

Coach LA

Playbook

City of Los Angeles
Department of Recreation & Parks



Dear Coach,

Thank you for choosing to be a part of the City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks Team! We are stewards to over 16,000 acres of parkland, offering extensive recreational, social and cultural programs at 446 park sites in every Los Angeles neighborhood from the valley to the ocean. As part of our core values, we believe that every young person involved in sports should be encouraged to celebrate, to try new things, and to build relationships which are more crucial than any win or loss record. Coaches play a central role in involving young people in play and sport.

This is why, with the help of Nike and the Center for Healing and Justice through Sport, we have invested in coaching in a new and meaningful way. We've committed to ensuring that coaches have what they need to make the best possible experiences for every young person they are working with. We've spent months digging into the research, listening to our staff, and most importantly, learning from the great coaches already out on the field to create this playbook. In it, you'll find what we have uncovered to be the core elements – or the DNA – of great LA Rec and Parks coaching.

A great coach makes the sport experience inclusive for all young people – not regardless of who they are, but because of who they are. Coaches help them believe in one another in a way that transcends the field and seeps into friendships that will last beyond any season.

We welcome you and hope you'll find something here that reinforces this great endeavor by allowing you to build healthy communities through people, parks, and programs.

- Jimmy Kim, General Manager
City of Los Angeles Recreation and Parks Department

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About This Guide



Great Job
You're doing good
How are you
You can do it
You got this
Try this
Let me show
Keep trying
You're getting better
Water break
Watch her/him
I believe in you

Set goals
Get into the player's frame
Include
Demonstrate
Reward
Practice feedback
Positive tone
Build up
Affirm people's abilities
Make you feel safe

The City of Los Angeles Department of Recreation and Parks is committed to getting the next generation of Angelenos moving, and proud to partner with Nike through its Made to Play commitment and its coaching collaborator, the Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS), to bring this playbook to life for LA Rec and Parks dedicated staff and coaches.

This guide is designed to help coaches:

- 1 Understand LA Rec & Parks' core coaching approach and philosophy.**
- 2 Provide LA Rec & Parks coaches with tools they can use to create a positive, safe, inclusive sport experience for every young person.**



LA Rec & Parks Informed Approach

This guide reflects the amazing work being done by LA Rec & Parks coaches and captures the DNA of LA Rec & Parks coaching. The Center for Healing and Justice Through Sport (CHJS) surveyed and conducted interviews and focus groups with a sample of staff, coaches, parents and participants across each of the regions of the city.

What we learned

Parents and participants generally **have positive experiences** with LA Rec & Parks programs and coaches.

More than 85%

of participants rated their experiences at their park and with their coach as **good or very good**

At least 85% believed that their coaches **“cared” or “cared a lot”** that they got better and had fun

The highest priorities for participants, parents and coaches among the LA Rec & Parks community include:

Participants having fun

Forming positive, protective relationships with their teammates

At the same time, coaches, staff and parents highlighted the **need for additional support and training for coaches:**

100% of coaches said they need **support in coaching** young people at different levels

Parents and staff identified the **need to support coaches**, especially first-year coaches

88% of coaches identified a **disconnect among the coaching community**, specifically those with a win-at-all-costs approach

How to BE a Great LA Rec & Parks Coach



The research tells us that, as a rule, young people who participate in sport:

- Are physically healthier
- Are more academically successful
- Have more well-developed social and emotional skills
- Have better mental health

But what we sometimes forget is that those outcomes are not guaranteed. They are the result of young people having positive experiences in sport and choosing to keep playing.

The flip side of this is that there are too many young people who don't gain the benefits of sport.

Young people from the following communities can find sport experiences unwelcoming or inaccessible:



That's why it's so important that coaches have the tools to create positive, inclusive, and developmentally appropriate sport experiences for all young people.

This is what it means to BE a great coach.

There are three core elements of great coaching — helping our young people:



If we do nothing else with young people, we should help them feel a sense of belonging on our teams.

What is belonging and why does it matter?

Belonging is more than just feeling safe.

Safe & Connected

We know that engagement in sport is highly correlated with how safe young people feel to be their whole selves. And that safety is deeply dependent on how connected they are, including:

- How much they like their coaches
- If they feel supported by their peers

Meaningful Contribution

Belonging also means believing that what we have to offer matters:

- That the team wouldn't be the same without us
- That what we contribute to the team is vital to its success, well-being, even its entire existence.



When young people belong, good things happen.

Research shows us that young people who feel a sense of belonging in schools are:

More motivated

Engage more deeply in the learning

More likely to choose to be part of the environment

All things we want in sport, too — **motivated, engaged athletes who choose to keep coming back!**

There's no one way to belong. Creating a safe, relationally rich space where kids feel like their contributions matter is not the same for every athlete.

