

# What Coaches Can Do to Create a Positive Youth Sports Experience

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The impact of coaches on young athletes' lives in and out of sports is well recognized. Coaches can positively influence the moral and social development of youth by setting a good example, acting as advisor, helping adolescents in trouble, and teaching pro-social values, teamwork, and cooperation.

The coach's interpersonal behaviors, values, goals, and priorities greatly influence the athlete's behaviors, self-perceptions, and self-esteem. Even casual remarks by a coach can have a significant effect. Coaches must always maintain acute awareness of children within earshot.

For most youth sports, the coach's priority is to ensure the enjoyment of the participants. Since the majority of coaches are volunteers with no formal training in coaching or child development, some may not have a developmentally appropriate coaching style, and may be unduly aggressive and have inappropriately high expectations of the players.

What follows are some tips for coaches on creating a positive youth sports experience:

- Be knowledgeable about the sport you are coaching.
- Be knowledgeable about the age group you are coaching.
- Be enthusiastic and genuine. Keep kids motivated with positive feedback. Make your rewarding statements sincere – kids can spot insincerity a mile away.
- Let everyone play and substitute players frequently.
  
- Understand the unique developmental skill patterns of that age group and make adjustments for that skill level. Remember that the inability to perform a certain skill may just be a lack of developmental timing, rather than a true lack of ability.
- Give kids small tasks to learn to increase chances for accomplishment. Reinforce and refine the skills that are achieved without pushing too quickly for other skills. If you train a child like an adult, you risk overtraining and injury.
- Make kids feel comfortable so they are not afraid to try new skills. Focus your verbal support on what skills they do right. Then your coaching support can more easily be directed at making constructive corrections in other skills.
- Have realistic expectations and communicate them so the active youngster can see improvement and acknowledge accomplishment more frequently and be more protected from societal pressure to perform for an ultimate prize.
- Teach good fundamental skills that the child can use to build on with the next coach or activity.
- Be alert for signs of overtraining and burnout.
  
- Know the limitations of aerobic development so you can maintain a solid aerobic base without overtraining, and concentrate on technique.
- Use caution in warmer conditions and hot environments and take frequent water breaks.
- Know when the circumstances are appropriate for weight training.
  
- Redefine success. Avoid the win-at-all-cost mentality. Emphasize effort and accomplishment more than winning.

- Gear the activity toward fun and a positive experience. You may be the very coach that helps inspire a child to stay involved in a sport and truly maximize his or her potential for reality success.
- As kids progress, give meaningful input on winning and losing, and emphasize that every practice and competition is an opportunity to learn and improve.
- Teach how to learn from successes, disappointments, and everything in between.
- Do not coach by intimidation.
- Be a good role model.
- Instill good sportsmanship (they are watching your example).
- Foster a sense of self-worth and confidence in the child or teen.
- Never cheat
- Avoid if at all possible losing one's temper
- Avoid negative criticism of teammates, assistant or opposing coaches, referees, and opposing players
- Avoid blaming teammates for mistakes or a poor team performance
- Never "trash talk" or taunt opponents
- Avoid showboating, or running up the score
- Avoid if at all possible arguing referees' calls and judgments

Coaching children is an honor and a privilege that carries with it a moral responsibility to contribute to the health character development of young players. Coaches who equate "trying your best" as the definition of success, and who value, expect, and demand good sportsmanship from their players, help shape the moral, ethical, and spiritual character of children.