



BRITISH  
TRIATHLON

# Performance Parents

## A guide to the ADF



TRIATHLON  
ENGLAND



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SCOTLAND



WELSH  
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CYMRU



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## Introduction

As a parent you are a lead, if not the lead, influencer of a home environment that massively impacts your child's development in triathlon. As a sport we recognise this and this guide is designed to aid you to better support your child's development in line with our Athlete Development Framework (ADF).

This guide is very much written in tandem with our Performance Parents handbook, found [here](#), and we would encourage reading that prior to, or alongside this. The handbook deals with a number of key areas that we hope will help you including, the role of the Performance Parent, understanding the development journey, sport specific knowledge and being the best possible supporter and facilitator. We would especially suggest you familiarising yourself with the Learning to Lead graph and other content on pages 3&4 to get the most out of this guide.







# Section 1

# Our Learning Philosophy



## The Athlete Development Framework (ADF)

The framework is designed around a set of principles that align with British Triathlon's core values on athletic development and coaching practice. Having a basic understanding of this we believe is important in helping your athlete develop in the sport and we hope this guide supports that.

Getting the most out of the rest of this guide will require you to have a basic grasp of the ADF please look [here](#) for more information should you need to.

### Independent learners and decision makers

Being the best in triathlon is not just about swim/bike and run ability, our athletes often operate independently and will need to make high quality decisions both in race, training and life situations. Supporting and guiding developing young athlete's abilities in these areas is vital.



## Our learning philosophy

Our learning philosophy is built around guided challenge and discovery and hopefully the below explanation helps you to understand where we are coming from.

### What is Guided Challenge and Discovery?

Guided Discovery is a learning method that puts the athlete (or learner) at the heart of the learning process. Learners are given the opportunity to explore and discover the answer for themselves, this supports a more independent learner who can solve their own problems. Constraints are used to help guide the learner to the outcome (more on this in the example on the following page)

At the same time triathlon can be a tough and at times uncompromising sport that is full of challenge and our best athletes respond well to the challenges that they face in training, racing and life. Looking to challenge developing athletes with the right balance of support and guidance is crucial for their development.





## Guided challenge and discovery – an example

To aid your understanding of how this works we thought it might help to compare and contrast our Guided Challenge and Discovery approach with a more directive approach.

**Task:** to improve bike handling by learning to ride one handed.

**The directive approach** - tell the athlete they are going to improve bike handling by riding with one hand, demonstrate riding a prescribed distance with one hand off the bars, tell them how to balance the bike while they do it and, finally after a lot of talking and detail, let them do it.

**The guided challenge and discovery approach** – give the athletes a bean bag and put a bucket on the floor. Challenge the athlete to get the bag on the bucket. Once finished ask them how they did it and if required alter the constraints during the task to make it harder or easier such as; set a time limit and alter it accordingly, give them more bags to practice with and build repetition, change bucket height (higher is easier, lower, as in the picture, is harder), change the gear they're riding, add more buckets, reduce/increase the space they have, etc.

Hopefully it is easy to spot which method is going to improve independent learning and problem solving as well as support the athlete with making their own decisions, along with giving them a lot more riding time to improve with too.



## Two Simple Tips

Hopefully keeping these in mind will help you feel happier and more confident in guiding learning and supporting athletes to discover for themselves.

1. Resist the urge to tell or show them what to do, support your athlete to learn for themselves; if needed use questions that can guide an athlete to the outcome. A talk (tell) less approach (from you), and do more approach (from them) can often be the best philosophy here.
2. Encourage mistakes and never let an athlete feel like they have failed if unsuccessful when striving to complete a challenge or task and **especially** in any competitive outing. The **ONLY** failure would be in not supporting them to learn from the setback.





## The Six Pillars

We feel that parents, as effective leaders of the home environment for younger developing athletes, can have a real impact on the first three pillars. Us supporting you with having a good working understanding of these pillars - Training as Play, Informed Choice and Learning to Lead - will, we hope, be really helpful in supporting and guiding your athletes development.