It takes work to figure out what matters to each young person, but we guarantee the work you put in to make sure kids belong will be worth it. The good news is that there are some things that we know will help along the way — and you'll see them throughout this playbook.



We have to teach them how to learn. We've all heard stories (or have our own stories) about how playing sports helped us achieve more in other parts of our lives; that playing sport helped prepare us for what came after.

We have to make sure that all of our young people are in the best place to learn when they step onto the field or dive into the pool.

Get rid of the idea that kids should "leave it at the door."

This expectation is not biologically respectful. Our brains are built based on our experiences, so it's physically impossible not to bring them with us.

A young person's experiences impact:

- How they engage in sport
- How they behave in sport
- What they gain things from sport



Understanding that young people bring their whole selves including their experiences outside sport to practice enables better support for the young person who shows up; not the one we think SHOULD be there.

Understand what is keeping kids from being ready.

There are a lot of things that can keep them from being ready for practice:

- Maybe they are hungry
- Didn't get enough sleep
- Had a bad experience at school
- Maybe there is too much stress & chaos in their lives

When any of these things are true, their bodies and brains react a certain way — they put their guard up and go into "survival mode".

Two things happen to kids who aren't ready for practice:

<p>1</p> <p>They are more likely to have problems focusing & fully participating.</p> <p>Often, the young people who are having the hardest time or the most challenging behavior during practice are the ones who aren't ready for it.</p>	<p>2</p> <p>Kids who aren't ready for practice have a hard time learning.</p> <p>When their brains are in survival mode, they're busy protecting themselves.</p> <p>The parts of our brain that are used for learning shut down.</p>
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We can help kids be ready by spending the time to make sure that:

- kids feel safe and connected
- have the chance to move their bodies

Investing in this at the beginning of practice will make a huge impact in the rest of your session.

Help kids get their bodies and brains ready.

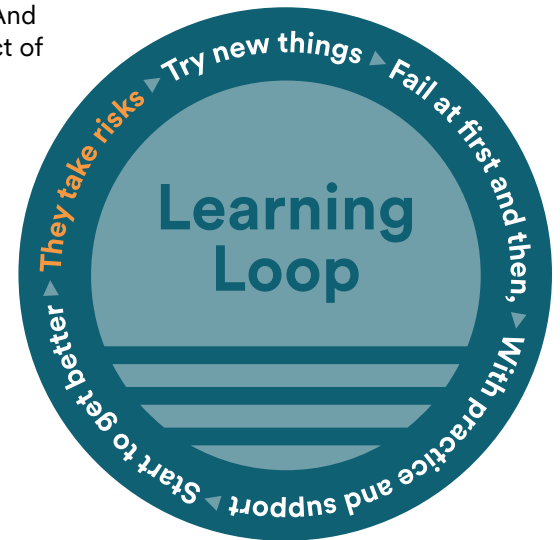
Skill development is youth development. And that includes **sport skill development**. Often when we talk about the benefits of sport, we immediately think about the essentials skills we develop – like teamwork, discipline, or getting back up when we fail – that can be used in other parts of our lives. And those skills are really important. But it’s important not to minimize the impact of helping kids get better at sport skills, too.

When kids learn skills three great things happen:

1
They learn how to learn.

The process of learning a new skill is the same on the field, in the classroom or in any other parts of our lives.

Getting to practice that learning loop means kids are more comfortable with it and more likely to engage with it in other parts of their lives.



Efficacy is the process of going from “I can’t” to “I can.”

When a young person’s efficacy grows, they believe that they can learn new things, no matter how hard they seem. They approach challenges with a positive attitude, believing that if they work hard and stick with it, they can get better. Even if something is out of reach to start, they believe that it won’t always be because they have some control over the process. Unfortunately, resilience is a widely misunderstood concept. We think that young people become resilient when they face really significant adversities. But that’s not how we become resilient, it is instead when we show our resilience.

2
They gain efficacy.

3
They build resilience.

Resilience is actually developed in the exact opposite conditions — when we are able to successfully manage lots of little challenges.

Young people become resilient when they face challenges that stress them just enough to help them get better, but not so much that they become overwhelmed.

Every time we help a young person build a skill in sport, we’re challenging them in that resilience-building way.

And that resilience goes with them wherever they go so they can face challenges wherever they are.



The **BE**haviors of a Great Coach



Now that we know how important it is for young people to **Belong, Be Ready** and **Be Better**, we can think about the pieces that go into each of these skills. We've broken each of these elements down into the building blocks of great coaching:

Building Blocks of Being a Great Coach



Being a great coach is the process of building a strong foundation first by creating of a culture of Belonging, then building on the elements of being ready and finally helping them be better.”



