

# TEN KEYS TO BEING A GOOD COACH

I have a straightforward coaching philosophy. I believe and have proven that there are only a few main components to succeed, and more importantly to ensure the children enjoy the experience and learn. Here are a few of the basic principles you need to be a successful coach.

With these Ten Keys and a sound perspective of the level that you are coaching, will allow you to watch your team achieve the delicate balance of having fun playing a game AND putting forth their best effort.

**1. Be Positive!** When you provide criticism, put something positive with it. Say a baseball player missed a grounder. Handle it something like this: "Nice effort, Billy – next time remember to get your glove all the way to the ground. Good Effort!" Sandwich constructive criticism with positive reinforcement.

**2. Make it Fun!** As a coach, you must make the game fun! That does not mean there is no discipline and structure. It means you can still have fun while teaching them that discipline is part of the game. We're talking about children, not professionals, so keep it light, organized and ABOVE ALL... FUN!

**3. Develop Confidence in Every Player!** The best coaches develop players who BELIEVE they can achieve great things as an individual and as a team. Don't let a player come back to the dugout with his head down after a strikeout. Commend them for the effort and help them realize it is part of the game. If a player is confident that his coach believes in him no matter the circumstance, he will play with more confidence and develop this valuable characteristic in life beyond the field of play!

**4. Set Expectations Early!** Your first communication with the parents of your team must include your expectations for the season. These expectations MUST be inclusive of the players, parents, and YOU the coach. You will avoid many problems during the season if you are clear with your expectations and you "walk

the talk” of those expectations. Keep them simple, such as: arriving to practice on time; giving your best effort; and having a great attitude. Remember this includes YOU the coach.

**5. You are the Coach!** Make sure the team understands that they are there to learn a game and you're going to help them become better players. They **MUST** pay attention when you are demonstrating drills and limit the goofing off. A simple warning, then a lap around the field if they didn't respond to your warning, usually works. Sometimes “positive peer pressure” works. Say, “The next time I have to ask for your attention, the whole team will do a lap.”

**6. The Three R's!** Teach your players The Three R's. **RESPECT** the game (including coaches and officials); **RESPECT** their teammates; and **RESPECT** the opponent. Without an opponent you have no game. Share this with parents and expect the same from them. They need to remember they are an example for their children. Yelling negatively at the official, the other team or their child does not show **RESPECT**. As the coach you are more of an example than their parents on the field. **YOU MUST TEACH THIS BY EXAMPLE!**

**7. Short-Term Memory!** Help your players develop a short-term memory. This means to not dwell on mistakes or get upset at making an error, striking out or giving up a big hit. They need to forget what happens as soon as possible and move on. It is in the past and they can't change it, so move forward with a positive attitude. Teach them that mistakes are okay. They happen at every level of play, even the Major Leagues! It's your responsibility to teach them that they will become a better player if they learn from their mistakes and forget about the outcome. Getting upset at mistakes does not provide a good environment to improve. Not putting it behind them is more detrimental than the mistake itself.

**8. Minimize Coaching DURING the Game!** Try (and I emphasize try) because it is not easy to do this. It is very difficult to do, especially with younger children. The time to coach is at practice or between innings. Game time is when the work you do at practice is applied. Let them play, make mistakes and learn on their own. Help them with subtle reminders. Example: "Hey Johnny, you know that we try to get the lead runner? Remember to think about what we do if the ball is hit to us!

Keep up the good work!” That's all you need to do. If you must coach during a game, do it during a stoppage of play, or pull the child aside in the dugout between innings and quietly ask him if he understood what happened. If he didn't, coach him up in a positive manner. Keep it brief, let them play the game and have fun! Keep notes on things to work on at the next practice.

**9. Develop Leaders!** Give leaders of the team more responsibility on the field. Allow them to tell the other players what to do, as long as they do it in a respectful, positive manner. Tell them they can correct and instruct other players only if they do so in a way they would like to be talked to. This will develop their leadership abilities and drive other children to become leaders. Example: A 10-year-old playing majors in Little League will be a good player, but if he is shown how to be a positive leader by 12-year olds on the team, when he is older he will likely follow this example. This type of leader on the field is invaluable to a coach. Plus, it develops positive traits in children for life.

**10. Develop Versatile Players!** At the youth level you must strive to develop well-rounded players. Playing a child in one position all of the time simply for the sake of winning is not beneficial to the player or the team. Allow kids to learn different positions and your team will grow to levels you never imagined. You will also be keeping the game exciting for the player. One way to do this is ask kids at the beginning of the season what positions they are interested in playing.

IN SUMMARY: Never forget that it is a GAME and should be FUN! Joke with kids; get to know them; find out what they like. After a good practice, get ice cream or bring treats. Have you ever heard of “Double Play Donuts?” When they turn a double play, bring donuts to the next practice. The players above are in the bottom of the 6<sup>th</sup> – donning rally caps – they're having FUN!

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