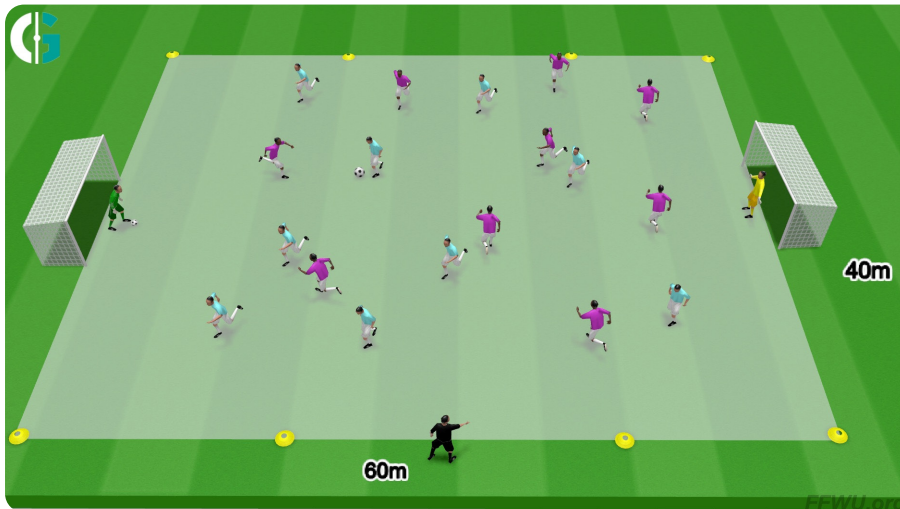
During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

- 1 Adjust their communication according to the demands of the situation
- 2 Respond to conflicts by staying calm and focusing on solutions
- 3 Recognise what teammates need and respond accordingly

3.4.3. Coach insight

Trust changes across situations and relationships. A player trusted in training may be trusted differently when the score is close, and pressure reveals how stable that trust really is. Emotional regulation, respectful communication and shared accountability protect it when intensity rises. Trusting a teammate to hold a lead is not the same as trusting them to admit a mistake.

TRUST SCENARIOS



	Players	18+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	60×40 m
	Equipment	1 ball, 18 bibs, 8 cones, 2 goals
	Duration	total: 35 min play: 3× 9 min breaks: 3 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- 9 vs 9
- Play 3 x 9-minute games, each creating a different trust situation.
- Game 1 – Tactical support: each team selects one player. The team's challenge is to help this player make better tactical decisions through clear and timely information.
- Game 2 – Performance support: play using the 1-2-1 touch rule, alternating continuously between one touch and two touches. If a player uses the wrong number of touches, possession changes immediately.
- Game 3 – Emotional support: one player secretly receives a frustration card and shows visible frustration after two mistakes while continuing to play. Two teammates secretly receive a support card and must recognise when support is needed. All remaining players receive blank cards.

Coaching Tips

1. Game 1: encourage players to **recognise the right moment** to organise the selected teammate rather than giving constant instructions.
2. Game 2: praise immediate encouragement after mistakes. Reinforce **behaviours that help teammates recover quickly** instead of focusing on the mistake itself.
3. Game 3: do not reveal the frustration or support cards until the reflection. **Allow players to** recognise emotional situations and **respond naturally**.



Learning Objectives



Reflection Questions

1

Players adjust communication by organising, encouraging or calming teammates as the situation demands.

- When did your information help a teammate decide better?
- How did your team know when support was needed?
- How did organising influence trust?

2

Players respond to mistakes by staying calm, showing respect and helping teammates recover.

- How did teammates react when someone made a mistake?
- Which behaviours helped them recover quickly?
- How did your reaction influence trust?

3

Players recognise what teammates need and respond accordingly.

- Which signs helped you recognise that a teammate needed emotional support?
- What helped a teammate regain focus most effectively?

Training

15-16
years



3.5. Stage 5 (15-16 years)

3.5.1. Stage characteristics

Beerthuizen and Brugman (2013) found a positive association between moral judgment and adolescents' importance to moral values. Extensive research exists about the importance of moral values during adolescence, which leads to the conclusion that the sports environment can serve as an environment for facilitating discussions to establish common values that all sports team members can equally contribute to. Trust is the foundation that needs to be built to create a safe environment to have those discussions.