Coaches create belonging by:

Building trust

In order to really belong, they have to feel like they're safe to bring their whole selves to the team. No one has more power to make a young person feel safe than the coach – **be predictable so they feel safe and curious so that they feel seen, heard and acknowledged.**

Offer opportunities for each player to make a true contribution

Being part of the team isn't what makes young people belong. They need to be an integral part of that team's identity and growth, and know that **what they have to offer the group matters.** When they have the chance to make a meaningful contribution to a team, that's when they know they belong.

Facilitating a great team environment

Belonging is feeling like you are a part of something that matters. Being accepted by teammates is a huge part of belonging. Coaches play a significant role in **helping young people create positive peer relationships.**



Coaches help kids be ready to learn when they:

Prepare in advance to prevent kids from getting out of whack

If we start practices with **intentional transitions, and predictable rituals and routines**, all young people will be better able to engage and learn — even the ones who are otherwise on high alert because they have a lot of stress or chaos in their lives.

Prolong healthy engagement by helping them Reset

Getting comfortable in high-pressure situations, is one of the things we get to practice in sport. **Teaching young people to recognize when they are overwhelmed by stress and how to handle it** is something that makes them a better athlete, and helps them off the field, too.

Protect young people when survival mode takes over and they lose focus

Sport is inherently stressful, and sometimes, that stress can be too much for our young people (or us). **Real safety for athletes comes when they know that we will always be invested in them** — even when (especially when) they make mistakes.



Coaches help kids be better when they:

Create environments in which kids can be brave

Learning new things is dependent on being willing to take risks. Taking risks requires us and them to be brave. Creating an environment that prioritizes and rewards bravery is **the first step to helping young people build sport and life skills.**

Build in ways that are specific to them

One of the best ways to make sure an athlete is engaged is by **helping them set and achieve realistic, individual goals.** Because no two players' journeys are the same, coaches need lots of skills to help young people build sport and life skills.

Help them believe in themselves so they will be more willing to try new things and take risks

Tracking your progress and being able to see, and feel, yourself get better at something helps build a young person's efficacy. **Kids who have a lot of self-efficacy are the kids who believe that they can take on new challenges** – they go from thinking “I can’t” to “I can.”

Building on the **BE**haviors of a **Great Coach**



We know that many of you are already doing these things — you’re building trust and team, and helping young people be brave. In fact, we hope now that you see this, you are thinking about all the things that you do that fit into this model. Keep it up!

But in case there are a few areas where you think you could do more, or you’d like more strategies, we’ve broken the building blocks into **BEhaviors**.

You might be saying to yourself, wow, that’s so many things to do! And that’s intentional. We want coaches to be able to design their own path to keep doing the great things that you are doing and add things that you fit your skills and style.

We thought it might be helpful to breakdown how to start. Or where to **BEgin**?

We know you have a ton on your plate, so we have simplified this further across three main strategies. They are:



BEhaviors are tangible actions you can take today to create the best experience for young people.

Rituals can serve a lot of purposes, most of which have to do with helping an athlete **Be Ready**.

Rituals can be used to create predictability and structure which results in:

1. Making young people feel safe because they know what to expect.
2. Helping young people calm themselves down or refocus; especially regulating activities.
3. Fostering connection with teammates while solidifying an athlete's sense of belonging.

This is how Rituals might look like across the Three Be's:

BELONG

Team-Ready Rituals

Opportunities for teams to bond and for everyone to contribute.

Example: Pasta dinners the night before a race.

Team Celebration Rituals

The way your team celebrates in the moment or as rites of passage that players go through when they achieve some kind of goal.

Example: Lining up at home plate when a player hits a homerun or goal celebrations in soccer.

BE READY

Ready Rituals

How you help them get ready for practice or a game and how you help them transition from one activity to the next.

Example: Softball players running out of the dugout the same way every time.

Reset Rituals

How you help young people calm down or focus through stress.

Example: Players on the free throw line while the opposing fans yell and wave things or the volleyball team that comes together to high-five between every play.

BE BETTER

Risk-taking Rituals

The thing you do to pump yourself up before you try something new.

Example: A "pump-up" mix or a team cheer.

Mistake Rituals

Whatever you can do to move on from a mistake.

Example: A softball player snapping out into the field and her teammates snapping back.

Check-ins allow us to create a common understanding with our players. It fundamentally helps avoid miscommunications.

It also reminds young people that we, as their coach, are interested in them and care about how they are doing.

This is how Check-Ins might look like across the Three Be's:

BELONG

Check-in for Connection

“How have you been since the last time I saw you?” lets your athletes know you’re interested. “How was your trip to see you grandmother?” or “How did it go with that big math test?” lets your athletes know you were paying attention.

Check-in for Feedback

“On a scale of 1 (worst coach ever) to 5 (best coach ever) how do you think I did today?” encourages athlete voice and leadership. You can have them write the number on a piece of paper if you want to protect their privacy. Or you can have an assistant coach or team captain tally the votes/ give you a summary while you look away. It also models that you want to improve, just like you want them to improve.

