



**TEAM UNDEFEATABLE**

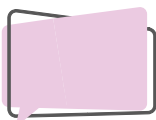
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# 10 VIRTUAL COACHING TIPS

on supporting people with  
long-term health conditions

**WE ARE  
UNDEFEATABLE**

## INTRODUCTION



## ENGLAND'S WALKING FOOTBALL COACH, STUART LANGWORTHY AND INCLUSIVE DANCE TEACHER, KATIE MASON

Have both been leading two virtual teams made up of individuals who are all living with at least one long-term health condition.

Here, they offer their top 10 tips for coaching virtual sessions and how you can tailor the session for people living with health conditions if they join your group.

To make your virtual sessions open to all, you might like to consider maximizing accessible features for virtual platforms such as BSL interpreters, audio for people who are visually impaired, and captions.

## 1 | ENVIRONMENT WHERE PEOPLE CAN THRIVE

The most important thing is to create an environment where people can thrive.



We know that participating in physical activity can benefit our mental and physical health, but we understand there can be many barriers to getting active.

One of the challenges can be establishing and sustaining a regular habit. That's where a coach can make a big difference. Great coaches get to know what motivates someone as an individual and can design activities that people enjoy and help them progress, whatever their abilities.

This continuous process can give the individual a sense of achievement, however big or small, which in turn can build confidence and motivate them to keep going.

## 2 | PERSON CENTERED

All activity should be person centered in its design.



Seeking to connect and understand the person in front of you is key to an effective and successful coaching relationship.

Having the ability to be open and engage with the people you are coaching, as well as to explore opportunities together, is key to creating and strengthening the relationship and keep them coming back to your sessions. Listening sits at the heart of this behaviour.

Some questions to ensure connection and understanding could include:

- How are you feeling today?
- What activities have you done before, and when did you do them?
- What do you want from this session?
- What goal would you like to work towards – no matter how small?
- What activities do you enjoy least?
- What in particular would you like to try? What do you enjoy most?

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### STUART LANGWORTHY

// **I shared my own experience, my own health conditions and how I deal with them.** It was about building up trust and the feeling of we're all in this together."

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### KATIE MASON

// **Normally I'd encourage my class to drop in early or stick around at the end if there was anything they would like to discuss.** As we were holding dance sessions virtually, I ensured everyone had access to my number and told them to drop me a message if there's anything they wanted to share in confidence."

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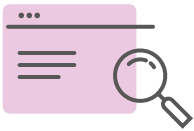
## ELLIE FINNIGAN

Team Undefeatable  
Dance Member

// **Katie is an amazing dance teacher! I was able to say if a particular movement was causing me issues and she'd show me an adaptation to do.** I struggled sometimes with more complex and quick parts of our routine, but being able to contact Katie in between classes to ask for help was brilliant. She's so encouraging and at the next class her belief that I'd be able to nail the aspect of the routine I struggled with initially really gave me confidence."

## 3 | CARE AND SHARE

Investing time in getting to know your team members.



If an individual decides to open up to you about their condition, you could ask them if there is anything they would like to share with you specifically and if there is anything they would like you to watch out for during the activity.

It may also be beneficial to visit relevant charity websites, or even the dedicated NHS pages to learn more about that particular condition to build on what your team member has shared with you. This will help you understand more about the challenges they may face, and may allow you to better plan for upcoming sessions.

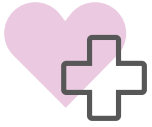
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## KATIE MASON

// **Whenever I have taught people with health conditions, I ensure I spend time talking to them at the beginning to really Get to know how they are individually impacted, and what their goals are for the session.** Sometimes, I also do my own research (for example on charity health websites, or the NHS website) so I can plan appropriate dance moves that will work with their condition.

# 4 SUPPORTING SOMEONE WITH A CONDITION

If in doubt, direct team members to a healthcare professional for advice.



Most people can get active without medical advice. But it may be daunting if you are supporting someone with a health condition. Remember they are the experts in their condition – they will know when they don't feel right and things are too much. You're there to guide the activity and make the it an enjoyable experience.

However below are some tips that might help you in your sessions;

- Remind people it's ok to take a rest (See Katie's tip) or have adaptations – You can't always know what that is for someone, but encourage them to tell you if they're struggling or need extra support and work with them to find a solution
- You are not a medical expert and don't need to act as such. If you are asked questions that you cannot answer, don't feel obliged to know. If they would like more support try suggesting charity websites or helplines for more information
- If you are seriously concerned about someone you should ask them to contact a health care professional. However in most instances this would not be necessary. If someone is not feeling their best they will normally have their own management strategies to help them, for instance an inhaler

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**KATIE  
MASON**

// **If one of my dance team mentioned they were feeling pain or fatigued, my first response would be to take a break, and a sip of water.** I would also encourage them to consult their Doctor if it felt unusual. I wasn't in a position to offer medical advice, so I didn't want to try."



For some people living with long-term health conditions sharing the day to day challenges of living with their condition with other people in similar situations is really important. However, we know it's also a good idea to build rapport by encouraging conversations about other things. Finding common ground is just as important for team building. That could be through shared love of football, or a television series.

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## STUART LANGWORTHY

// **We had a different 'discussion point' for each weekly Zoom meeting. This ranged from proudest moment to biggest fear.** Each one gave the players the chance to learn a bit more about each other – what makes them tick. It also helped to build trust and friendships within the group, and each week, people began to open up a little more and to share their feelings, their experiences (good and bad) and their problems – the rest became such a fantastic support if anyone was in a bad place – it was so rewarding to see it happening and so humbling.”

