

Risk Management For Coaches In Indoor Climbing Gyms

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Posted By: **Heather Reynolds** in [CWA Blog](#)



Ever hear the saying, from George Bernard Shaw's 1903 play entitled *Man and Superman*, which states, "those who can, do; those who can't teach." The trouble with coaching and instruction is that those who provide the instruction are given a position of power over those they are teaching.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Heather Reynolds, Education Consultant for the CWA. She is part of our new year-long series on issues and topics surrounding certification and education.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for our coaches and program staff.
- **What Will You Learn:** How coaches can capitalize on protecting themselves and their facilities from risk associated with the job.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** If you don't know what LTAD means, [start here](#).

How this power is wielded can provide clients with an exceptional experience that makes them love climbing, improve performance, and become an integral part of the community. On the other hand, it can also give clients a terrible experience, which has them leaving your facility and the sport entirely.

In the climbing world, there are a variety of instructor certification programs designed to mentor

and shape how instructors use their power when instructing. However, there are no climbing coach certifications available in Canada or the United States of America. Climbing Canada has some training available for Community coaches and Competition Intro coaches, which provides introductory training and guidance on how to coach youth climbers. However, this training does not offer a certification.

Historically, performance coaches are performance athletes who've dedicated time to their climbing careers prior to being coaches. The skills required to coach involve communication skills, knowledge of long-term athlete development, activities that will develop strengths and skills, and managing the appropriate physical performance with appropriate rest and recovery.

Performing a sport is not at all the same as instructing or coaching a sport.

In a new and developing sport like climbing, unfortunately, the coach may not know whether they are providing misinformation, they may just be providing what information they have heard or believe to be true based on their own experience. The scientific research on climbing as a sport is still in its infancy; however, there are guidelines in place for best practices.

In 1990 Istvan Baylin, a Canadian sports scientist with the British Amateur Swimming Association, developed the Long Term Athlete Development Model. The model provides coaches with a guide on the appropriate development of athletes over an extended period. This model was adapted by the U.S. Olympic Committee and National Sport Organizations in the U.S. in the following years, being renamed the Athlete Development Model (ADM). Variations of the original model have been implemented in many nations to both improve the performance and safeguard against injury for prospective athletes and recreational sport participants.

READ ALSO: Applying LTAD to Every Generation

The ADM or LTAD provides climbing coaches with generalized information to guide the physical and technical skill development of athletes, ensuring the appropriate degree of training and effort.

A coach should at least be familiar with the guide and understand how to apply the information to the participants in their program. Training the coaches provides them with the requisite knowledge to apply ADM concepts and accurately assess an athlete's stage of physical and technical skill development, leading to improved outcomes for both clients and athletes.

When an instructor is certified, they've proven via a third party their level of understanding and knowledge. Training is the next best thing to certification, assuming the information is being provided from a reliable source.

If a facility is fortunate, it may find a climber who also happens to have formal education in sport science or training and certification as a personal trainer. While this provides a better understanding of how to guide climbers to improve performance, training and certifications come at a higher cost to the facility. **The cost may be worth the reduction of risk exposure.**

One of the more pronounced risks with youth programming is the potential for abuse of power and a potential accusation of abuse or mistreatment of youth in a program. Climbing facilities and coaches should take this risk very seriously and ensure that they take the necessary steps to protect themselves. Having youth coaches take the [US SafeSport](#) training or the [Canadian Safe Sport](#) and conducting an abuse registry are necessary steps. Implementing the [Rule of Two](#) or implementing the [Minor Athlete Abuse Prevention Policies \(MAAP\)](#) in all youth program design and delivery protects coaches and instructors.

For climbing facilities to offer programs and manage the risks associated with them, the most important things to remember are:

- The planning starts in the design phase by considering the audience, the potential staff knowledge and skills required. This informs the fiscal viability and refines the audience.
- Research local regulatory requirements for the type of program and the audience the program is intended to serve. Using tools like the ADM and MAAPP can assist in the design and delivery plan for a program.
- Hire and train staff adequately to protect both your facility and the staff. There are numerous programs available to support employee professional development, and these can be factored into informing the job description, rate of pay, and ultimately the potential employees you invest in.
- Communication should be clear and transparent in the marketing and promotion, the registration agreement, any informed consent, and the agreement of expectations.
- Document all the necessary information confirming the understanding between the parties involved. When working with youth, confirmation between coaches and parents about the limits of expectations can clarify and manage expectations appropriately.

Taking these steps may not prevent injuries or negative experiences; however, they will go a long way to ensure that the right protections are in place if an unwanted accusation is made. Finally, look for the CWA Program Guidelines Matrix for more information.

About The Author



Heather Reynolds is a licensed kinesiologist, High Five Trainer (Sport, PCHD), CEC Climbing Coach, CWA Climbing Wall Instructor Certification Provider Trainer. She works as a Consultant to the CWA. She blends her knowledge of movement, physiology, and education to develop a multitude of successful climbing programs designed to support and engage youth. Having worked with youth for over 30 years as a recreation instructor, leader and educator, Heather supports the values and expertise available in the High Five Program, bringing quality assurance to youth-based sport and

recreation programming.

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