

The Do's and Don'ts of Coaching Character in Youth Sports

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In an ideal situation, the kids you coach will learn sport skills, have fun, and develop countless life skills through their experiences being a part of a team. The best coaches work to help kids build and develop character by playing sports, but it takes effort to reach this goal. Coaches invested in helping kids develop holistically through sports need to develop their own coaching fair and consistent philosophies, protocols, and even disciplinary measures for when kids break team rules. Below are some ideas to consider as you prepare to coach kids this summer:

Do's

- ***Make it fun!*** Remember, the #1 reason why kids play sports is to have fun, making it all that much more important for you to bring your A-Game every day.
- ***Motivate.*** Make your spirit and energy contagious to kids and inspire them to try their best every day, even if they are not the most talented athletes.
- ***Instruct.*** Sports are full of “teachable moments,” allowing coaches to step in and provide important sport and life-skills training to kids.
- ***Support.*** Failing in sports can be a tough experience, especially in situations where kids feel they caused their team to lose. Good coaches lend their support to kids and inspire them to learn from tough experiences to improve for the future.
- ***Reinforce.*** Positive reinforcement is something everyone likes, but make sure to reinforce *effort*, not just results.
- ***Teach sportsmanship by modeling it.*** Shake hands, show respect to the opponent, and respect the officials calls — if you do, odds are the kids you coach will, too.
- ***Make yourself available to talk to parents.*** Similar to teachers, good coaches make themselves available to talk to parents who have questions about how their child can develop and maximize his or her efforts on the team.

Don'ts

- ***Intimidate.*** Most kids will already have some fear and anxiety starting a new team, making it important for coaches to make themselves approachable. Good coaches don't lead by fear, and they never intentionally intimidate and scare kids in order to get them to play their best.

- **Make fun.** Some of the kids you coach won't be the most athletically talented, leaving them at-risk for other kids to laugh and make fun of them. Good coaches never "pile on" when they see a kid struggling, and also make sure to use communication that isn't hurtful.
- **Play favorites.** While it is difficult to make objective judgements in sports (since so much of coaching is subjective), it is important to always work toward fairness when deciding on playing time. Try to develop specific measurements for your appraisals, and explain your decisions so that kids (and their parents) know what they need to do to improve their chances for playing time.
- **Take your responsibilities as a coach lightly.** The kids you coach are very impressionable, and as a result will learn and model behaviors that you set as the standard. How you handle bad calls, adversity, and every other challenge will have a direct impact on the kids you coach.
Interested in learning more about helping kids develop character and being a great youth sport coach?

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