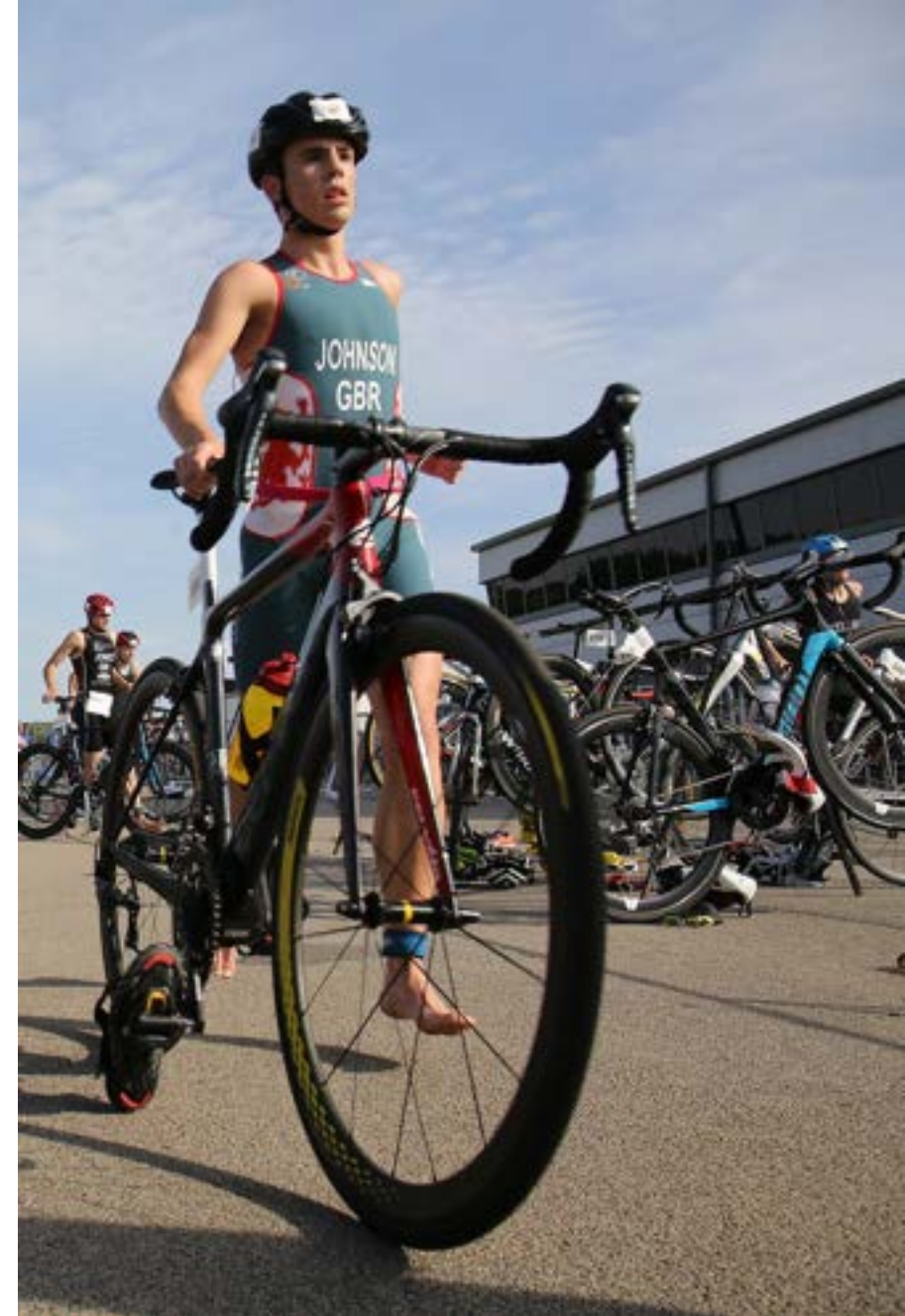
As you will have read the pillars come in a prescribed order - with Training as Play being the first pillar athletes are exposed to and One Day One Race being last.

Further to this large areas of the first 3 pillars can be supported with limited or no technical knowledge - Informed Choice and Learning to Lead especially - and therefore can be facilitated by a parent, or any other supporter for that matter, who doesn't have technical expertise.



To help with this and support you as parents we have expanded on the first three pillars in greater detail through the rest of this guide, but first some more tips and guidance on supporting your athletes development in line with the ADF that will hopefully help.