BE READY

Check-in for Athlete Baseline

“On a scale of 1 (worst day ever) to 5 (best day ever) how was your day today?” or “Thumbs up, down or middle — how are you feeling as we start practice” allows you to establish a baseline from your athlete’s perspective (not just what you think the baseline is) and can give you important information about how they are or will move through practice.

BE BETTER

Check-in for Skills

“If you had to rate yourself, 1 to 5, how would you say you’re doing with that new skill?” can tell you important information about how the athlete sees the challenge and their ability to meet the challenge. It helps you avoid misunderstandings with your players, and it can help you set goals with them — “Great, if you’re a 3, how do we get to 3.5 today?”

Check-in for Reflection

“Before we move on, where did you start with that skill? Where did you end?” or “What’s one thing that you think you did well in that activity?” can help make sure your players see that they are making progress and that they’ve grown. This helps build efficacy. It also reminds the players that what they think matters (and not just what the coach thinks).

In sport, too often we equate a player's worth with their performance. Young people who are new to the game, haven't had a growth spurt yet, or just want to have fun are measured by how many points they score or their times on a stopwatch.

We believe that **EVERY PLAYER IS VALUABLE JUST BY SHOWING UP**. Their value as a part of our team is determined by their humanity, not by their jump shot.

This is how Mirror Moments might look like across the Three Be's:

BELONG

Ask Questions

A coach's default is often to "tell" — to give instructions. Instead, spark engagement and learning and make young people feel seen, heard and acknowledged by asking more questions. You'll be amazed at how much more effective it is than simply telling young people what to do.

Fair, Not Equal

I heard a kindergarten teacher once describe fair as "not everything is the same, but everyone gets what they need." Too many sports "norms" revolve around the idea that everyone on the team is treated the same way and must do everything the exact same way. This is inherently exclusive and doesn't encourage young people to focus on growth.

BE READY

Coach the Bench, Praise the Play

When young people are competing, their brains are on high alert. This means that most "coaching" that happens during play is wasted breath and energy since the player isn't comprehending what the coach is saying. Instead, when a player is on the court or field, be predictable and safe by simply encouraging them. Wait to share coaching tips with a player when they are taking a break or sitting on the bench.

BE BETTER

Focus on Progress, Not Performance

Not every player is going to be the best athlete on the team. Avoid too many comparisons between players by focusing on how much an athlete improved. Instead of saying "Wow, Anthony is the best passer on the team," say "Wow, Claire has gotten so much better at passing!"

Separate Worth from Performance

There are countless small things you can do to make sure that young people know their value is not determined by their sport performance. Start by letting them know that you're glad they are there, that it's nice to see them. It sounds simple, but it makes a huge difference.

Building Blocks of Being a Great Coach with Key BEhaviors

BE BETTER

Skill Building

RITUALS
Mistake rituals

CHECK-INS
Skills check-in

MORE BEhaviors!

- Show, tell, try
- Scaffold up & down
- Take an athlete's perspective
- Groupings for skill

Brave

RITUALS
Risk-taking rituals

MIRROR MOMENTS
Separate worth from performance

MORE BEhaviors!

- Be predictable in order to create safety
- Offer choice & control
- Show, share & shout Out bravery

Believe

CHECK-INS
Reflection check-ins

MIRROR MOMENTS
Focus on progress, Not performance

MORE BEhaviors!

- Set personal records
- Progress reminders
- Ask: how did you do that?

BE READY

Prepare

RITUALS
Ready rituals

CHECK-INS
Athlete baseline check-ins

MORE BEhaviors!

- Patterned, Repetitive, Rhythmic Activity (PRRA) – prevent injury
- Predictable routines
- Dysregulation plan

Reset

RITUALS
Reset rituals

MORE BEhaviors!

- Offer time outs & do overs
- Mix up competition
- Dysregulation station

Protect

RITUALS
Mistake rituals

MIRROR MOMENTS

- Coach the bench, praise the play
- Separate worth from performance

BELONG

Trust

CHECK-INS
Connection check-ins

MIRROR MOMENTS
• Ask questions
• Fair, not equal

MORE BEhaviors!
Learn names

True Contribution

RITUALS
Team celebration rituals

CHECK-INS
Feedback check-ins

MORE BEhaviors!

- Offer leadership roles
- Reward ALL contributions
- Share decision-making power

Team

RITUALS
Team ready rituals

MORE BEhaviors!

- Groupings for connection
- Clear, simple expectations
- Model positive interactions

Tools to **BE a** Great Coach



On the next two pages, you'll see some practice plans tips including:

1

Focus
Areas

Suggested areas you can focus on during practice. We hope it will get your creative juices flowing.

2

Key
Behaviors

Where you might incorporate new **mirror moments** to make sure your players know they are valuable.

3

Worksheet

A worksheet for you to make notes — what do you want to focus on during each part of practice?



