



## Your first virtual coaching session

Throughout this crisis, we have seen some great advice from around the world on how you, as a coach, can engage with your athletes. Many of you may choose to do so online; many will prefer to stick with connecting via phone calls, SMS or via post/mail. Whatever mode you choose, here are a few tips we would like to share.

### **This is a new situation – we all have to pull together.**

It can be a great idea to include families/caregivers in whatever activity you are using to engage with your athletes. If you are able to organise a group call or video conference, together you can all discuss the vision for your virtual coaching sessions. You might decide it is more appropriate for your group to have a separate call or communication with Families/Carers – that is ok. What is most important is that together,

- You reach an agreement on how this will work,
- You get buy in from your athletes AND those who will support your athletes to join
- You identify any challenges/restrictions people may have with video/virtual calls and develop a separate strategy for them

### **Acknowledge the situation. This is not a normal situation and it might be frightening for some.**

At worst, it is frightening, at best, it is still frustrating and worrying. Our advice to you is:

**Recognise this.** It is ok for us to be unclear of how to think and feel. This is a new situation.

**Invite your athletes and coaches to share their feelings and their worries.** Consider connecting with your local SO Program to see what good advice and resources they can share with you to help inform and reassure your athletes

**Be honest and realistic.** Your athletes trust you and now is a time that this trust becomes even more important. Avoid giving reassurances you cannot support – “we’ll be back training in a few weeks”. Be honest with them that we do not know how long this will last; it could be for some weeks or months. BE truthful about the fact that this is how training is going to be for a while. Reassure them that you are still a team, and encourage them to support one another.

**Refer to Special Olympics Strong Minds advice if you identify any athletes you feel may be struggling with anxiety, social isolation or depression.** Your job is not to be a psychologist, physician or clinician. However, you can help share relevant information and contact details when needed. We will share links to some new Strong Minds resources as they become available.

**Set some clear expectations – These are team sessions.** Where possible, you EXPECT your team to show up, for themselves and for each other – not for you! To do this, you need to be clear what those expectations are. Even better, work with your athletes to identify the expectations they have of each other. Explore together what you CAN do. Have some ideas, but listen to their suggestions too



## What are other players in the Sports field saying?

James Leath from [Unleash the Athlete](#) shared some great advice for your first **Virtual Coaching Sessions** on a recent webinar with [Changing the Game Project](#). The webinar recording is available at no charge [here](#).

We are sharing his advice here, with some modifications, but ***you know your athletes best*** – this is just a guideline, change it up to work for you and your team.

### The First Session:

First session will be chaos, and that is okay. It is like the first day of practice and you have to teach them how to behave and how this will work!

It will look like this:

- Share the WHY? Why are you doing this?.... the answer is because you care.(People do not care how much you know, until they know how much you care!)
- Share practice schedule, what will this look like?
- Ask for their commitment, be ready to field questions.
- Group Chat behaviour – what is ok? What is not?
- Introduce Basic Outline of the talks (be flexible)
- Let them know there will be some assignments (watch, read, exercise, practice)
- Encourage ideas of topics (this came from posting my phone number in social media)

Here is a rough outline of what your first call could look like.

And remember how you always encourage your athletes to try new things and tell them it is ok if you don't get it right first time?! Well now is your chance to show them just how much you believe it. Be honest with them; let them know you are new to this too!

Time	
1-15 mins	<p><b>Team Chat</b></p> <p>Invite your team to give some updates about their world. Maybe a family member is sick, maybe someone got a new dog; maybe they have been doing some fun games or activities. You can use this time to create a sense of team and community. You are in this together – you can support one another!</p>
15-35 mins	<p><b>Speak Life into your Athletes</b></p> <p>You may find it difficult to do your sport training online. But you already know that you are a role model for your athletes, a friend, a supporter, a confidante ... use this time to grow and develop other life skills and qualities like communication, resilience, friendship, kindness</p> <p>Introduce the topic or activity.</p> <p>Start with a story from your life or someone else's but tell a story.</p> <p>This is a strange time, but it IS real life,</p>



35-45:	<p>Let the athletes share and have a discussion</p> <p><b>Wrap up and let someone share.</b></p> <p>Maybe have someone prepare something beforehand, a life hack. Keep a list and make sure everyone knows when it is his or her turn. Preparing and sharing in front of peers helps develop confidence and leadership skills. It allows each person to have a voice and to be heard.</p>
45-60:	<p>Assign something to watch, read, do, and/or create.</p> <p><b>Watch:</b> Assign an inspiring Sports movie, a TedTalk or something else suitable to watch and discuss next session.</p> <p><b>Read:</b> Depending on your athletes ages and literacy levels, you could read a book, a sports story or news article about athletes who are inspiring or who triumph over adversity ... or something else that works for your team.</p> <p><b>Create:</b> Do an activity together like goal setting or creating a list of values.</p> <p><b>Do:</b> Give them workouts to complete so they can come back stronger than before. Or give them a challenge of a new skill to work on?</p>

**REMINDER:** You know your athletes. Design a session/video call that will work for them and for you. Be Creative! Take a chance and try something new. Above all else, remember that right now, the most important role you can play as a coach, is not to teach complex technical or tactical sports skill, but to be a reassuring voice, a role model and a supporter. Do not be afraid to give your athletes a challenge, after all, sport is about learning new skills and challenging ourselves!