1. You don't have to be an academic or coaching expert to support learning and development, your child or children has/have got this far so you've obviously done a decent job to this point!
2. There will be some trial and error and there isn't a manual (just like in broader parenting!)
3. All kids are different and will respond differently to different tasks and challenges
4. Ensure you're happy that they're safe and enjoying themselves
5. Discuss boundaries with them so they can learn to assess risk for themselves e.g., always ride slowly around any (sharper/faster) corner or down any (steep/fast) descent for the first time before adding speed (they can always go back up for another go)







# Section 2

## Training as Play





## Training as Play

Supporting athletes in learning to love their training is critical – success in triathlon is driven through hours and hours of training and it is difficult to succeed in the sport if you don't love training. You can find out more about what Training as Play really means and how we define it [here](#)

## Building a love of training

This takes time and sometimes young athletes will need some support in developing this, it certainly won't happen overnight. Some things that can help here are:

- Supporting/encouraging them to train with other athletes of a similar age/ability where possible (this can either be triathletes or single discipline athletes)
- Giving them the opportunity to really get to know their local area (bike and run)
- Encouraging them to plan their own training routes
- Supporting them to question coaches to better understand their training and what the purpose of the session is
- Thinking about sensible challenges that can at points be used e.g., go somewhere new, plan and complete the flattest or hilliest ride/run you can, conquer a nearby well known climb, attain the 'tron' bike on Zwift, etc.



## Coping strategies

Sometimes training will be really quite challenging – examples here are many and varied as all athletes are so different in their make-up and how they perceive and respond to the various challenges that training in the sport will throw up; what one athlete finds a real challenge another will really enjoy or find very easy, likewise what works as a coping strategy for one may not work for another.

That said being supported and guided to positively manage what is a small challenge for them in training will not only help them become more resilient and be steadily able to manage bigger and bigger challenges but will also mean they will learn to love their sport more too.

Some common strategies that can help athletes cope in training are:

### Feeling under pressure in a session

Pressure comes in many forms for athletes, but it can often be helped by having a process or plan, this supports athletes to focus on what is within their control. For example, if doing a 5km run time trial in training having a warm up and race plan that might include a pacing strategy and some technical pointers to focus attention on positively could really help.



## Managing repetition

Endurance training by its nature is repetitive and having strategies to manage can help some athletes. Associating (focusing and directing attention toward what you're doing) or disassociating (directing attention away from what you are doing) can work here. Both can help occupy the mind and/or retain or divert focus – depending on the nature of the task and preference of the athlete.

**Associating;** in a long swim set or rep, for example, would mean counting swim strokes or keeping an eye on the clock every 50 or 100m to manage pace (and help count lengths) or thinking technically about particular parts of the stroke or breathing patterns, body position, etc.

**Disassociating** on a similar long swim rep means thinking about literally anything but swimming, e.g., what you're going to eat that evening, singing a song in your head, what you're going to do at the weekend, etc., that said while for some completely disassociating might help, you can also disassociate and stay 'on task' too. Paula Radcliffe is a great example here, she would count to 100 repeatedly on each step when a marathon got hard, this helped her to take her mind off the pain while counting steps can also help with staying relaxed and rhythmical. Some athletes like to count forwards others backwards (as this can be more distracting). Disassociation can also work really well when tired and a long way from home or if wet and cold on a ride or run. Often on a cold, wet group bike ride or run it goes quiet – striking up a conversation at this point can really help!





## Managing Repetition (continued)

**Breaking tasks down** Breaking a task down into manageable chunks and staying in the moment really helps if it just seems too big to achieve in one go. Paula Radcliffe also knew that counting to 100 three times was roughly equal to a mile for her, focusing on counting through one mile at a time helped her remain in positive when tiring by taking her focus away from how many miles were left, instead she would just tick one off at once. If swimming a 1000m rep seems challenging or is daunting for your athlete support them to break it down into chunks – two examples are, they could set a goal pace to achieve every 100m and sneak a quick look at the pace clock – just before or after each turn without breaking stroke; or they could change the stroke emphasis each 100m by swapping through 5 different areas of technical focus twice.

## Training alone

It is really important for athletes in our sport to learn to enjoy training alone. Given the time spent training and the programming differences from athlete to athlete it is highly unlikely that through their time in the sport they'll be able to do every session with others. Being confident training alone allows much more flexibility with training.

Learning to train alone is a gradual process and all athletes will approach this differently and be ready at different ages. If this a real challenge for your athlete start by keeping sessions short or setting them small targets to achieve, you can even start indoors e.g. can they write and complete a short solo bike session on rollers/a trainer?

