



Step #2 – Making Ethical Decisions

The objectives of this step are to:

- ☐ provide you with an ethical decision-making process; and
- ☐ enable you to make thoughtful and responsible decisions in situations presenting ethical and moral dilemmas.

2.1 Your Starting Point

2.1.1 Read the situation below, called **To Play or Not to Play**.

Jamie has just been named the head coach of her sport organization. Recently, she has noticed that one of the athletes seems to suffer from a knee injury. She brings the situation up with the parents of this 13-year old athlete, whom she knows very well. They say that they are aware of the situation and that they have called their family doctor. The physician was away but, during a telephone conversation, told them not to worry since “this is normal for growing children” and “there should not be any risk”.

The coach speaks with the athlete who confirms that he hurts a bit, but that he will be ready for the championships that are scheduled in a few days. The athlete has a lot of talent and his name is on the provincial coach’s list of potential new recruits.

The athlete’s parents are both members of the organization’s Board of Directors and they are responsible for hiring and assessing coaches. Club policy dictates that it is the coach who ultimately decides whether or not an athlete will take part in a competition. Another policy dictates that an injured athlete cannot compete, and that a written confirmation declaring that the athlete is fit to return to competition must be obtained from a medical doctor.

Since her last discussion with the athlete and the parents, the coach has read a recent sport medicine article dealing with the possible long-term consequences of this type of injury if the first warning signs are ignored. She has also spoken to a sport physician who strongly suggests to not take any chances in this situation, and to consult a specialist as soon as possible. These verifications confirm the signs she had observed in the athlete.





One hour before the beginning of the competition, the parents talk to the coach. They repeat what their family doctor has said, and guarantee that, first thing tomorrow morning, she will have the required letter confirming that the child is fit to compete. The athlete mentions that the pain has increased since last time, but that he is ready to compete if the parents and the coach give the go ahead. The parents insist that their child competes because (1) he wants to and says he can, and (2) the provincial team coach has made a two-hour trip to come and see him compete in order to confirm his selection. The parents leave the coach, and walk towards the registration table with their child.

2.1.2 On the basis of the facts presented, reflect individually on what you would do in the situation **To Play or Not to Play**. What actions would you take? Why did you make this decision? Write your responses in the space below.

a. In this situation, the decision I would make or the action I would take would be...

b. I would make this decision or take this action because...

2.1.3 Discuss the case and your answer with two or three other coaches. Do you agree with the positions of other coaches regarding the nature of the issues in the situation, or are there fundamental differences in opinion among you?

2.1.4 Review “*Factors That May Influence Your Decision*” in your Reference Material (section 2.2.3 - a). Identify the factors that influenced your decision, and highlight others that might be relevant but that you didn’t consider. Think about how these





factors might come into play in the decision-making around **To Play or Not to Play**.

2.2 The Ethical Decision-making Process

2.2.1 Let's look again at **To Play or Not to Play**, but this time using an ethical decision-making process. The ethical decision-making process used in this workshop has six distinct steps, and it depends heavily on the NCCP Code of Ethics. The Code provides a set of guiding principles that coaches can draw on in their decision-making. For your information the Code is reproduced in your Reference Material (section 2.2.3 – f). The six steps in the process are:

1. Establish the facts in a situation.
2. Decide whether the situation involves legal or ethical issues.
3. Identify your options.
4. Evaluate your options.
5. Choose the best option.
6. Implement your decision.

2.3 Step 1 - Establish the Facts in a Situation

2.3.1 Recall **To Play or Not to Play** and the decision you made about it in 2.1.1 at the beginning of this step. Working with 2 or 3 other coaches, identify the facts in the situation, and record them in column 1 of “*Worksheet #1*” in your Reference Material (section 2.2.1). If necessary, refer to the rest of that section of the Reference Material for more information.

2.3.2 Once this exercise is completed, set “*Worksheet #1*” aside for the time being.





2.4 Step 2 - Decide Whether the Situation Involves Legal or Ethical Issues

- 2.4.1 Are the Issues Legal or Ethical? Read “*Determine Whether the Situation Involves Legal or Ethical Issues*”, in the Reference Material (section 2.2.2), especially the examples of situations that have legal implications.
- 2.4.2 Listen as the Facilitator describes a situation that may involve legal or ethical issues, and then take five minutes or so to discuss the situation with two or three other coaches.
- a. Does the situation have legal implications?
- () YES () NO
- b. Note below the reasons for your answer.
- 2.4.3 Identify the Ethical Issues. The “*NCCP Code of Ethics*” in your Reference Material (section 2.2.3 - f) is a guide that you can use at various stages of the ethical decision-making process. The Code specifies the standards of behaviour that coaches are expected to demonstrate in certain areas (coaching responsibility, for example, or integrity in relations with others).
- 2.4.4 Answer the questions in Table 2.1 in section 2.2.2 of your Reference Material regarding actions and behaviours that might occur. These questions are based on the NCCP Code of Ethics, and they will help you identify possible ethical issues.
- 2.4.5 Discuss the questions that seemed important to you with other coaches, and explain below why you found them important.





2.4.6 Are there questions not listed in section 2.2.2 of your Reference Material that could help identify ethical issues? If there are, list them below.

2.4.7 Now read the entries in column 2 of “*Worksheet #1*” in your Reference Material (section 2.2.1), and put a checkmark beside the statements that are relevant to **To Play or Not to Play**.

2.5 Step 3 - Identify Your Options and Possible Consequences

2.5.1 This step of the decision-making process involves identifying your options for decision or action. To do this refer to “*Identify Your Options and Possible Consequences*” in the Reference Material (section 2.2.3). Answer the questions on the options for decision or action for the coach in **To Play or Not to Play**.

In this situation, the coach could:

a.

b.

c.

2.5.2 Discuss the options available to the coach in **To Play or Not to Play** with other group members, and record them in the third column of “*Worksheet #1*”.





- 2.5.3 For each option, identify possible consequences and record them in the third column also. Note that the consequences may be positive or negative — pros and cons. Did the factors listed in “*Factors That May Influence Your Decision*” (section 2.2.3 – a) help you identify other potential outcomes?

2.6 Step 4 - Evaluate Your Options

- 2.6.1 Use “*Worksheet #2*” in of your Reference Material (section 2.2.3) to determine the extent to which each of the options you identified in “*Worksheet #1*” upholds NCCP standards of behaviour.
- Consider Option 1.
 - Read the first statement in the first row of the column “A coach is expected to”.
 - Ask yourself whether Option 1 upholds this standard of behaviour. If it does, put a checkmark in the Option 1 column; if it doesn’t, leave the Option 1 column empty.
 - Repeat this for each statement in the “A coach is expected to” column for Option 1.
 - Once you’ve evaluated Option 1 in the light of each statement, do the same for each of the other options you identified in “*Worksheet #1*” (Options 2, 3, 4, and 5 as appropriate).
 - Total the number of checkmarks associated with each option.

2.7 Step 5 - Choose the Best Option

- 2.7.1 **Review your scoring.** Refer back to how you scored your options in question 2.6.1. What option has the highest score? Record that option below.
- 2.7.2 **Checking your decision.** Read “*Step 5 – Moral Dilemmas and Ethical Decision-making*” in the Reference Material (section 2.2.5). Is there an ethical dilemma in this case? What if any values and ethical principles are competing? Discuss your views with other coaches. Clearly state any dilemma you identify, and write your answer below.





In this case there is a conflict between preserving the principle of

_____, which competes with the principle _____

2.7.3 The option with the highest marks preserves the principle of “Do No Harm”? In other words, does it maintain athletes’ physical, emotional, and psychological safety?

() YES () NO

2.7.4 Would you make the same decision in all similar cases?

() YES () NO

Note: If you answer YES to the questions in 2.7.3 and 2.7.4, you can be confident that the option you have chosen is the best one under the circumstances.

2.7.5 State your decision in terms of the NCCP Code of Ethics.

a. My decision in the case of **To Play or Not to Play** is to:

b. This is consistent with maintaining this core principle from the NCCP Code of Ethics:

c. My choice is also consistent with the expectation that a coach should:





- 2.7.6 Share your decision with another coach, saying why you feel the choice you made is the best course of action under the circumstances. Answer any questions the other coach has.
- 2.7.7 Think about the decision you made in question 2.7.5 and your explanations for your decision. How does the decision you recorded in 2.7.5 compare with the one you made more spontaneously in 2.1.2? Which aspects are the same? Which are different?

2.8 Step 6 - Implement Your Decision

- 2.8.1 Once you have made the best decision possible, you need to think carefully about how to put it into action. This section will help you carry out an action plan to solve an ethical problem while still showing respect for the people involved. Identify who needs to know. Consider carefully who needs to know about or be involved in the implementation of the action plan.
- 2.8.2 Think about what may happen. Consider the likely outcomes of your decision, and write below how you will manage any consequences.
- 2.8.3 Write below what you will do if your first plan of action doesn't work. Consider who to contact and what level of authority you should now involve in this situation.

2.9 Applying the Ethical Decision-making Process in a Personal Situation

- 2.9.1 Describe an ethical situation you have had to manage or you know about and you want to analyze in detail because of its importance to you. If there is no single situation that comes to mind, team up with another coach, and analyze his or her situation together.
- 2.9.2 Using "*Worksheets #1 and #2*" from your Reference Material (sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.3), apply Step 1 through Step 4 of the ethical decision-making process to your situation. Then proceed to question 2.9.3 below.





2.9.3 Refer to your scoring for your options in 2.9.2 above. What option has the highest score? Record that option below.

2.9.4 Does the option with the highest marks preserve the principle of Do No Harm? In other words, does it maintain athletes' physical, emotional, and psychological safety?

() YES () NO

Would you make the same decision in all similar cases?

() YES () NO

2.10 Are the Issues Legal or Ethical?

2.10.1 Read Situation A and Situation B below.

Situation A. At the end of a series of qualifying competitions for athletes in the T2T – stage of development, one of your athletes has not secured a spot to compete at the regional championships. This is a dedicated young athlete who tries hard and attends all training sessions. After the competition, you're in the stands when you notice this child and his parents together in a corner far away from the group. You can hear the parents, because their voices are raised: they are criticizing the child's performance, calling him an embarrassment to the family. They are telling him that he is the only one of their children who has failed to meet the regional standards, and he will be grounded for the next while so that he can think about his lack of effort and wimpiness when it really counted.

Situation B. You are coaching a group of T2T athletes, and they have just finished a competition. You are somewhat frustrated because they underperformed. After talking with the group and airing what went well and what you would work on in the next practice, the athletes go home and all seem to be in good spirits. On the way to your car in the parking lot, you witness an athlete that you coach cowering below the raised hand of her father who is yelling that he is disgusted by her performance and that she has no talent. On several occasions you've noticed





dark bruises on the athlete's face, arms, and legs. Whenever you asked her where her bruises came from, she claimed to be a klutz, to have fallen downstairs or bumped into objects.

2.10.2 Do you see any fundamental differences between these two situations? If so, what are the differences, and what do you think causes them?

2.10.3 Now discuss your answer with other coaches, and share your points of view. Then check "*Step 1 - Establish the Facts in a Situation*" in the Reference Material (section 2.2.1). What facts can you establish in each situation?

2.10.4 Check "*Step 2 - Determine Whether the Situation Involves Legal or Ethical Issues*" in section 2.2.2 in the Reference Material. Then determine if either situation has legal implications.

In my opinion, Situation A has legal implications: () YES () NO

In my opinion, Situation B has legal implications: () YES () NO

2.10.5 Use your Action Card to note what you will do differently now when dealing with ethical situations.

2.11 Self-Assessment

2.11.1 Complete the "*Self-Assessment Sheet*" (section 2.4) in your Reference Material.





ACTIONS FOR MAKING ETHICAL DECISIONS

GREAT IDEAS:

I INTEND TO IMPLEMENT THEM BY:

Coaching Tip: The athlete/coach relationship is a privileged one. Coaches must recognize that they are conduits through which the values and goals of a sport organization are channeled. Thus, how athletes regard their sport is often dependent on the behavior of the coach.

Source: CCC Coaches Code of Conduct