TIME
(60 min)

PRACTICE COMPONENT

COACH FOCUS

5 mins	Circle Up	Establish a routine, so players know what to expect (e.g. how practice will start every day). Check-ins, previewing the day, and letting young people share what's top of mind for them.	<p>BELONG: Always form a circle — circles put everyone at the same level and make us feel safe.</p> <p>BE READY: Have a routine — predictability allows young people to let their guard down.</p> <p>BELONG and BE READY: Check in to get an athlete baseline and to show that you are invested in them as people.</p>
5 mins	Warm-Up	Make your warm-up consistent, active and focused on connection. Even better if it's youth-led. This is a time to shake off what's happened during the day and focus on practice.	<p>BELONG: A good time to practice names and making sure they know you're glad they are there.</p> <p>BE READY: Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activity helps us get ready; Predictable routines make us feel safe so we can more deeply engage.</p>
10 mins	Skill Building	Introduce your skill of the day. Start with a simple drill and add difficulty. Notice how the team responds as the challenge increases. Before moving on to the next activity, spend a minute doing part of the skill they've mastered again — it will help them reset and move forward (and avoid challenging behavior).	<p>BE READY: Use rituals and routines to get ready for challenge — preview when the challenge will increase and invite players to reset/restart whenever they need to.</p> <p>BE BETTER: Check in with players to find out how they think they are doing — it will help you set goals and provide better tips for how to improve.</p> <p>BE BETTER: Remind players of their mistake rituals! Mistakes are the way we learn.</p>
15 mins	Drills	Transition into drills that use the skills you've been teaching. Watch how this increases the pressure and who might need a restart, ritual, or reset.	<p>BE READY and BE BETTER: Mix up competition so that you are challenging players to beat personal records, combine for a team record, or find the day's winning team.</p>
15 mins	Games	Transition into games that reinforce the skill you are working on — making the environment more like competitions.	<p>BE BETTER: Remember to recognize players who are being brave, taking risks, and trying new things! It matters that you focus on this when it counts!</p>
5 mins	Cool Down	Consistently follow your end-of-practice routine to cool down from the day's activities and get ready to transition out of practice.	<p>BE READY: Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activity helps us get ready for whatever is next — predictable routines make us feel safe so we can retain what we've learned.</p>
5 mins	Circle Up	Give players time to connect with each other and talk about whatever is going on for them.	<p>BELONG and BE BETTER: Check-in and see where your players are — what did they notice that changed for them today? Ask them how they thought you did that day and what could be better for them next time.</p>

Practice Plans



TIME
(60 min)

COACH FOCUS

COACH FOCUS

5 mins	Circle Up	Check-In	
5 mins	Warm-Up	Ritual	
10 mins	Skill Building	Check-In	
15 mins	Drills	Mirror Moments	
15 mins	Games	Mirror Moments	
5 mins	Cool Down	Ritual	
5 mins	Circle Up	Check-In	

Designing an age-appropriate practice

What's good (and fun) for a 6-year-old is not the same as what's good for a 16-year-old. Here's a quick-start guide to help you design practices that are right for the age of your team.

	Ages 5-8	Ages 9-12	Ages 13 and up
Practice Activities	<p>Simple and Fun</p> <p>Play games that relate to your sport (i.e. tag, handball, spud); emphasize fundamental movement skills (Be Ready) and very basic sport skills.</p>	<p>Fundamental Sport Skills</p> <p>Give kids lots of chances to build skills (Be Better) and encourage teamwork (Belong).</p>	<p>Complex Skills and Game Strategy</p> <p>Introduce more cognitive aspects of the game and progressively more challenge.</p> <p>Encourage teammates to motivate each other; promote leadership (Belong).</p>
Coach Approach	<p>Be silly!</p> <p>Kids this age respond to high energy are ready to laugh.</p>	<p>High energy!</p> <p>Can be more serious but they will still feed off of your energy.</p>	<p>Share power!</p> <p>Kids are ready to take more leadership roles and have more control over their experience.</p>
Activity Length	Not more than 8 minutes	Not more than 12 minutes	15-20 minutes
Modifications	<p>Modify equipment and field dimensions, and take lots of breaks to accommodate their smaller size and low endurance.</p>	<p>Modify equipment and field dimensions for success.</p>	
Competition	<p>Just Play</p> <p>Don't emphasize competition; help teams start to set achievable goals that aren't necessarily sport related. Be sure to celebrate all efforts to meet those goals.</p>	<p>Self-Competition</p> <p>Teams work together to beat their own records or times; players can work on improving their individual records.</p>	<p>Competition</p> <p>Teams compete against each other; there are winners and losers.</p> <p>Continue to offer multiple ways to be competitive as young people build their tolerance to stress.</p>
Coaching Time	Maximum 30 seconds of talking at a time.	Maximum 1 minute of talking at a time.	Maximum 2 minutes of talking at a time.