A good first step outdoors could be giving them more responsibility in terms of leading runs or rides. Once they're able to do this confidently and safely on a few occasions, whether that's with an older athlete/trusted adult or with you, they're probably ready



Fast Running/Paul Halford

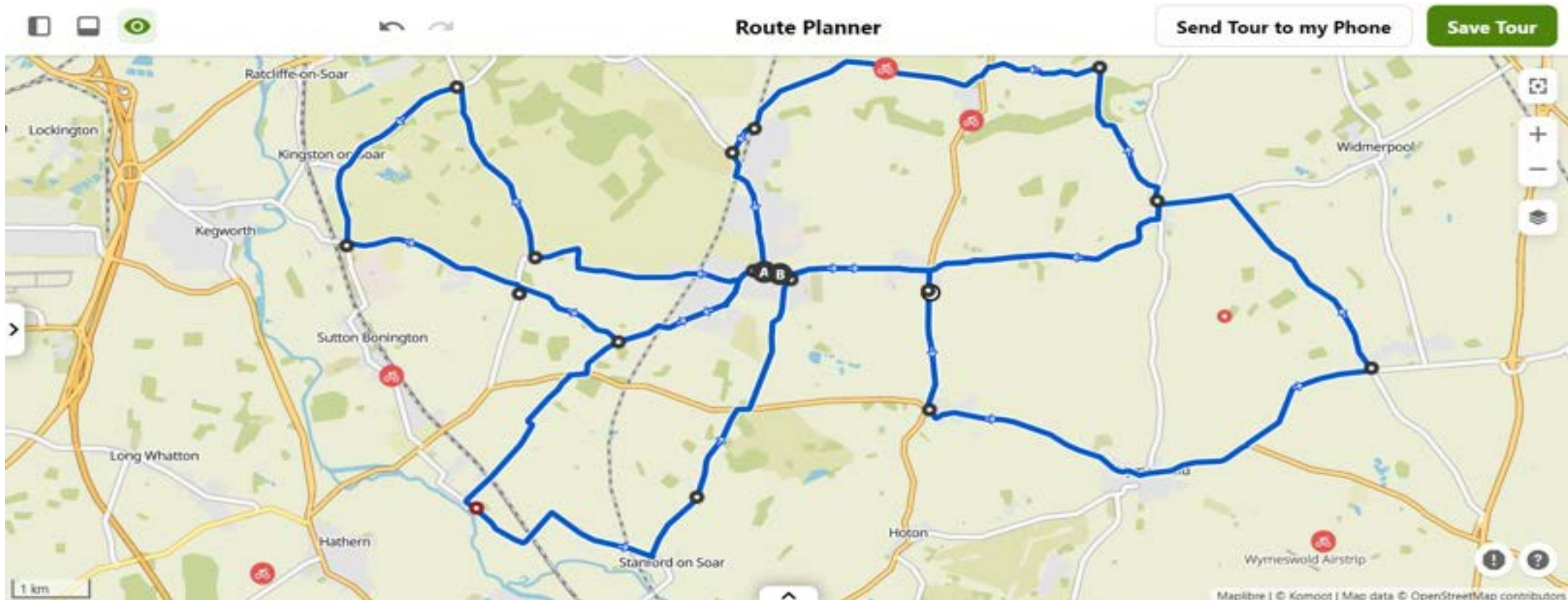
## Tips on building training independence

1. Do the first sessions alone close to home on roads/paths/routes that are well known to them and they have already run or ridden
2. Meeting halfway round, or you (or a training partner) setting off 3-4min behind them or going around the opposite way all can be good plans to build confidence for the first couple of goes.
3. Equally a figure of 8 or a clover leaf route (see next page) work well too. Both these options can be good when they start exploring longer rides especially (and perhaps runs too) as it gives chance for a re-fuel stop and means they're never too far from home if something does go wrong
4. Repeating the same route a few times can really help build confidence in the early stages
5. Ensure you and they have a good idea of how long it will take
6. Go through some 'what ifs', this will support them feeling able to cope if something goes wrong e.g., what would you do if you fall over (running) or fell off your bike (cycling)? What happens if you get a mechanical issue (cycling)? What happens if you're riding through a sudden heavy downpour? How will you negotiate any potentially hazardous sections? E.g. short busier section of road/a single track road/a steep downhill with parked cars on both sides of the road/steeper section of run trail, etc.?



## A Clover Leaf Ride

An example of planning a clover leaf ride – the rider completes smaller loops, four in this case, but it could be more or less as fits the available road network. Each loop passes through the ride start/finish, points A and B in the centre of the map. This ride is approx. 60km and the rider would never be more than 10km from the start/finish at any one point.

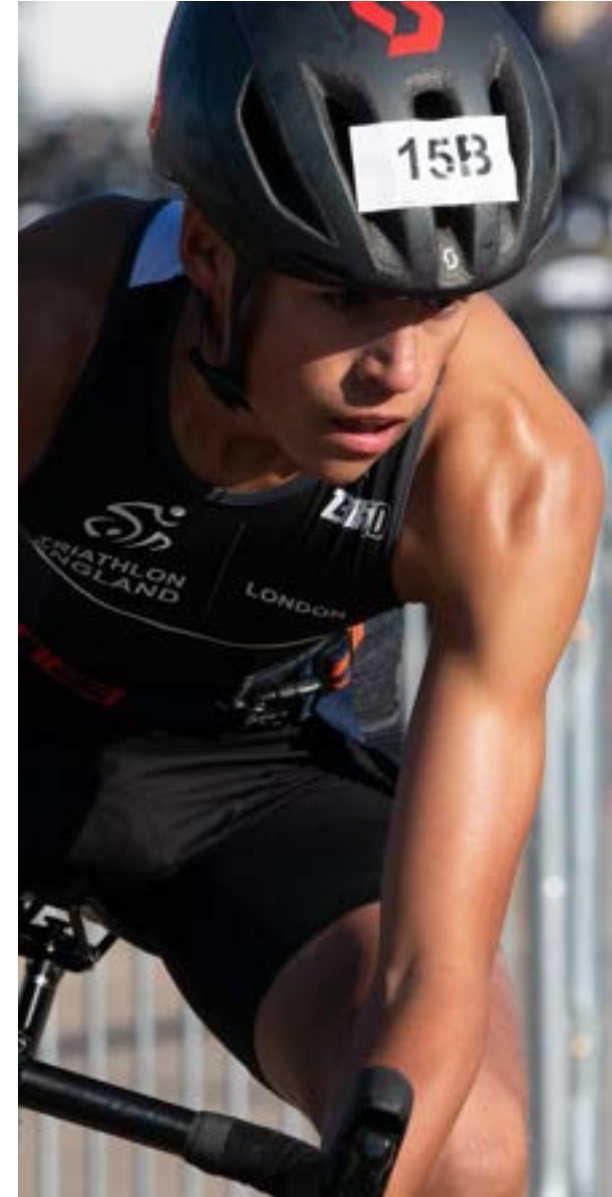




## Cycling specific advice to support training independence

For athletes just starting to ride alone the following might help,

1. Go at a sensible time when the roads are quiet in good weather/visibility.
2. Doing a left hand loop (with no right turns across traffic)
3. Always use a 'be seen' light with a daylight flashing function on the front AND back of the bike, the brighter the better. We would advise using a 'be seen' light on ALL rides no matter the level/experience of the rider.
4. Having a good understanding of the highway code and ensuring they can ride confidently without erratic movements e.g., can hold their line when looking behind (over their shoulder) before turning right i.e., they're not drifting across the road when doing so.
5. Understand all points on the route that might be potentially hazardous and know how to negotiate these safely (part of your 'what if's').
6. If they do need to stop, for whatever reason, ensuring they understand the importance of getting well off the road in doing so.
7. Having a fully charged smart phone, with their data turned on, and that you both share an app that will give their live location e.g., 'Find my Friends', 'WhatsApp', etc.
8. Having spares with them and ensuring they know how to use them – investing in good puncture resistant tyres may give you and them more confidence/peace of mind here.



## Cycling specific advice (continued)

### The weather

Getting used to training in all weathers is important especially in the UK! You may well have heard of the Scandinavian/Russian saying that goes along the lines of 'there is no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing,' and this is very true. Being too warm rather than too cold is the best policy on a bike, inexperienced cyclists (especially younger ones) will generally wear too little as they aren't aware enough of the impact of (cold) wind chill, where you are travelling an awful lot faster than when running for example and so will need to wear more clothing. Also ALWAYS take a spare layer when riding in case the weather turns, or you have to stop with a mechanical or other issue, you will be amazed at how quickly you will get cold when standing on the side of the road on a cooler day. If there is any chance of rain that spare layer should always be waterproof







# **Section 3**

## **Informed Choice**



## Informed Choice

Informed choice can be defined within our framework as all the decision making that resides outside of racing and training and more info on it can be found [here](#)

Being successful at world level will require an athlete to make millions of decisions over their training and racing career, some big, some small but all will have a consequence on their journey to the top of the podium.

World leading triathletes will find that they have to operate independently on numerous occasions, some obvious examples include understanding selection policies, making good nutrition choices, the dual career balance (i.e., managing academics and sport or employment and sport), managing anti-doping responsibilities and making key transitions through their athletic career. Simply put our best athletes are problem solvers and independent thinkers; they can source and prioritise the best information and with that consistently make good choices.

As we all know learning to make good decisions doesn't happen overnight, it is challenging and will naturally mean athletes getting some choices right and some wrong. With this in mind it is essential that our younger athletes are exposed early in their triathlon journey, through a guided and supported process, to information and to making their own choices. So doing will ensure that as informed choice is explored and enhanced they will gradually become more proficient decision makers.





Finally Informed Choice plays a huge part in developing the whole athlete or person as being able to absorb information, make good decisions, learn independently and problem solve are all key life skills.

Your role as a parent, and consequently the leader of the home environment, in supporting their development in this pillar cannot be overstated.

Some examples of supporting athletes to be exposed to and to begin exploring Informed Choice might be:

### **Academy or athletes aged 15-17**

1. Engaging with their coaching team and wanting information e.g.
  - i. learning about athlete health and well being
  - ii. learning about recovery processes
  - iii. asking for feedback after sessions
2. Supporting them to not be afraid to make mistakes and critically to learn from them (and so have a basic understanding of the learning cycle- plan/do/review) e.g., if they forgot to take any nutrition with them on a bike ride being able to review and understand the consequences of that and make a plan for not doing the same next time.
3. Supporting them to be more inquisitive and curious, and to actively seek information e.g., being encouraged to understand what they are doing and why, be that in a camp or competition setting, at school or at home.



## Next Generation/older Academy or athletes aged 18-19

As athletes mature we'd like to see them do the following:

- Exploring making better decisions with better information
- Exploring their ability to learn from the decisions they make, good or bad
- Exploring all areas of their development needs (personal, athletic and academic) and how they interrelate
- Exploring collaboration and the decision-making process with their wider coaching/support team which in turn results in exposure to a far greater volume of information

Some examples of what this might look like

1. Understanding how to best work with a coach to get the most out their training (i.e., not just waiting to be told but being proactive with questions and feedback to create a dialogue)
2. Questioning and evaluating their options e.g.,
  - i. if they're looking for a part time job understanding what options best suits and fits around their training
  - ii. or similarly if interested in going to Uni exploring what options will best suit and fit around training and/or any other identified needs





## Next Generation/older Academy or athletes aged 18-19

Some examples of what this might look like (cont'd)

3. Actively seek out other opinions and listening to them, depending on the input needed in decisions that they need to make e.g., coaches, teachers, other athletes, you, etc.
4. Demonstrating good recovery and athlete health e.g., minimising days of missed training, building recovery into a weekly plan
5. Reviewing decisions made good or bad, learning and moving on, e.g., following the plan/do/review cycle
6. Following a prehab or S&C programme and being able to explain why
7. Demonstrating a really good school / life / sport balance
8. Showing an understanding of selection policies
9. Understanding their responsibility towards anti-doping
10. Making better nutrition choices on a consistent basis
11. Researching about bike position and discussing this to develop their understanding



## Tips for supporting Informed Choice

1. Always encourage being curious and asking questions
2. If you are answering their question(s) try not to give them all the detail in one go, rather pique curiosity and encourage them to lead the conversation and ask more questions.
3. Ask them to go away and research things e.g., what is the ideal carb content in a home-made energy drink or how much carbohydrate should I eat per hour on a bike ride?
4. If you see a mistake coming resist the urge to step in and stop it (assuming it's safe to do so), do your best to let it play it out but do make sure that you review it with them and ensure they learn from it.
5. Do all you can to let them find answers out for themselves, while some guidance might be needed to stop them straying too far, resist the urge to overly lead them with questions or answers, or flat out tell them whenever possible. Our life experience will often mean we have views and opinions on the best way of doing something and just telling them or leading them to that answer/solution can both stifle their learning and hamper their creativity. They could quite easily discover a better way for themselves!







# Section 4

## Learning to Lead





## Learning to Lead

Learning to Lead aims to give athletes the knowledge and experiences to develop their leadership skills and more info can be found [here](#). This is important as we would expect our World Class Podium level athletes to take significant (if not full) ownership of their Olympic campaigns.

Learning to Lead is about exposing athletes to developing leadership skills, such as ownership and responsibility along with the communication abilities required to eventually manage and lead other people, and allowing them to explore and enhance these as they develop along the pathway.

As with all the other pillars success will not happen overnight and athletes will get some things right and some wrong, the key to success is being supported, guided and challenged through the early stages and here are some ideas below that might support you in guiding your athletes at the start of their leadership journey.

Again your role in this as the leader of the home environment is key.





## Academy or athletes aged 15-17

At this stage we'd suggest athletes exploring their role in their owning their athletic and personal development process This will obviously look different for all athletes and we hope that some of the examples below might help give you some idea,

1. Keeping a training diary and sharing it with their coach
2. Cleaning and looking after their bike e.g., learning how to clean a chain, perform a simple 'M' check before riding
3. Always encourage being curious and asking questions
4. Exploring simple 'road-side' bike mechanics to enable them to be self-sufficient and work towards riding alone e.g., getting a wheel off and on, fixing a puncture, understanding how a quick link works, etc.
5. In the summer when there is less school pressure entering some races and working out travel, and accommodation if necessary
6. Planning training routes
7. Starting to communicate with school so teachers are aware of what they are balancing on a daily basis
8. Creating their own race process and sharing these with you and/or their coach as appropriate
9. Planning and preparing their own recovery snacks and hydration
10. If they can't already, start learning, with guidance, how to cook simple meals



## Next Generation/older Academy or athletes aged 18-19

At this stage we'd suggest athletes should be focusing on enhancing their ability to work with their coach(es) for best outcome as well as exploring taking responsibility for what has previously been managed and owned by you (their parent). They should also be exploring and driving what to do when they're post 18 e.g., education or employment choices and how this balances with triathlon, along with preparing (learning the life-skills) for any transition that may come.

Some examples of this might look like:

1. Research and bring their own ideas to coaching discussions
2. Seek to take the lead in engaging their coaches
3. Become the primary contact for Programme information and enquiries
4. Proactively use the information in their training diary to update their coaching team
5. Proactively lead on communication with school and begin to develop a really strong relationship with the key staff who can support their dual career
6. Manage their race entries and the travel planning that goes with it
7. Do some if not all of their own bike mechanics e.g., be able to service their bike
8. Get themselves to training (when/where possible)





## Next Generation/older Academy or athletes aged 18-19

Some examples of what this might look like (cont'd)

9. Contact the coach at a chosen university to arrange a visit (if choosing to go to uni) and/or be proactive with discussions around their sporting commitments with employers
10. Begin to understand about personal finance and budgeting
11. At a point when there isn't a lot of study pressure, plan a full week's worth of meals (or more) either for themselves or the whole family, then shop for and cook them.
12. Ensure they're fully conversant with washing their own clothes and kit



## Case Study

Vicky Holland reflects on the importance of being ready to take complete ownership of the responsibilities that come with leaving home and looking after yourself.

“Looking back I really struggled through my time at Uni and didn’t appreciate it at the time. Mum, because I was so busy with school and sport, had done so much to make my life easier when I lived at home and I wasn’t as mature an 18 year old as I thought. I looked back after a year or two at that girl that turned up at Loughborough as the 1500m English Schools Champ, who wanted to win and was utterly driven and remember being disappointed at how much I had changed. I just wasn’t invested in being an athlete, I was going out a lot and really struggling to own, manage and balance everything.’





## And finally ... the other 3 pillars

Intelligent Training, Intelligent Racing and One Day One Race in the main, cover the more technical elements of triathlon and therefore will need majority input from a coach.

As with the first three pillars though there are some common higher-level themes that you can support here and these very much mirror some of the information that is shared in the Performance Parents Handbook [here](#) especially the first – *Understanding The Development Journey* and third sections *Being the Best Possible Supporter and Facilitator*.

Your abilities to be able to contextualise your athlete's journey along with supporting their continued development through excellent use of questions to challenge their reflective processes and by getting them constantly to take greater ownership of their development journey both inside and outside of their sport will be of tremendous benefit for them.





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