



AUTONOMY

The expression of choice and personal freedom promotes learning and enhances children's motivation.



'Sometimes a coach who steps back and gives more ownership and choice to his or her players is actually doing a really good thing... The players then have to get used to what they do with this extra choice, responsibility and ownership...'

(Pete Sturges, English FA)



Autonomy represents *the expression of choice and personal freedom* and is one of the three basic psychological needs of self-determination theory. Providing young players with autonomy is a key motivational driver, with **autonomy-supportive teaching styles** also linked to improved performance, creativity, cognitive flexibility, conceptual learning, self-esteem, perceived competence, trust and health.

HOW DOES C.A.R.D.S PROMOTE AUTONOMY?

We place great emphasis on developing authentic relationships with our learners, to help them engage with activities on their own terms. Understanding children and their conceptions of who they are and want to be is crucial if they are to express their true selves through their engagement in activities. Key to this approach is empowering players to make decisions for themselves. The following are seven ways we try to achieve **autonomy-supportive learning environments** at C.A.R.D.S:

1. Provide as much choice as possible to learners within clearly communicated limits and rules.
2. Provide a rationale for tasks, limits and rules, rather than a 'do it because I said so' approach.
3. Inquire about and acknowledge their players' feelings.
4. Allow their players opportunities to take their own initiative and make independent decisions.
5. Provide their players with non-controlling, competence feedback.
6. Avoid blatant control, criticisms that induce guilt in their players, controlling statements, and tangible rewards,
7. Prevent ego-involvement from taking place within their teams.

(Lara Mossman, '7 Steps to Self-Motivated Decision-Makers',
Player Development Project)

'When players see coaches as autonomy supportive, they generally feel a greater sense of control over their own development, they experience more intrinsic motivation and have a greater sense of wellbeing. Importantly, these players are more likely to enjoy their sport.'

Lara Mossman

ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITY TO THE LEARNER

Adopting a **constraints-led approach** can help frame tasks with no single 'right' answer, encouraging players to explore and think for themselves. Flexible coaching and adaptable session plans can also involve players themselves progressing activities, by adding their own rules/constraints or deciding when and how to adjust a task's difficulty. At C.A.R.D.S, we look to promote self-direction in many ways, encouraging **creative problem-solving** and **divergent thinking**.

This emphasis on **self-direction** can also involve learners self-reflecting on their level of success in achieving session goals, actively engaging them in the learning process as they honestly appraise their performance. **Questioning** is another approach that can facilitate processes of exploration and reflection, helping develop autonomous and intelligent players who understand their own performance.