You can find more information about different age groups in our "age and stage planner" in the appendix.

Making Modifications

Chances are that the team you're coaching will have a range of skills — physical, social and emotional skills. That means that you have to be ready to deal with a wide range of kids all at the same time.

Being flexible, and willing to make modifications to what you're doing, will help you adapt to the players on your team so that you can be sure you're not pushing them beyond where they can manage (**Be Ready**), and building skills in a way that works for their specific needs (**Be Better**). Some things you can try:



Space

Change the size of your space to match your players' age and stage and accomplish your goals.

- If you want players to move more, make the space bigger.
- If you're emphasizing changing the point of attack, make the space wider.
- If your players are younger and don't have as much stamina yet, make the space smaller.
- If you want to increase engagement, add extra goals or play with extra hoops.

Equipment

Think about what equipment you are using and how you can use it differently to create more success for your players and help them learn the game.

Modify the equipment to make beginning skills easier to manage so that young people have some initial success:

- Hit a ball by using a larger ball or pitching slower.
- Make it easier to score a goal by not having a goalie.
- Rally with your partner in tennis by lowering the net or using a larger ball.

Rules

Create new rules to accommodate your team's and players needs to teach new or developing skills and encourage true contribution.

- If you're working on passing, don't let the team score until they've completed 3 passes.
- If your team is struggling with substitutions, implement clear guidelines on who plays when.
- Do you think games should be played in quarters instead of halves for younger players — let the league know.

Roles

Coaches don't have to be yelling from the sidelines.
Change roles so that your young people are getting what they need, not what we think sport is supposed to look like.

- Encourage parents to walk the perimeter of the space so they can get some exercise and set a good example for their kids (they'll be more regulated, too).
- Ask the referees to join the team huddles so that the referee can see the game through the eyes of the players.
- Ask referees to explain rules when they are enforced so the players learn while they play.

Appendix



Age and Stage Planner

Young people bring their experiences with them to practice. Things that have happened to them that day or in the past influence how they behave at practice. As a coach, the best thing you can do is to treat each player as an individual and over time, learn how to challenge and support each player on his or her own terms. This section will give you some ideas about how young people grow and develop (although, remember, it's not an exact science) so you can meet them where they are.

	Young People (5-8)	Older Young People (9-12)	Teens (13 and up)
Their Bodies	<p>Begin to run.</p> <p>Learning to jump, hop, throw, catch.</p>	<p>Like games with rules and contact.</p> <p>Improved body control, accuracy, speed, and reaction times.</p>	<p>Big hormone increases, growth spurts.</p> <p>Fine motor skills improve at faster rates for boys than girls.</p> <p>Girls add body fat, boys add muscle mass.</p>
Their Brains	<p>Take instruction very literally.</p> <p>Short attention spans mean coaches should keep instructions short and rotate activities often.</p>	<p>Eager to learn and try out new skills.</p> <p>Varying abilities to understand directions and expectations.</p> <p>Sensitive to distractions and may need continuous redirection.</p> <p>Will look for opportunities to contribute their ideas and advice.</p>	<p>Seek structure and routine in an atmosphere of exploration.</p> <p>Part of the brain responsible for complex reasoning developing at a fast rate (but still under-developed) which means it's a great time to practice decision making.</p> <p>Will start to test boundaries.</p>
Their Feelings	<p>Just starting to control strong emotions.</p> <p>Will verbalize what they are feeling and say whatever comes to mind.</p> <p>Thrive on encouragement and positive feedback.</p>	<p>Still developing the ability to control strong emotions.</p> <p>Sensitive to sarcasm and criticism; thrive on encouragement and positive feedback.</p>	<p>Part of the brain responsible for experience of emotions is in overdrive and they are STILL developing the ability to control strong emotions.</p> <p>Highly sensitive to personal criticism; Actively seek recognition for positive efforts.</p>
Their Teammates	<p>Start playing as a group.</p> <p>Kid to kid relationships begin.</p> <p>Begin to develop morals.</p>	<p>Understand moral rules, social norms, and individual rights.</p> <p>School, physical appearance and sports impact self-esteem.</p>	<p>Want increased autonomy.</p> <p>Peer pressure and conformity increase.</p> <p>Relationships become stronger and last longer.</p> <p>Moral reasoning improves.</p>

TRUST

Learn Names

If you want young people to know you care, then you must learn their names or work on learning their names. Not being good at remembering names is not an excuse — it's a chance to model working hard to do something that doesn't come naturally.

Ask Questions

A coach's default is to tell — to give instructions. Instead, spark engagement and learning, and make young people feel seen, heard and acknowledged by asking more questions. You'll be amazed at how much more effective it is than simply telling young people what to do.

