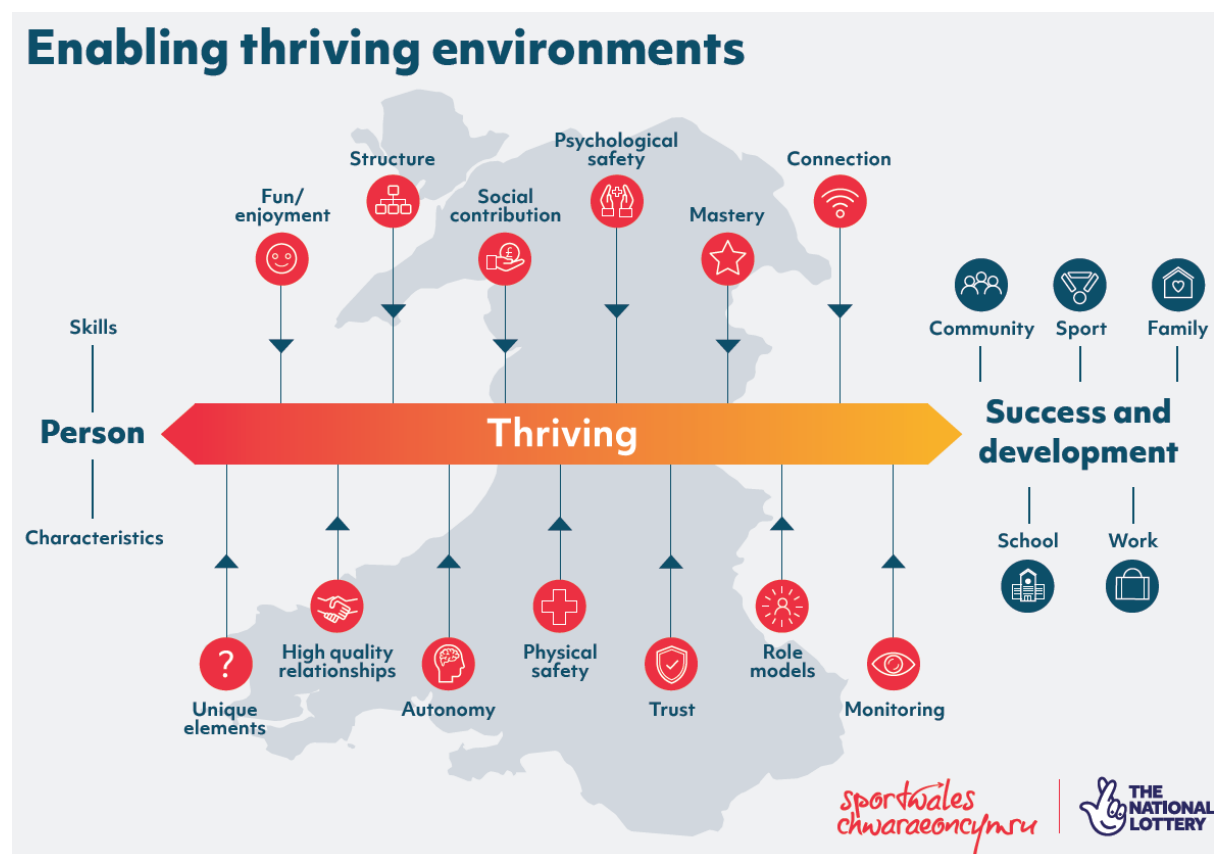


Game – Set – Support: Promoting Autonomy in Youth Tennis

Introduction

In the winter of 2023/2024, Sport Wales presented to the parents of U10, U12, and U14 national training players around the concept of thriving environments. As a reminder, thriving refers to the joint experience of success and development, where perceived levels of high performance don't come at the cost of wellbeing. As shown by the image below of the Sport Wales Thriving Environments framework, there are a number of features that enable a thriving environment, that include psychological safety, role models, and autonomy:



In the parent focus groups, we asked parents to consider the following questions:

- *What does thriving look like for your child?*
- *What helps or hinders your child from thriving?*
- *How can Tennis Wales best support you and your child?*

A unique aspect of parenting a young tennis player, is the role of autonomy. To thrive, your child must learn to be independent, to self-monitor and self-motivate, and to work

without the constant feedback from a coach. In turn, you, as the parent, must find the balance between coach/parent/psych, knowing when and how to foster this independence. In creating opportunities for your child to experience autonomy, you are developing one of their most basic of human psychological needs and increasing their chance of experiencing thriving.

What we know about 'autonomy'

- Autonomy is the need for control, independence, and choice.
- Parents and coaches can enable young people to experience autonomy through providing opportunities for them to make decisions and solve problems for themselves (or with the appropriate levels of support, dependent on their age and stage).
- This can be challenging. Sometimes it may be quicker to get your child's kitbag ready for them or have conversations with their coaches on their behalf. It will be difficult to watch your child fail or struggle, and know you can step in. Try to resist.
- Despite this, providing opportunities for autonomy is worthwhile; it leads to many benefits, that include:
 - Increases in motivation
 - Coping better during periods of challenge
 - Development of life skills that help young people to transition successfully through different areas of their lives
 - Staying in sport for longer and being well equipped to progress through the pathway

Given the key role autonomy plays in thriving, Tennis Wales is making this the focus of a new Parent Hub aimed at supporting parents of young Welsh tennis players. The parent hub will combine web page articles, infographics, and webinars with the aim of promoting independent, thriving young tennis players (and parents).