



The role of the coach

It has been a long-held belief that sports coaches play an important role in the personal development of the young athletes they work with off the field of play, as well as on it.

This was confirmed through the findings of the *My World Survey: National Study of Youth Mental Health in Ireland* (Headstrong, UCD School of Psychology, 2012), which highlighted the importance of 'One Good Adult' in the wellbeing of young people.

Many GAA players will name-check a former coach as one of the greatest influences in their lives. Never under-estimate the positive impact you, as a coach, can have or the power of your words and actions. You have the power to be that 'One Good Adult'.

This booklet aims to assist coaches in supporting players who may turn to them for help, or to arm a coach with some of the communication tools necessary to assist a player through challenging times.

What is a brief intervention?

A brief intervention is any intervention that involves the minimum amount of time to support a change in a particular type of behaviour. A brief intervention may simply start by raising the issue that a particular problem exists or reinforce an individual's desire to change a problematic behaviour.

The model used in this resource is the SAOR model. It was devised by two addiction treatment professionals Jim O'Shea and Paul Goff, both whom are lifelong GAA members. In it, SAOR, the Irish word for "free", is used as an acronym to assist people in remembering the four key components of a brief intervention.

While the SAOR model has been specially designed to guide GAA coaches through a short, supportive, structured conversation with a player that may be engaged in harmful alcohol or drug use, the communication and listening skills outlined in this booklet can be useful in other situations, such as a player presenting with issues relating to problem gambling (see inside for more details).



GAA players and behaviour

International research has shown increased rates of alcohol consumption, and in particular binge drinking, amongst athletes engaged in team sports. Research into GAA club players by Trinity college in 2010 (O'Farrell et al) reinforced such evidence in the Irish sports setting. Anecdotally, team bonding, socialising after big games, and the group dynamic of a squad also encourage instance of binge-drinking and even gambling activity within the cohort.

However, participation in sport has a strong link with positive health outcomes, functional capacity, positive mood and general wellbeing. In addition to the physical and mental health benefits, sport participation also teaches participants about the value of rules, discipline, responsibility and fair play. As it evident from the chart, being an active member of your local GAA club can expose individuals of all ages, but particularly our younger members, to 'protective factors' that help minimise the risk of developing a problematic relationship with alcohol or other substances at any stage of their lives.



Protective factors and risk factors

PROTECTIVE FACTORS	RISK FACTORS
Positive outlook	Early use of tobacco, alcohol and other substances
Self confidence and positive self belief	Mental health problems
Good communication skills	Aggression/impulsivity
Appropriate boundaries/supervision	Risk taking
Assertiveness	Easily influences by peers
Strong sense of community	No sense of belonging to or pride in community
Opportunities to socialize in a safe environment	Lack of facilities and amenities

GAA ASAP PROGRAMME

Coaching for Confidence SAOR Booklet

A useful pocket guide to assist GAA coaches in supporting players through challenging times.



Why focus on coaches

Coaches form a special bond with their players and they readily take onboard the advice coaches offer. Such advice already touches on many important life skills, such as self-efficacy or self-belief, resilience building, communications skills, and issues relating to health and wellbeing, such as diet, nutrition and hydration.

As coaches we regularly ask our players to 'leave their life issues' in the changing room. For some players that won't be possible. If a player is experiencing a difficulty in their lives this will manifest itself eventually physically or mentally and a forewarned coach is a forearmed coach. Research conducted on behalf of the GAA's ASAP Programme in 2010 (Murphy & Gottsche) revealed that over half of GAA coaches had to deal with issues relating to one of their player's lifestyle behaviours that was negatively impacting on his/her training and/or playing. However, only 6% expressed a high confidence in their abilities to do so.

This resource is designed to address that skills deficit.



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By Páras Ó Midheach

When can SAOR be used?

Ireland has one of the highest instances of harmful binge-drinking and alcohol consumption levels in the world. The misuse and abuse of alcohol and drugs are serious issues that will inevitably be reflected in a small percentage of GAA players and members. If left untreated, harmful use and abuse can develop into dependence. Early recognition of the signs and symptoms facilitates action and early intervention models such as SAOR are proven to have a positive impact if properly delivered.

If you're worried that a player or you think a teammate may be abusing alcohol and/or drugs, here are some of the warning signs to look out for:



Signs and symptoms

- Sudden weight gain or loss
- Deterioration in physical appearance
- Impaired coordination during training
- Drop in attendance and performance at training
- Loss of interest in training or other hobbies
- Borrowing or stealing ; missing money or valuables from changing rooms
- Silent and withdrawn; not fully participating in training
- Frequently getting into trouble and starting fights at training
- Inability to focus or appearing spaced out during training
- Appearing fearful, withdrawn and anxious for no apparent reason

Can SAOR be used for problem gambling?

While brief interventions such as SAOR are proven to be most effective in circumstances of problem drinking or drug use, there is evidence to suggest interventions of a similar nature can stimulate problem gamblers to alter their behaviour and/or seek the necessary help.

Unfortunately symptoms related to gambling tend to present when the individual has entered the addiction stage of behaviour, rather than the earlier problem stage (as outlined with problem alcohol and drug use symptoms highlighted above). Gambling addiction does not have similar physical manifestations, other than perhaps signs of stress, and can go unnoticed to family and friends until the addiction is relatively deeply rooted.

However, if approached by a player who is experiencing problem gambling the communication and listening skills outlined in the SAOR model will still provide a valuable guide for how to conduct that conversation. For those in deep rooted gambling addiction, referral to a GP or addiction counsellor may be the only options. (See the GAA's gambling guidelines at www.gaa.ie/community for more advice.)

Please see the diagram below, which highlights each area of the SAOR model:



How does SAOR work?

Coaches, who wish to conduct a successful brief intervention with a player should be able to sensitively guide a conversation along the path and at times will need to lead while at other times follow the player towards the goal of change.

Components of a brief intervention

- **Individuality** – one to one basis as opposed to in a group setting
- **Focused** – specific issues, usually behavioural and goal oriented in nature
- **Short-term** – time limited typically last between 3 and 20 minutes
- **Person centred** – approach taken is one that evokes motivation to change within as opposed to instilling it from without
- **Information provision** – the provision of resources, direction, encouragement and other forms of support are usually required to guide the person to greater health

Principle aspects of the intervention

The four principle aspect of a SAOR brief intervention are:

- (1) Support
- (2) Ask and assess
- (3) Offer assistance
- (4) Refer

It is important to note that very few, if any, interventions in a GAA setting will ever reach the Refer stage – simply engaging in an encouraging conversation on the topic has been shown to be effective in getting players who are engaging with alcohol in a harmful way to change their behaviour. Only those in need of professional intervention due to addictive behaviour, as outlined in relation to gambling above, will need a referral.

FURTHER INFORMATION

In an ideal world a GAA coach will never have to use these skills but the evidence shows coaches are already dealing with such issues. Fore-armed is fore-warned.

For further information on SAOR training please log on to www.gaa.ie/community where an educational video will take you through the stages of a SAOR brief intervention.

SAOR
BRIEF INTERVENTION

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