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## KATIE MASON

// **The sessions were a time when the individuals just think about dancing and enjoy the feeling rather than stress about what they may be going through.** In addition all the movement and exercises in the class have positive health benefits on top of the musicality and expression of dance.”

# 6 ADAPT YOUR MOVES

Consider how to be flexible with your sessions and activities.



Working with people with health conditions, means you may need to adapt certain activities. Each activity or move that you suggest to the group should have variations so the team members can choose which one is most appropriate and comfortable for them.

Remind your team members to start slowly and build up. Encourage them to listen to their body and do what feels comfortable for them. On their not-so-good days they may need to do less.

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## STUART LANGWORTHY

// **It is really important to be completely flexible and to come up with alternative ways of achieving the desired outcome.** We had one player in moon boots due to Achilles injuries – he used a balloon instead of a football. Another had a spinal injury and used a sponge ball. One, recovering from a stroke bounced the ball and did one keepy-upppy catching it each time. Also, when we did a Pilates session, they used a towel and a football to assist with stretching and were encouraged to do so from a sitting position if they found it a challenge standing up.”

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## KATIE MASON

// **All of the moves I taught in this class could be done seated or standing.** This was a big thing for my class as I had some team members in wheelchairs and others with limited mobility. I made sure that everyone could do the moves and that they felt good doing them.”

## 7 UNDERSTANDING THEIR CAPABILITIES

Understand that how team members feel may vary from day to day, and this may affect how active or energised they feel before and during a session.



Individuals should be encouraged to feel confident in their capabilities and not feel embarrassed or defeated if they need to take a step back or adapt the activity.

You could remind them that even small changes can have a positive impact. For some people, aiming for a couple of minutes throughout the day can help them get started.

## STUART LANGWORTHY



**At the start of every session, I always reminded everyone to take it at their own pace, and to not worry about other people's progress.** Even though we were working as a 'team', the main thing all the team members wanted from each other was to have fun and enjoy the company."

## 8 BUILD CONFIDENCE

Celebrate every success.



Ensure you are rewarding people's efforts to help build confidence. On top of celebrating physical activity successes - celebrate getting involved, turning up on time, asking great questions, and so on!



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## STUART LANGWORTHY

// **Everyone made such a positive contribution to the group, so I wanted to ensure each member felt valued and was celebrated in their own way.** We also held an 'end of season' event where I announced an award for every team member - some more serious, and some a bit more jokey and fun, based on some of the banter we had over the course of the programme. Another option could be to announce the categories, and get the team to nominate a different person per category. Medals and small trophies can also be found online at a reasonable price, so may be worth bearing in mind for a nice keepsake!"

## 9 | ATTENDANCE ISN'T MANDATORY

Ensure people know that attendance isn't mandatory.



There's nothing worse than feeling like you are letting someone down, when your mind or your body just isn't up for it. If your classes are paid for, you might consider not enforcing a cancellation fee if don't feel up to attending and instead look into some sort of credit system so they can attend a later class when they feel better.

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## STUART LANGWORTHY

// **Some of our team members occasionally struggled with juggling hospital appointments, work commitments, and social and family life.** That is fine! The important thing was to remind people that we are here for them when they feel like it, and that they are still very much part of the team and welcome to join in for as many sessions as they can."

# 10

## BUILD CONFIDENCE

Check in with individuals regularly.



Ensure you are checking in with individuals throughout the programme to ensure they are ok, are happy with the sorts of activities they are doing, and if they need any more support in reaching their goals.

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### KATIE MASON

// **Every week I made sure to include time in our hour's class to check in on how everyone was feeling.** It was a really important part of the class as it allowed the team to be open and honest with each other, but also provided me some insight in to whether they have had any pain or niggles which would need to be considered as they dance. One team member found it harder to follow the pace of the dance, so I spoke to her after class and we found a speed that she was happy and confident following."



- Set up a WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger group for communication outside of the online sessions for those that want to stay connected
- Send filmed exercises and activity inspiration to the group throughout the week so they have the option to practice outside of the classes too
- Host mini competitions during the week - these don't have to be activity related, and could just be a fun quiz
- Look into purchasing a team kit. There are lots of websites which sell unbranded kit for a reasonable price - you could look at getting your team name printed on the front!
- Agree on a shared goal or challenge that you want to work together as a team - for example a dance routine, or a keepie-uppie challenge
- Suggest buddying up or sending a friendly message in the chat to welcome new joiners and help them settle in

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## KIERA WALTERS

Virtual Walking Football

// **The virtual walking football team was genuinely a lifeline for me. Getting active with a group of like-minded individuals has given me focus and purpose.** I feel as though I have learnt so much from the virtual team members, including increasing my awareness of other people's long-term health conditions and how we can build a genuine support network together. I honestly can say I have a spring in my step again."



## END OF PROGRAMME

### INSPIRED TO TAKE YOUR COACHING TO THE NEXT LEVEL?

UK Coaching, in partnership with Sport England and other workforce partners, are looking to build more support for coaches to provide a great experience for people living with long-term health conditions.

Visit UK Coaching [www.ukcoaching.org/resources](http://www.ukcoaching.org/resources) or Activity Alliance [www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/training](http://www.activityalliance.org.uk/how-we-help/training) for more information.



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PARKINSON'S<sup>UK</sup>



DIABETES UK  
www.diabetes.org.uk

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