

# How do adventure sport coaches facilitate decision making while working with adolescents?

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## Abstract

### Background and Purpose

To participate in any adventure sport, a level of decision making is required, this includes decisions on elements like residual risk, perceived risk, and real risk. The job of adventure sport coaches (ASC) can often be to encourage and facilitate the development of the required decisions necessary to become an independent performer. Recently, I was the coach on an advanced white water kayaking week for under eighteen year olds where three participants were constantly in trouble in the evenings for boisterous behaviour, but on the water, were capable of making decisions that could be perceived to beyond their age. During the course part of their learning became decision making using similar methods to those I would use while coaching adults. I was left surprised and impressed with the grown-up judgments during activity from a group that were guilty of acting up in the evening. Is what I did that week reflected in others in adventure sports coaching? There has been research into the decision-making processes that the adventure sports coach utilizes, however, very little that discusses age of decision making capabilities. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine if and how ASCs facilitate and encourage decision making while working with the adolescents.

### What was done?

Participants: Six ASCs participated in the study. Their qualifications held included the British canoeing level five award (white water kayak), International mountain guide, mountaineering instructor certificate and the British cycling level three mountain bike leader award. To be considered for this study participants were required to have an extensive history of working with learners across a wide range of ages and backgrounds.

Process: The ASCs participated in a semi-structured interview. The topics discussed included: background and experience, extent of engagement with decision making when working with adults and adolescents, how decision making is facilitated, how their practices were developed. The interviews were analysed to address the purpose of the study.

### Key findings:

1. All the coaches interviewed *encouraged decision making while working with adults*. This was connected with the idea that to be independent of the coach, a decision-making process that is appropriate to the individual's wants and needs is required. The decisions that were encouraged included slow deliberate (classical decision making) such as venue choice based

on weather pattern and skill level; and in-action decisions (naturalistic and classical decision making) such as line of choice and adaptations to plans because of changes in river conditions.

2. Decision making was *facilitated* through profiling, questioning, observation and analysis and encouraging reflection. Also learning from mistakes and appropriate picture setting (giving the learner the knowledge of where their abilities lie) were used.
3. All coaches also *encouraged decision making* when working with *adolescents*. This was connected with attempting to ensure risk awareness and being able to make 'mature' decisions went beyond the course to when they might be participating on their own (or at least without an ASC). The methods used were similar to those used with adults, however, three coaches also placed more emphasis on appropriate picture setting and agreed task setting that revolved around the individual or individuals. The ASCs also interacted differently with the adolescents shifting between adult to adult and child to adult approaches where appropriate.

### **Points of interest for coaches**

Decision making is not reserved for adult participants. Younger participants are capable of mature decision making. It can be developed in anyone. ASCs should be encouraged to develop their 'set of tools' to be able to foster mature decision makers no matter what age. Furthermore, to be able to set the agreed goals, realistic picture and continue to relate back to these set goals you need to be able to interact with the learners at an appropriate level to their stage of development which is not necessarily determined by their age.

### **Conclusion**

The ASCs in this study actively facilitated decision making in adults *and* adolescents. This was connected to a desire to ensure participants were developing the skills to become independent performers and be safe beyond ASC-led courses. A range of 'tools' were used to develop decision making abilities which were largely the same for adults and adolescents. However, consideration of the stage of development of adolescents (rather than age) was important.

If you would like further information on the research or to receive a copy of the full project please contact Chris on: [chrisevans83.ce@googlemail.com](mailto:chrisevans83.ce@googlemail.com)