

Managing Youth Behavior Issues In The Gym, Part 2

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in [CWA Blog](#)



In part one of this series, we examined [behavioral management and different types of disruptive behavior](#). We're continuing to expand on this while providing tactics for effectively handling these issues and proactively using empathy as a coach.

While addressing challenging behaviors, it is important to be empathetic and understand that disruptive behavior has different **functions** (reason someone engages in a behavior) and **antecedents** (events that occur before the behavior).

For example, a climber who constantly talks over the coach when they are giving directions might be seeking attention from peers or a coach (**function**). Or, it is possible that the climber had a long, difficult day at school before coming to practice and is not primed to sit and listen (**antecedent**).

Before imposing a hasty consequence, the coach should take their time and try to understand the possible function and antecedent of the behavior and consider how they as the coach could **adapt the setting to make it easier for the disruptive climber to learn**.

In our example here, perhaps the coach could lead a quick icebreaker activity to give a social butterfly an opportunity to engage with others or a movement activity to give a restless climber a chance to get the wiggles out before sitting and listening to directions.

While the time it takes to play a quick game may seem like a burden, the coach should consider the time it would take to individually address the disruptive climber and re-deliver their

directions. In light of that alternative, a quick game is clearly the better option.

A QUICK LOOK AT CONSEQUENCES - PUNITIVE VS. RESTORATIVE

When thinking about imposing consequences in response to challenging behaviors, it's important to understand that not all types of consequences are equally effective. Let's look at the difference between a few types of consequences: **punitive** and **restorative**.

A *punitive consequence* is one that is not directly related to the behavior. A *restorative consequence* is one that is directly related to the challenging behavior and attempts to repair the harm that is caused by the behavior. We believe that restorative consequences are more effective at teaching a lesson.

Let's look at a punitive consequence vs. a restorative consequence for the following challenging behavior:

A young climber has been running in the bouldering area, often right underneath other climbers on the wall, and encouraging other climbers to chase him.

- An example of a *punitive consequence* would be "sitting out", requiring the climber to sit in a specific space away from the group for a specified amount of time before again being allowed to rejoin the group.
- An example of a *restorative consequence* would be requiring that the climber act as the "safety monitor" of the bouldering area for a certain amount of time before rejoining the group. As a safety monitor, they would be required to engage with adult and youth members, explaining the safety rules of the bouldering area and politely enforcing them.

INDIVIDUAL INTERVENTION PLAN

When behavior issues become persistent, extremely disruptive, or pose safety concerns, measures beyond a conversation or quick reactive intervention are warranted. In these instances, the coach might need to set aside time to sit down with the climber *and* their parents to discuss an appropriate course of action.

Using the program's behavior policy and well-documented instances of behavior offenses, the coach can guide a conversation that outlines a path to restoring any harm done and moving forward. Since this reactive process is so time-consuming, it's easy to see why being proactive pays off.

Climbing coaches face challenging behaviors that drain the coach's emotional and personal resources if they are persistent and unaddressed.

They can cause frustration, staffing challenges, and create safety concerns if a program does not have a consistent approach to addressing them proactively and reactively. Time spent planning on the front end creating an effective plan for addressing these issues saves time that is much better spent on the wall.

About the Headwall Group



The [Headwall Group](#) distills the lessons learned as educators and leaders working in dynamic and high risk environments and brings them to youth-serving organizations. The Headwall group provides trainings, consultation, and curriculum development services that are rooted in our experience as outdoor experiential educators for climbing gyms, summer camps, and schools.



The Headwall Group was founded by Bix Firer and Pat Brehm. Bix Firer (MA, University of Chicago) is currently the Director of Outdoor Programs at College of Idaho and has worked as a wilderness educator, trainer, facilitator, and experiential educator for over a decade. Pat Brehm works as a professional organizational trainer and has spent his career as a climbing coach, facilitator, and outdoor educator.



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