



# Youth Baseball Manual







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<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>THE PARENTS/GUARDIANS</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>HEALTH AND SAFETY</b>	<b>6</b>	COMMUNICATION	28
ABUSE AWARENESS	6	COACHING YOUR OWN CHILD	28
BASIC FIRST AID	6	PARENT/GUARDIAN INVOLVEMENT	29
PITCH SMART	8	MANAGING CONFLICTS	31
<b>THE COACH</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>PRACTICES</b>	<b>33</b>
PHILOSOPHY	10	GOALS OF PRACTICES	34
CODE OF CONDUCT	11	PLANNING	35
THE BIG PICTURE	13	USA BASEBALL MOBILE COACH APP	36
PLANNING	14	SKILL DEVELOPMENT	37
<b>THE TEAM</b>	<b>19</b>	BASIC THROWING PROGRAM	37
TEAM CULTURE	19	<b>GAMES</b>	<b>41</b>
TEAM ENVIRONMENT	19	GOALS OF GAMES	41
TEAM AND INDIVIDUAL GOALS	21	PLANNING FOR GAMES	41
INCLUSIVITY	23	IN-GAME MANAGEMENT	43
BENEFITS OF PLAYING MULTIPLE SPORTS	23	<b>RESOURCES</b>	<b>48</b>
SEASON OPENING TEAM MEETING	24	TEAM CONTACT INFORMATION	50
ATHLETE RESPONSIBILITIES	26	TEAM ROSTER	51
MANAGING CONFLICTS	27	SAMPLE PRACTICE PLANS	52









# Introduction

This youth baseball manual has been developed to support the thousands of dedicated baseball coaches around the country in their mission to provide a positive, development-based experience for their athletes. The manual can serve as a blueprint for building a productive environment for athletes, and a call to action for coaches to work towards the betterment of the youth baseball experience. Key concepts that this manual covers include the following:

- The importance of emphasizing enjoyment of the game and the best interests of the athletes.
- How to create appropriate practice and game plans based on the USA Baseball American Development Model that enables maximum engagement, movement and physical activity.
- The benefits of supporting your athletes' participation in multiple sports.
- Managing relationships within your program, including conflict resolution techniques.
- Developing a positive team culture.
- Best practices concerning health and safety.
- Keeping it fun!

# Health and Safety

## Abuse Awareness

BASE is USA Baseball's zero-tolerance campaign for any type of abuse within the sport of baseball. For coaches, BASE can help you create plans for handling safety issues that may arise within your team. All coaches on the coaching staff must complete the BASE Compliance program at [USABDevelops.com](http://USABDevelops.com).

Athletes can achieve more in a safe setting, and coaches can contribute to this growth by making sure that they are offering the safest setting possible.

For additional information and resources from the BASE program, please visit [USABASE.org](http://USABASE.org). USA Baseball provides an effective and inexpensive way for organizations to track and manage coaches' completions of the BASE Compliance. If you would like for your organization to become a BASE Organization, please email [BASE@USABaseball.com](mailto:BASE@USABaseball.com).

### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



### RELATED LINKS

- [Signs of Child Sexual Abuse](#)
- [Hazing](#)
- [Physical Misconduct](#)
- [Sexual Misconduct](#)
- [Emotional Misconduct](#)
- [Harassment](#)
- [Background Checks](#)
- [Bullying](#)

## Basic First Aid

Emergencies, injuries, and natural disasters are rarely predictable, however, having a controlled plan and resources in place can help mitigate any confusion and increase response time to get aid to those who need it. Recognizing when athletes are injured in any manner is a critical responsibility for all coaches. All coaches, volunteers, and athletes should be well informed on all common injuries and illnesses, their signs and symptoms, and the processes to go about treating them. If an athlete continues to play when injured, there is an increased risk of a more serious injury.

The following outlines various plans and resources that you, as well as the practice and game facility, should have in place to help keep your athletes safe at the ballpark. Please note, coaches should receive formal training on First Aid, CPR and AED prior to stepping on the field.