3.5.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, players can build trust deliberately and protect it. They notice that teammates need different things — one needs encouragement, another needs to be listened to — and that trust breaks faster than it builds. Trust no longer grows on its own; it holds because players act to keep it and speak up when team standards slip.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

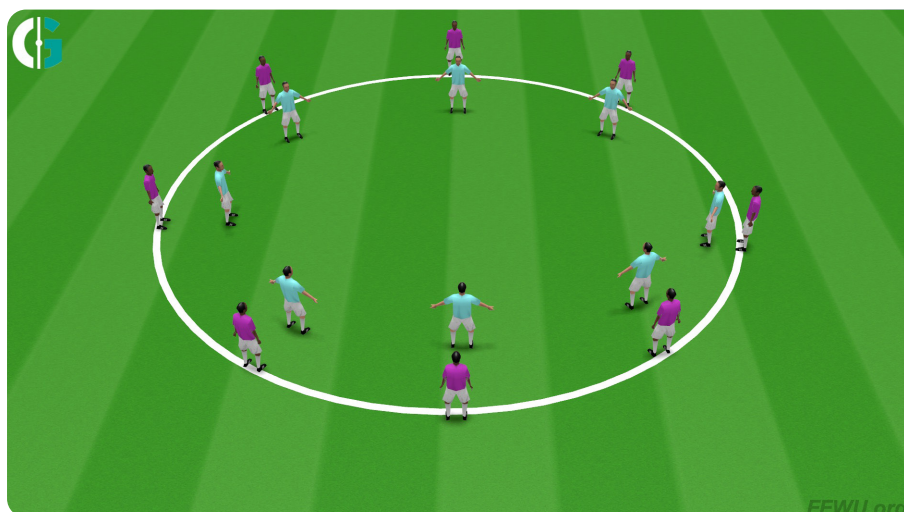
- 1 Adapt their communication to the needs of different teammates
- 2 Address blaming & negative language by reinforcing positive team standards
- 3 Keep agreements, show respect & support teammates consistently

3.5.3. Coach insight

Trust grows differently with different people and has to be protected. Players are trusted for different reasons — honesty, reliability, support — and the same teammate may be trusted deeply by one player and far less by another. Trust also breaks faster than it builds. At this stage it no longer grows on its own; players strengthen it by acting deliberately to protect it.

EXERCISE

CIRCLES OF TRUST



	Players	16+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	open space
	Equipment	-
	Duration	total: 20 min play: 8 x 1 min breaks: 1 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Players form two circles of equal size, one inside the other, facing a partner.
- The inner circle remains stationary while the outer circle rotates one position after each repetition.
- One player stands with their back to their partner, crosses their arms over their chest, keeps their feet together and their body straight and stiff, and falls backwards.
- The partner catches them safely and helps them return to a standing position.
- Players then change roles before the outer circle rotates to the next partner.
- After every player has worked with several different partners, the group reflects on why trust differed between teammates and transfers the learning to football.

Coaching Tips

1. Demonstrate **the correct catching technique** before the activity begins and ensure every player understands that safety is everyone's responsibility.
2. Connect the experience to football situations where trust grows through **repeated positive experiences**: keeping promises, encouraging teammates after mistakes, communicating consistently and arriving on time.
3. Discuss **how trust is weakened quickly** through blaming, breaking agreements, negative body language, dishonesty or giving up, and ask players to name everyday actions that protect trust.



Learning Objectives

1

Players **adapt how they reassure, guide or listen** according to each partner's needs.

2

Players **address blaming, negative language or broken agreements** by reinforcing standards to protect trust.

3

Players protect trust by **acting reliably, keeping agreements** and supporting everyone consistently.



Reflection Questions

- Did you trust every teammate in the same way?
- What did different partners need from you?
- Where do you experience different levels of trust in football?
- What could quickly weaken trust here?
- Why can one negative experience outweigh many positive ones? What protects trust in your team every day?
- Which behaviours helped you trust your teammates more throughout the activity?
- How can you build trust with your teammates every day?

Training

17-18
years



3.6. Stage 6 (17-18 years)

3.6.1. Stage characteristics

Oros, Chemisquy, and Rubilar (2024) found that trust enhances feelings of joy, sympathy, gratitude, serenity, and personal satisfaction, while distrust diminishes joy but boosts sympathy. Their study also revealed that trust fosters appropriate social behaviours and reduces aggressiveness, whereas distrust leads to increased aggressiveness, arrogance, and social anxiety. They concluded that interpersonal trust is beneficial during middle childhood by promoting positive emotional experiences and social interaction skills, whereas distrust may pose a risk to children's well-being.

Equal-status contact with peers likely contributes to developing social competences that are difficult to acquire in unequal interactions with parents and other adults, as Shaffer and Kipp (2014) affirm. The development of trust is one of those competences that is influenced by all the different relationships with parents, teachers, coaches, and peers.

3.6.2. Specific learning objectives

At this stage, players are the ones whose trustworthiness others depend on: younger players watch them, teammates rely on them, and coaches recommend them. What a player does this month decides who is asked to take responsibility next month, and a player the team trusts can pass that trust on by vouching for someone else.

During the reflection phase, the players should be able to:

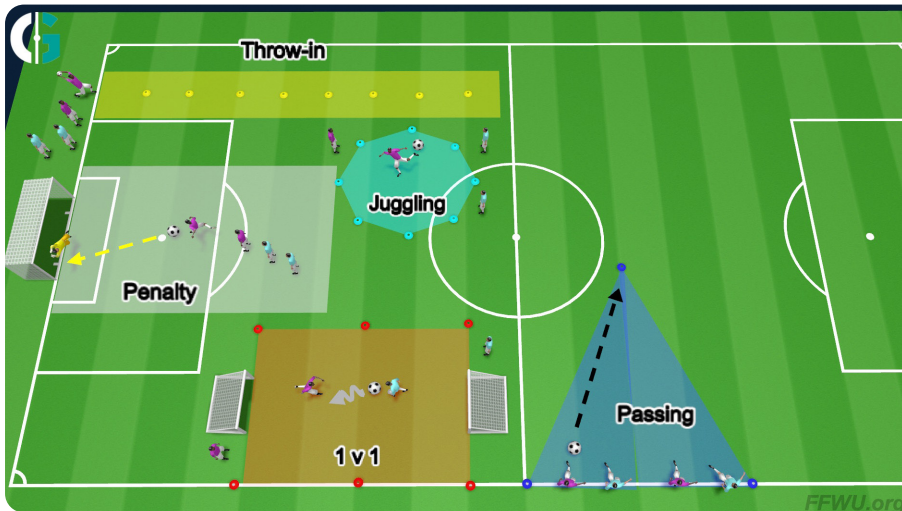
- 1 Admit mistakes, apologise when appropriate and ask for support
- 2 Build trust by keeping promises, taking responsibility and supporting teammates
- 3 Consistently demonstrate behaviours that teammates and coaches can rely on

3.6.3. Coach insight

Today's behaviour shapes tomorrow's trust. Trust earned in one situation carries into the next: the reliable player in training is the one teammates turn to under pressure, and the one a coach recommends when an opportunity appears. Asking for support does not cost credibility — it proves it. At this stage, players pass that trust on to others, and choosing well is a responsibility.

EXERCISE

PASS IT ON



	Players	20+
	Age	07–08 09–10 11–12 13–14 15–16 17–18
	Pitch	40 x 30 m
	Equipment	5 balls, 20 bibs (4 colors), 24 cones, 1 goal
	Duration	total: 40 min play: 3 x 10 min breaks: 3 min
	Author	Sascha Bauer

Description

- Four teams of five. Five challenge stations run at the same time, so every player is active throughout.
- Each round, the team sends each of its five players to the station they are trusted most to complete. Players cannot volunteer.
- Stations: Penalty Kick, 1v1 Defensive (only balls won by the defender count), Passing Precision, Long Throw-in, Juggling.
- Each team has two jokers. After five minutes, a player who recognises they will not reach the goal may call one: they name a teammate at another station they trust for the task, and the two swap positions. Only that player may call a joker, and the result counts the same.
- Three rounds of 10 minutes. Teams reallocate their players before each round.
- After the third round, the group reflects on how trust influenced their choices and what it took to ask for support.

Coaching Tips

1. Teams send each player to the station **they trust the most** for, not the strongest player to the hardest one. Ask them to explain their choices in the reflection.
2. Only the player at the station decides when to call a joker. **Stop teammates pressuring them**, and recognise calling one as clearly as finishing alone.
3. Every allocation **transfers trust**, and calling a joker passes it on again. Link this to how coaches, captains and scouts recommend players.



Learning Objectives

1

Players recognise when they are **not reaching the goal** and ask a teammate they trust to take over.

2

Players **take responsibility** for their station and **support** teammates without hesitation or criticism.

3

Players consistently demonstrate behaviours that lead teammates to **nominate and rely on them**.



Reflection Questions

- When did you realise you would not reach the goal alone?
- What made it difficult to call for support in front of the team?
- How did you approach the challenge you took over?
- How did you prepare once your team chose your station?
- How did you react when a teammate called you in?
- Why does responsibility matter when your team chose you?
- Why did your team place players where they placed them?
- Which of your own behaviours over the past weeks influenced where you were sent?

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