Fair, Not Equal

I heard a kindergarten teacher once describe fair "not as everything is the same, but that everyone gets what they need." Too many sports "norms" revolve around everyone on the team having to do things the exact same way. This is inherently exclusive and doesn't encourage young people to focus on growth.

Check-In: Connection

Make a point to check-in about something other than practice when you see young people. Learning about your players shows them that you're invested in them as whole people. Circling back to something you've learned makes them feel seen and heard.

TRUE CONTRIBUTION

Team Rituals

Find ways for your team to celebrate in the moment or as rites of passage that players go through when they achieve a goal. Think: lining up at home plate when a player hits a homerun, goal celebrations in soccer and senior awards celebrations.

Offer Leadership Roles

Not every player will be the star on the field, but every player does have something meaningful to contribute. One of the ways we help them see the value of their contribution is by giving them leadership roles. This can include being team captain for the day, running a drill, being in charge of a team event, picking up a teammate when they are down, giving the halftime speech, etc.

Reward All Contributions

In sport, there are some things that are easy to reward such as an athlete performing well. As coaches, it's our job to think about and reward all the ways that a player can contribute to the success of the team when we see them. Calling out the player who helped their teammate get to practice on time or was willing to stay late to learn a new move is just as important as recognizing the player who gets the walk off hit or sinks the winning shot.

Check-Ins: Feedback

When we think of feedback, we often think of asking players what their experience was like after the season is over. However, this means we miss the opportunity to improve as we go. Make reflection and feedback a normal part of the team by setting up regular ways to give and get feedback. You can use the same ranking system as you do for other check-ins. Use it to have players rate themselves and you on a variety of things throughout the season.

TEAM

Team Rituals

Find ways for your team to celebrate in the moment or as rites of passage that players go through when they achieve a goal. Think: lining up at home plate when a player hits a homerun, goal celebrations in soccer and senior awards celebrations.

Clear, Simple

Sometimes our well intentioned “team rules” just don’t work. Often, it’s because there are too many rules to remember, or the rules are too complicated to understand. Stick to the most essential rules you can (3-5 max) and try to make them about behaviors, not concepts, so everyone will understand. “Don’t talk when your teammates are talking” is better than “Respect your teammates” because everyone has a different definition of respect.

Model Positive Behavior

Our behavior sets the tone for the team. This means we need to treat the team the way we want them to treat each other: by welcoming all parts of them, being kind, honoring everyone’s contribution, and not associating a teammate’s worth with their athletic performance. We have a big influence, but we don’t have to be perfect. If we own our mistakes and apologize, we’re still modeling the kind of people we want our players to be!

Groupings For Connection

In sports, there are tons of opportunities for young people to “pair up” or work in small groups. Be intentional about how you create groups so that kids have a chance to work with different teammates. Be explicit about why you put players together such as learning what they have in common or what you hope they will get out of working together.

PREPARE

Check-In: Athlete

A quick check-in can tell you how your athletes are doing that day. You will learn which athletes to keep an eye on, how much transition time the team might need, and how hard to push a team on a given day. Check in at the beginning of practice to see how everyone is doing. You can do it quickly by using a simple hand gesture like 1 to 5 or thumbs up, down and middle.

Dysregulation Plan

When a young person is calm, talk to them about what they would like you to do when they lose their cool, get worked up, or experience painful defeat. If they have choice over the experience, then they are much more likely to feel supported at the right time and how they need it to be.

PRRA - Prevent Injury

Patterned, repetitive, rhythmic activity calms our brains down when we're stressed by helping us get regulated. The same kinds of activities that are good for rehabbing a physical injury are also good for supporting our brains when they get out of whack. Invest in PRRA at the beginning of practice to get athletes ready for the day.

Predictable Routines

Young people feel safe when they know what to expect. Try to follow the same routines to transition to and start practice every day. Preview for athletes what's coming so they aren't surprised by what's ahead.

Ready Rituals

We usually consider team activities when we think about how to get young people ready for practice or a game. In addition to team activities, encourage young people to have their own customized rituals that they go through to help them feel ready.

RESET

Dysregulation Plan

When a young person is calm, talk to them about what they would like you to do when they lose their cool, get worked up, or experience painful defeat. If they have choice over the experience, then they are much more likely to feel supported at the right time and how they need it to be.

Offer Timeouts & Do-Over

Allow young people to call their own timeouts so that they have control over their experience. If we let them have do-overs, then we encourage them to try things, make mistakes, and keep trying.

Reset Rituals: Be Ready Station

We all need time to reset when the pressure gets turned up and some need it more than others. Normalize the need for a reset by setting up a skill-building, calming station that includes patterned, repetitive rhythmic activities. This reminds young people that resetting is not a punishment.

Reset Rituals

Help young people find a ritual that helps them reset quickly and allows them to refocus. It might be a motion or a saying. It doesn't matter what it is or looks like as long as it works for them.

PROTECT

Mistake Ritual

No one enjoys making mistakes. And some young people have a particularly hard time coping with the experience of failing. Having a mistake ritual encourages young people to leave a mistake in the past so that they can move forward as quickly as possible.

Separate Worth from Performance

Too often in sports, young people believe their value has to do with their performance on the field. Young people who are confident that their coach and teammates value them no matter what happens when they play are the young people most willing to take risks, try new things, and subsequently, perform the best.

Coach the Bench

When young people are competing, their brains are on high alert. This means that most "coaching" that happens during play is ineffective breath and energy since the player isn't comprehending what the coach is saying. Instead, wait to share coaching tips with a player when they are taking a break and sitting on the bench.

Praise the Play

Make sure that any cheering during competition is encouragement. A young person's brain needs to feel safe and connected when they are stressed. When a coach is predictable and positive, young people create that connection and safety.

BRAVE

Separate Worth from Performance

There are countless small things you can do to make sure that young people know their value is not determined by their sport performance. Start by letting them know that you're glad they are there and that it's nice to see them. It sounds simple, but it makes a huge difference.

Be sure to focus on the unique contributions that EVERY player brings to the team.

Choice & Control

It makes all the difference when we get to decide if we're ready to try something new instead of having someone tell us when we must. Give young people the power to decide by making all challenges optional "when you're ready, try and ...".

Shout Out Bravery

Young people care about what we care about. If you reward bravery by shouting it out and complimenting young people when they are brave, you'll start to notice more and more young people being brave.

Be Predictable

When we don't know what to expect, we put our guard up. When you are consistent and your players know how you'll react, they can start to feel safe to take risks.

Show and Share Bravery

One of the best ways we can help young people take risks and try new things is by modeling it. Show them that we're willing to try new things and share stories of when we took risks.

Separate Worth from Performance

When a young person knows that their coach will support them even when they fail, it takes away the pressure of being perfect. This, ironically, encourages them to take more risks and try more things, which eventually makes them perform better.

Risk-Taking Rituals

The scariest part of taking risks is not knowing what will happen. Try and build in some predictability by helping young people come up with a ritual for taking a risk. It could be as simple as telling themselves "it's scary, but I'm brave".

SKILL BUILDING

Check-In: Skills

Sometimes when we're helping a young person learn a new skill, their perception of how they are doing with it compared to ours is different. Use check-ins (1 to 5, thumbs up or down, etc.) to understand how a player thinks they are doing with their skill. This tells us a lot about how to approach new instructions and corrections.

Groupings For Skills

When you have players with a wide range of skills, think about dividing them up based on how well they are performing the skill. This allows more advanced or experienced young people to continue learning while allowing less experienced players an opportunity to learn the new skill.

Scaffold Up & Down: Modifications

When we're working on building skills, we typically keep turning the dial up (more advanced skill, more pressure or time restraints) until we push young people past where they are comfortable. We don't usually give them time to recover from that challenge. It doesn't have to be long. It can be just 30 seconds or 1 minute of doing something (preferably patterned and rhythmic) that they are confident in. This will help them recover, get regulated and move onto the rest of the practice without incident.

Mistake Rituals

No one enjoys making mistakes. Some young people have a particularly hard time coping with the experience of failing. Having a mistake ritual encourages young people to leave a mistake in the past so that they can move forward as quickly as possible.

Take An Athlete's Perspective

Think about where you stand when you give instructions or demonstrate a new skill. Is the young person able to see it from their perspective? If not, is there a way to demonstrate the skill so that they can copy it exactly the way you're doing it?

Show, Tell, Try

Make sure that you're not only explaining what you want players to do, but also showing them, demonstrating, and even trying it with them. Some young people respond better to verbal instructions, some want to see it first, and some want to just try it. Make it possible for all players to do what works for them.

BELIEVE

Focus on Progress, Not Performance

Not every player is going to be the best athlete on the team. Avoid too many comparisons between players by focusing on how much an athlete has improved. Instead of saying, “Wow, Claire is the best passer on the team” say, “Wow, Anthony has gotten so much better at passing.”

Check-Ins: Reflection

Help young people get in the habit of reflecting on their progress by checking in. It might look like: “On a scale of 1 to 5, how good were you at serving when you started the volleyball season? And how good are you now?”

Set Personal Records

Help young people set achievable goals for themselves and encourage them when they reach them. The feedback loop of setting a goal, working to achieve it, and celebrating when you do, influences a young person’s confidence more than almost anything else.

Progress Reminders

Even when we focus on progress, young people will forget about their own progress and compare themselves to others. That’s why we must remind them how far they’ve come both in the short term, like from one practice to the next, and in the longer term, like over the course of a season.

How Did You Do That?

This is one of the best questions in coaching that will help you recognize when a player has done something new and encourages them to understand the process that got them there. This will allow them to use this process again when they are taking on a different challenge.



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