- **Emergency Action Plan (EAP)**
  - Every facility should have an Emergency Action Plan that is reviewed and rehearsed annually by all coaches



and facility staff to ensure that should an emergency occur, everything runs smoothly. An Emergency Action Plan should be a written document (ideally one to two pages) that is posted in a public location and distributed to certified athletic trainers, teams, staff, administrators, coaches, and parents. It should include step-by-step directions such as, but not limited to:

- Contact information for local emergency medical service providers (EMS, Police, Fire) and other pertinent emergency numbers.
- Facility address, locations or maps, specific directions, and global positioning coordinates.
- Personnel names, contact information, and responsibilities.
- The equipment needed to carry out the tasks required in the event of an emergency and the location of the equipment. This includes the location of the nearest AED if available.
- Identification of the mode of transport for the injured participant.
- Identification of the emergency care facility that the injured participant should be taken to.
- Detailed plans for the event of natural disasters/emergencies, such as severe storms, lightning, flooding, earthquakes, tornadoes, and fires.

- **Basic First Aid Kit**

- Each team and facility should have a basic first aid kit for injuries. Some items the kit should include are as follows: Bandages of various shapes and sizes, oval eye pads, hypo-allergenic first aid tape in dispenser, antiseptic wipes, first aid cream, instant cold pack, over the counter pain reliever medicine, scissors, tweezers, first aid guide, and disposable

gloves. Gloves should always be worn when treating a bleeding athlete.

- **Safety Equipment**

- While you can ensure athletes are wearing the appropriate safety equipment, such as helmets, catcher's gear, and protective cups, injuries may still occur. To better prepare yourself for how to handle any injuries or health concerns, remember these tips:
  - Every team or facility should have an easily accessible first aid kit, inclusive of bandages, ice packs, athletic tape, and plastic gloves.
  - If an athlete is struck by a baseball, either via a thrown or batted ball, go out to the athlete and check on him or her. If the area is swelling or bleeding, take the athlete out of the game to provide medical attention.
  - Injuries often occur when athletes slide into bases. For minor scrapes and cuts, give athletes medical attention on-site and determine their ability to reenter the game on a case-by-case basis. For major injuries, such as broken bones, keep the athlete where he or she is and seek professional medical attention.
  - Any time athletes are struck in the head, they should be removed from any activity and a medical professional should examine him or her for a concussion as soon as possible. If an athlete has a concussion, he or she should take the required rest time prescribed by doctors before returning to play.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Written Risk Management](#)
- [Heat Illness Prevention](#)
- [Competitive Edge](#)
- [Overtraining](#)
- [Electronic Communication](#)
- [Patterns of Injury](#)
- [Facility Risk Management](#)
- [Hydration Guidelines](#)
- [Ice & Heat](#)
- [Travel Tips](#)
- [Concussions](#)
- [Locker Room Tips](#)
- [The Injured Athlete](#)
- [Lightning Safety](#)

## Pitch Smart

USA Baseball and MLB have teamed up to help young athletes reduce arm injuries by providing a comprehensive resource for safe pitching practices. Baseball is a safe game to play at all ages, but research has shown that pitching too much, particularly at a young age, can increase a pitcher's

risk of injury. Pitch Smart is a series of practical, age-appropriate guidelines to help parents, athletes, and coaches avoid overuse injuries and foster long, healthy careers for youth pitchers.

Pitch Smart provides a valuable resource for ways in which you can work to prevent arm injuries. To further aim to prevent arm injuries, remember these key tips for safe pitching practices:

- Ask your pitchers when they last threw, and how much they threw in that outing.
- Pay close attention to pitchers as they are warming up. If a pitcher looks as if his or her arm is sore, be sure to talk to the pitcher and decide if he or she is unable to compete that day.
- If a pitcher verbalizes that their arm is hurting, take them out of the game to rest.
- If you notice a pitcher grabbing their elbow or shoulder, or favoring their arm in any way while on the mound, call timeout to check on the pitcher and take them out of the game to rest.
- Minimize the amount of time pitchers spend playing catch immediately before and after pitching appearances.
- Disregard the game setting and the scoreboard, and prioritize the athlete's long-term arm health.

By using the Pitch Smart guidelines (Figure 1) as your team's pitch count standards, you will help to better protect your athletes' arms and teach them safe pitching practices. The chart below shows the

<b>FIGURE 1</b> <b>PITCH COUNTS AND REQUIRED REST</b> <b>FOR ALL PLAYERS</b>						
AGE	0 DAYS REST	1 DAYS REST	2 DAYS REST	3 DAYS REST	4 DAYS REST	5 DAYS REST
7-8	1-20	21-35	36-50	N/A	N/A	N/A
9-10	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
11-12	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
13-14	1-20	21-35	36-50	51-65	66+	N/A
15-16	1-30	35-45	46-60	61-75	76+	N/A
17-18	1-30	31-45	46-60	61-80	81+	N/A
19-22	1-30	31-45	46-60	61-80	81-105	106+



pitch count guidelines for each age group and the recommended days of rest per pitches thrown. The days of rest are calendar days, meaning the day after a pitching outing is day one. For example, if a pitcher who is 12 years old throws 45 pitches on a Saturday, he or she would be available to pitch again that next Tuesday (Sunday and Monday being the recommended two days of rest).

A Pitch Smart Compliance program has been developed to assist the public in identifying the organizations that have adopted Pitch Smart guidelines and principles. If your organization would like to become Pitch Smart Compliant, please email [PitchSmart@USABaseball.com](mailto:PitchSmart@USABaseball.com).

#### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Pitch Smart\*\*](#)

# The Coach

## Philosophy

One of the most important exercises you can do as a coach is create and write down your coaching philosophy. It is USA Baseball's goal to provide a positive and impactful sport experience to athletes at every level of the game by developing competent, caring coaches who mold and shape young athletes into leaders. As a coach you can be one of the most influential people in your athletes' lives. By becoming a role model for your athletes, you can create an atmosphere of positivity and fun for your entire team. The research on sport is clear: the number one reason that kids begin playing a sport is because it is FUN! The number one reason that kids drop out of a sport is because it is no longer fun. You have a direct impact on encouraging your athletes to be lifelong participants of the game by keeping their baseball experience fun.

Coaches who put genuine thought into how they want to approach and organize time on the diamond not only maximize their productivity, but also provide their athletes with a positive and enriching experience. When creating your coaching philosophy, consider the following leadership styles:

- **Task-Oriented Leaders**

1. Autocratic: One-way communication, "my way or the highway" coaching approach.
2. Dictatorial: Two-way communication, coach has the final say.

- **People-Oriented Leaders (Social Leaders)**

1. Democratic: Coach and athletes have a say in team matters, decisions made by consensus.
2. Laissez-Faire: Little or no direction, individuality is the norm, communication is two-way.

- **Transactional Leaders**

- Focused on actions, performance, and effort. All drills, practices, and training exercises are focused on individual and team improvement (getting a little better each time, each day) and impacting the desired result of winning.

- **Transformational Leaders**

- Strive to build athletes through teamwork, responsibility, hard work, respect, and sportsmanship. Developing the team through selflessness, working towards a shared vision, and focusing on team building are the main objectives.

One thing to keep in mind is that these four styles are all useful, given the situation. Being adaptive in your leadership style is highly effective. Which style do you identify with?

Legendary coaches and renowned leaders often possess the following strengths: good listening skills, patience, clear expectations, strong organizational skills, the ability to cultivate meaningful relationships, and excellent communication. When creating your coaching philosophy, be sure to reflect on those traits and others and ask yourself, "What kind of coach do I want to be?"



## RELATED LINKS

- [Leadership Style](#)
- [How to Help Your Athletes Achieve Their Goals](#)
- [Coaching Philosophy](#)
- [Quality Coaching](#)
- [Best Coaches in the Country](#)
- [Be Who You Want Your Team to Be](#)

## Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct is intended to provide standards of ethical conduct that can be applied to any baseball team and organization.

Baseball is played at numerous levels including professional, collegiate, interscholastic, community, and recreational, as well as extending from the local level to international competitions. The responsibility of all athletes, coaches, umpires, officials and



workers is to abide by only the highest level of sportsmanship and conduct.

Coaches must be aware that they have tremendous influence, either good or bad, in the development of the baseball athlete, and thus, should never place the value of winning above fostering the highest desirable ideals of character.

In all personal contact with the athletes, umpires, officials, administrators, state and national organizations, the media, and the public, the coach should strive to set an example of the highest ethical and moral conduct.

Coaches should prohibit bench jockeying, including all personal and malicious remarks, cursing and obscene language towards opponents, umpires or spectators.

The coach should take an active role in the prevention of drug, alcohol, and tobacco abuse and under no circumstances authorize or endorse their use.

The coach should never use alcohol or tobacco products when in contact with athletes.

The coach should be thoroughly acquainted with baseball rules and be responsible for their interpretation to team members. The coach should not try to seek an advantage by circumvention of the spirit or letter of the rules. Athletes should be taught to respect the dignity of the game, umpires, and their opponents.

Coaches should confine their discussion to the rules and not challenge umpire decisions involving judgment.

Coaches should actively use their influence to enhance sportsmanship by their athletes and spectators. Before and after contests, rival coaches should meet and exchange friendly greetings in order to set the correct tone for the game.

Umpires should be treated with respect and support by the coach. The coach should not indulge in conduct which will incite athletes or spectators against the umpires. Public criticism of umpires or athletes is unethical.

Coaches should expect a courteous and dignified attitude from the umpires. Coaches should never



engage in sexual harassment, abuse, or any other harassment.

Coaches should develop and promote a spirit of cooperation among the baseball family, including sponsors, the community, and any person connected with the program.

Coaches should recognize the responsibility encumbered upon them to model ethical behavior. They should pledge themselves to observe, practice, and maintain this code of ethics. A coach should be committed to having a constructive impact on athletes, understanding the game's general health and safety components, and keeping the integrity of the game. Further, a coach should be committed to recognizing and responding to misconduct and to creating a safe environment for all athletes, coaches, parents, and umpires within the game of baseball.

#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Ethical Coaching Decisions\*\*](#)
- [\*\*The Game is About Players' Fun, Not Coaches' Knowledge\*\*](#)

## The Big Picture

Ultimately, baseball is just a game, and games are meant to be fun! With that in mind, sports can also be impactful vehicles for character development. It can be easy to get caught up in the minute details of the game, especially when a game is on the line, but taking a step back occasionally and looking at the big picture can help to guide your perspective when coaching youth athletes. The big picture includes:

- **Keeping a Positive and Fun Environment**
  - Athletes can achieve more when they are having fun. You can create a positive and fun environment to make sure your team is enjoying the game by: praising your athletes when they do skills well,

allowing your athletes to be loose and enjoy themselves as long as they are still on task, never asking your athletes to do something you would not do (such as excessive punishment runs), encouraging your athletes to discuss the game with you, and mixing in fun competition-driven games and drills within a practice.

- **Prioritizing Sportsmanship**
  - One of the greatest character traits baseball can teach all athletes is sportsmanship. Start teaching your athletes about sportsmanship by explaining what it is and what it includes: playing fair, being honest, following the rules of the game, respecting officials, coaches, teammates, and opponents at all times, and remembering the golden rule to treat others as you wish to be treated.
- **Being an Encourager**
  - Your athletes need constructive criticism to improve. However, in order to get the most out of your athletes, it is important to provide them with specific, truthful praises as well. If you balance your criticism with praise, your athletes will be more likely to accept the constructive criticism since they will be more confident from your earlier praise. This will give your athletes a realistic sense of where they need to improve and how to do so, and it will ensure them that you as a coach will communicate honestly and help them improve.
- **Helping Athletes Reach Goals**
  - The most basic desire that every athlete has of their coach is for their coach to help them play better. However, it might not be as simple and straightforward as it sounds. Helping your athletes reach their goals often requires a more creative



approach, such as using video, music, or other forms of technology to help you connect with them. One of the quickest ways to lose your team's attention is to forget the game of baseball is difficult. It is important to remind yourself that the game seems a lot easier when you are not the one playing. Keep this in mind when determining your expectations of your athletes.

#### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Making Baseball Fun Again\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Cultivating Communication\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Displaying Sportsmanship\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Sportsmanship on the Field\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Spreading Sportsmanship\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Magic Ratio\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Setting Goals\*\*](#)
- [\*\*How to Help Your Athletes Achieve Goals\*\*](#)

## Planning

The secret to having a successful experience at practices, games, and even for the entire season often comes down to planning.

### American Development Model

When planning for baseball activities, it is important to follow developmentally appropriate programs. The USA Baseball American Development Model (ADM) provides an in-depth look at what activities are considered developmentally-appropriate at various age levels to ensure athletes are cultivating

skills for success in the game. The following (Figure 2) is an excerpt from the ADM that explains the developmentally appropriate time frames for practicing and competing (playing in games) for each age group. When creating your season plans, follow the periodization and competition schedules below for the age group you are coaching.

To explore the ADM, click the link below.

### [\*\*American Development Model\*\*](#)

### Stages of Planning

The following are items to consider in the pre-season, practice, and game stages of planning.

#### PRE-SEASON PLANNING:

- **Coach Philosophy:** What type of coach do you want to be?
- **The Coaching Staff:** Who will help you lead and coach the team?
- **Team Logistics:** Team name, practice and game times and locations, schedule
- **Team Gear:** Equipment, uniforms
- **Team Culture and Environment:** What values do you want your team to uphold?
- **Coach Education and Certification:**
  - USA Baseball Coach Certification
    - The USA Baseball Coach Certification Program is a certification pathway for any individuals who are currently coaching baseball or aspire to coach at any level of the game. The program aims to create a higher standard of coaching education and enhance the ability of coaches to better serve their athletes, their team, and the communities.
    - The pathway consists of three certification levels ("A," "B," and "C"), which are each free of cost, and require the completion of a series of courses, resources, and programs offered by USA Baseball. The curriculum includes educational resources that cover topics

RECREATIONAL TRACK PERIODIZATION AND COMPETITION SCHEDULE					
ADM STAGE	AGE	PRACTICE	COMPETITION	DAYS PER WEEK IN SCHOOL	COMPETITIVE MONTHS PER YEAR
ACTIVATE	Entry to 7	75%	25%	1 to 2 Days	4 Months
DISCOVER	7 to 12	75%	25%	1 to 2 Days	4 Months
PROGRESS	12 to 14	65%	35%	2 to 3 Days	4 to 8 Months
DEVELOP	14 to 16	65%	35%	3 to 4 Days	4 to 8 Months
APPLY	16 to 18	65%	35%	4 to 5 Days	4 to 8 Months
INSPIRE	Any	70%	30%	At Leisure	At Leisure

ADVANCED TRACK PERIODIZATION AND COMPETITION SCHEDULE					
ADM STAGE	AGE	PRACTICE	COMPETITION	DAYS PER WEEK IN SCHOOL	COMPETITIVE MONTHS PER YEAR
DEVELOP	14 to 16	50%	50%	4 to 5 Days	4 to 8 Months
APPLY	16 to 18	45%	55%	4 to 5 Days	8 Months
EXCEL	19+	Collegiate or Professional Level Development			

Figure 2 - American Development Model Schedules

such as health and safety, creating a positive environment, recognizing and responding to misconduct, practice planning, game management, skill-specific development, and hosting local coaching clinics in your own community. Requirements for each level are listed below.

- **A Certification**
  - Four Online Courses
  - "A" Code of Conduct
- **B Certification**
  - Completion of A Certification
  - Nine Online Courses
  - "B" Code of Conduct
- **C Certification**
  - Completion of A and B Certifications
  - Eight Online Courses
  - Community Coaches Clinic
  - "C" Code of Conduct

- For more information about USA Baseball Coach Certification, [click here](#).

- **Athlete Safety:** USA Baseball BASE Compliance
  - The BASE program provides abuse awareness training for amateur baseball coaches across the United States and consists of an online course and a standard background check. The free course provides resources to create a positive and safe environment for all athletes, coaches, parents, umpires, and spectators by understanding how to recognize all types' misconduct and abuse. Topics covered include identifying and reporting incidents and the abuse awareness policies that should be in place. The standard background check

is six dollars and includes the JDP National Criminal Database, JDP National Sex Offender Registry, along with hundreds of State and Federal Sanctions Lists, Fugitive Watch Lists, FBI Most Wanted, and Terrorist Watch Lists.

- For more information about USA Baseball's BASE, visit [USABASE.org](http://USABASE.org).

### **PRACTICE PLANNING:**

- **Creating Practice Plans**

- USA Baseball has created a tool to help make practice planning easier and more readily available through the USA Baseball app. The USA Baseball app

is a valuable tool that aims to simplify practice planning for baseball coaches at all levels. The app, which is free to all users, features the ability for baseball coaches at all levels to plan practices using drills supplied in the application through the practice planning function. The app also includes information related to Pitch Smart, the American Development Model, USA Baseball Develops education, and athlete safety.

- The USA Baseball App features the following:
  - Downloadable from the Apple and Android application stores.
  - Drill library with baseball-specific drill documents and videos.



- Ability for coaches to create practice plans using the drill documents and videos.
- Practice plans created by USA Baseball and a panel of experts.
- Access to free USA Baseball Online Education courses, inclusive of skill-specific and culture-based courses.
- Information on USA Baseball's American Development Model.
- **Skill Development:**
  - USA Baseball hosts a library of Online Education Courses that cover the various baseball skills that athletes can practice and develop. The courses, geared towards coaches, provide insight into teaching new skills and helping athletes build confidence while mastering skills.
    - To view the course catalog and take the courses, please [click here](#).
  - USA Baseball offers free Community Coaches Clinics for coaches at any level in the game. The clinics feature entry-level content and drills from coaches and are three hours long. A library of past virtual Community Coaches Clinics can be [found here](#).

## GAME PLANNING:

- **Game Logistics:** Location, Game Time, Team Arrival Time, Uniform
  - These communications from the coaching staff should be to the team and parents as a whole group, not to individual athletes. If the communication is directed at one athlete, the athlete's parents or guardians should be included in the communication.
- **Game Details:** Line Up, Substitutions, Pitching Rotations, Pre-Game Warm Up
- **Responsibilities of the Coaching Staff:** Who are the 1st and 3rd base coaches? Who is the scorekeeper? Who is in the dugout? Anyone who has repeated contact with minor athletes needs to be BASE Compliant. This

includes coaches, scorekeepers, or anyone else who is frequently in the dugout or on the field.

- **Pitch Smart**

- USA Baseball and MLB have teamed up to help young athletes reduce arm injuries by providing a comprehensive resource for safe pitching practices. Baseball is a safe game to play at all ages, but research has shown that pitching too much — particularly at a young age — can increase a pitcher's risk of injury. Pitch Smart is a series of practical, age-appropriate guidelines to help parents, athletes and coaches avoid overuse injuries and foster long, healthy careers for youth pitchers.
- Visit [PitchSmart.org](https://PitchSmart.org) for more information.





# The Team

## Team Culture

Culture is the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. It is the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious or social group. It is also the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time. It is the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization. Ultimately, culture is the way you and your team do things on a regular basis.

A good team culture starts with good leadership that makes the distinction between individual goals and team goals. Developing a team culture that takes priority over a “me-first” attitude is challenging at every age level. It is never too early to instill responsibility, accountability, and good habits within a group, and to help them understand their own individual goals and collectively create a list of their team goals. When establishing your team’s culture, consider the following and be sure to get the athletes involved in the process:

1. What values do we as a team view as most important?
2. What kind of team do we want to be?
3. How can we improve ourselves and help our teammates?
4. What are the smaller goals that move us towards the ultimate goal?
5. How can we be good teammates?
6. How can the coaching staff help the athletes?
7. How can the athletes help the coaching staff?
8. Are there any routines we can do as a team?

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Respect Officials](#)
- [Clubhouse Culture](#)
- [Culture is a Verb](#)
- [Culture is a Verb - Part II](#)
- [Culture is a Verb - Part III](#)
- [Culture is a Verb - Part IV](#)

## Team Environment

One of the most challenging tasks of a coach is bringing a team together as a collective group and moving towards the same goal. The environment in which a team practices and competes is vital to the overall success of the team, both on and off the field. Below are several factors that help to create a successful team environment:

- **Maintain Respect and Safety**
  - Ensure all coaches have completed the BASE program through USA Baseball.
  - Model appropriate behavior.
  - Set standards before the season starts and communicate them with parents, athletes, and coaches.
  - Avoid using explicit language.
  - Ensure athletes are wearing proper safety equipment.



- **Show Care Towards Athletes**

- Engage in team-building games and activities.
- Participate in community service projects.
- Share personal stories and anecdotes.
- Initiate team gatherings, such as dinners or barbecues.

- **Create Autonomy**

- Allow athletes to make decisions on their own, and not rely on the coach to make every in-game decision. When athletes are empowered to make decisions, they often take more ownership of the game, assume more responsibility for their actions, and become more confident of their skills.

- **Provide Support**

- Support is needed throughout games and practices, but it becomes crucial when an athlete begins to struggle. Each

athlete needs to feel supported so that when he or she does make a mistake or start to struggle, the athlete knows that the coach and team are supportive.

- **Avoid Excessive Pressure**

- Coaches often put too much pressure on their athletes, trying to pump them up for the game, but oftentimes that added pressure can make them play more timidly and be afraid to make mistakes.

- **Provide Recognition**

- Athletes need to be periodically recognized for the good things they do by the coaching staff. This promotes a positive environment that increases confidence.

- **Develop Trust**

- Coaches must trust the athletes to make decisions on the field, and the athletes



must trust the coach to teach them the game and guide them. It is important to convey through actions and words that a coach trusts the athletes to do the right thing.

- **Treat Athletes Fairly**

- All athletes are not as equally talented, but they must be treated equally and fairly. If some athletes think that another is receiving excessive attention, then they will start to resent that athlete and the coach.

- **Encourage Innovation**

- The team should be able to show its various personalities, as long as they do not interfere with performance. By letting the athletes' personalities come together and shine, a team personality is created that can stimulate even higher performance.

- **Promote Cohesion**

- Possibly the most crucial factor to a successful team climate is the cohesion of the team. Cohesion is a measure of an athlete's attraction to, a sense of belonging to, and a desire to remain a part of the team. The team should operate as one unit, not as several small units.

- **Take Pride**

- Athletes are more likely to give their best effort and take accountability for their actions and the team's success when they believe in the coaching staff and their teammates.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Engineering Your Sport Environment](#)
- [Engineering Your Sport Environment - Part II](#)
- [Cultivating a Team Identity](#)

## Team and Individual Goals

Setting goals is an important skill for your athletes to learn. As a coach, you can help your athletes set both individual and team goals. Setting goals is a great motivational tool for athletes. All coaches want to coach motivated athletes. Intrinsic motivation is that burning desire found within each and every person. With intrinsic motivation as the driving force, athletes generally feel more motivated and excited. The key to building a successful environment is to develop and strengthen the internal, intrinsic motivation BEFORE adding the external, extrinsic forms of motivation.

Help your athlete set goals and make sure that those goals fall within the developmentally appropriate limits outlined in USA Baseball's Athlete Development Model. Help your athletes set SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Based). Your athletes' goals should challenge them but not be so challenging that they are unattainable. A great team-building exercise would be to have athletes

write down their individual goals on a poster board and then, as a team, brainstorm team goals to write down as well. You can display the poster board of goals in the dugout for motivation.

- **Specific:** What do you want to achieve? Be clear and straightforward, so goals are easier to achieve.
- **Measurable:** Ensure that athletes can track the goal, allowing them to see their progress.
- **Attainable:** Check to see that the goal can be achieved in the time available and whether the goal is appropriate within the athlete's ability.
- **Relevant:** Why do you want to achieve this goal? Ensuring that the goal is important to

the athlete will encourage commitment and eliminate frustration.

- **Time-Based:** include a time or date to help the athletes stay focused and motivated.

Example: By the end of the season, the team will have successfully gotten the first out of the inning fifty percent of the time.

#### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES





## RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Athlete Centered Approach\*\*](#)
- [\*\*How to Help Your Athletes Achieve Goals\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Age Based Goal Setting\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Team Identity\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Team Building\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Every Player on Your Team is Significant\*\*](#)

## Inclusivity

Baseball is America's pastime, which means it is for all individuals regardless of race, color, religion, disability, age, sexual orientation, gender, or national origin. As a coach, it is vital to understand your responsibility to your young athletes. Athletes need a place to belong, a place to feel welcome, and a place to develop. To build that sport foundation, coaches must frequently revisit their own personal values. Every word that the athletes hear influences them, and they look to coaches as role models. Part of your responsibility as a coach is to refrain from unacceptable dialogue that is disparaging or harmful to youth. The goal should always be to provide a safe, respectful, positive, and competitive environment for all athletes.

Coaches can help create an environment of inclusion by:

- Giving the same level of respect to everyone.
- Never tolerating derogatory or belittling language between athletes.
- Recognizing and mentoring each athlete.
- Listening and displaying empathy to all athletes.
- Respecting any assistive devices, such as canes or wheelchairs, and always asking before moving assistive devices.
- Remembering that some disabilities may not be easily noticeable and can be hidden,

such as dyslexia and Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder.

- Having open communication from the start about abilities and limitations.
- Being considerate of the modifications to the game or the extra time athletes may need.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Disability Etiquette: What to Know\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Interacting with Athletes with Disabilities\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Intellectual Disability\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Sensory Disability\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Principles for Adapting Activities in Recreation Programs\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Keeping Injured Players Involved\*\*](#)

## Benefits of Playing Multiple Sports

The transition into cooler weather and the changing of the seasons into fall can be challenging for anyone who enjoys spending their spring and summer days on the baseball field. While these changes signify the end of the baseball season, they don't have to

signify the end of sports participation for the year. By encouraging your athletes to play other sports during baseball's off-season, you're helping them become better all-around athletes and people.

There are several benefits for athletes to participate in more than one sport throughout the year, such as:

1. Reducing the risk of overuse-related injuries.
2. Developing better skills as an all-around athlete.
3. Enhancing the development of mental skills.
4. Building confidence.
5. Continuing to develop life skills.
6. Avoiding emotional, physical, and mental burn out.
7. Learning to compete outside of baseball.
8. Handling adversity and failure.
9. Experiencing different coaching styles, which can prepare them for different leadership styles later in life.
10. Broadening their social circle and experiences.

#### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Benefits of Playing Multiple Sports\*\*](#)
- [\*\*7 Reasons to Invest in Multi-Sport Camps\*\*](#)

## Season Opening Team Meeting

Before your season starts, it is a good idea to have a meeting with the parents and guardians of your athletes, and your athletes to discuss the overall team standards, expectations, and goals for the season. When these items are discussed with parents, guardians, and athletes at the start of the season, channels of communication and expectations are established before any issues arise. When people know what the expectations are, they are more likely to reach them. This following serves as a guideline for your team meeting.

### 1. Introductions

- Tell everyone about yourself as an athlete, coach, or parent.
- Have parents/guardians/athletes introduce themselves to the group.
- Once everyone is introduced, explain what type of coach you are. What is your coaching philosophy?

### 2. Standards and Expectations

- Team values
  - Explain the core values for your team.
- Expectations of athletes
  - Explain the expectations you hold, as a coach, for your athletes.
  - