

WHEN TO INTERVENE: SPOTTING UNSAFE COACHING OR INSTRUCTING

*Written on behalf of the CSPA Coaching Working Committee (CWC) and Women's Initiative Committee (WIC)
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Unsafe coaching and instructing rarely looks dramatic; it more often appears as small lapses, skipped steps, ignored protocols, or subtle pressure that seem harmless in the moment but quietly erode safety, normalize shortcuts, and create the conditions where judgment dulls and risk grows until something finally goes wrong.

Red Flags to Watch For

- Poor supervision or inconsistent oversight
- Outdated techniques or non-compliance with current standards
- Pressure to rush progression or “move up” too soon
- Ignoring readiness, consent, or comfort
- Inadequate briefings or debriefings
- Failure to model safety protocols
- Dismissing questions or concerns
- Missing or incomplete documentation
- Neglected equipment checks
- Disregard for weather, DZ conditions, or airspace
- Bullying, intimidation, or abuse of authority

One of the most dangerous patterns is pushing students or novices ahead before they're ready, whether to keep them engaged, meet business goals, or out of impatience. The CSPA emphasizes that foundational skills, especially canopy control and landing accuracy, must be mastered before advancement. Quality instruction and coaching respects physical, psychological, and emotional readiness; brushing off anxiety, confusion, or fatigue undermines trust and increases risk. Thorough briefings and debriefings are essential and skipping them hides problems and weakens learning.

Instructors and coaches set the tone, and when they cut corners on gear checks, weather holds, or DZ rules, students and novices internalize those behaviours, leading to normalization of deviance as unsafe practices quietly become “normal.” A safe learning environment encourages questions, while belittling or ignoring concerns shuts down communication and prevents early reporting of hazards. Accurate logbooks and documentation are equally critical for accountability and progression tracking. Abuse of authority, whether overt or subtle, damages psychological safety and is directly linked to increased incidents.

When and How to Intervene

Recognizing unsafe instruction and coaching is only the first step. Intervening protects lives, upholds standards, and strengthens a culture where everyone can speak up.

Peer-to-Peer Interventions

When to Intervene

- You see skipped safety checks or rushed progression
- A colleague dismisses concerns or uses outdated techniques
- You notice complacency or disregard for DZ protocols

How to Intervene

- **Choose the right moment:** Speak privately and promptly
- **Communicate respectfully:** Use “I” statements
- **Focus on safety, not blame:** Emphasize shared responsibility
- **Offer support:** Share resources or review procedures together
- **Escalate if needed:** Bring concerns to a senior instructor, DZSO, or DZO

Sample Script:

“Hey, I noticed you skipped the full canopy control briefing with your student/novice. I know things are busy, but that’s a critical step for their safety. Can I help cover the next one, or do you want to review the checklist together?”

Student/Novice-to-Instructor/Coach Interventions

When to Intervene

- You feel unsafe, confused, or pressured
- Your concerns are dismissed
- You observe unsafe practices or equipment issues

How to Intervene

- Speak up early: “I’m not comfortable with this skill yet.”
- Ask for clarification
- Request a second opinion
- Document concerns if unresolved
- Know your rights: you can refuse unsafe instruction without retaliation

Sample Script:

“I’m not sure I’m ready for this jump. Can we review the landing pattern again or wait for another day?”

Staff Interventions & Escalation

When to Intervene

- Repeated unsafe coaching or ethical violations
- Reports of bullying, harassment, or abuse of authority

How to Intervene

- Follow DZ SoPs
- Document incidents and gather statements
- Initiate formal review processes
- Protect whistleblowers
- Implement corrective actions (retraining, suspension, rating review)

Escalation Ladder

1. Direct conversation
2. Report to DZSO or senior instructor
3. Formal report to DZO and/or CSPA
4. External review or disciplinary action

Ethical Accountability & Psychological Safety

A safe skydiving community depends on ethical accountability. This includes owning mistakes, reporting concerns, and supporting transparent review processes.

Key elements include:

- **Transparency:** Open discussion of incidents and near-misses
- **Non-retaliation:** Protecting those who speak up
- **Continuous improvement:** Regular review of training and culture
- **Inclusion:** Ensuring all voices are heard

Psychological safety is essential. When people can ask questions, admit uncertainty, or raise concerns without fear, risks are caught earlier and learning improves. Punitive cultures silence people; restorative approaches strengthen trust, skills, and systems.

Building a Culture of Safety

- Encourage open dialogue and feedback
- Recognize proactive safety behaviours
- Provide scenario-based training and roleplays
- Ensure confidential reporting pathways
- Address incidents with empathy and transparency

Skydiving runs on trust, earned through vigilance, accountability, and shared responsibility. Spotting and addressing unsafe coaching is not the job of a few; it is the duty of everyone on the DZ. Every voice matters. Every intervention counts. Together, we build a safer, stronger skydiving community.

Further Resources:

[Coaching Association of Canada | Association canadienne des entraîneurs](#)
[PIM 5 Policies & Procedures Standards of Integrity](#)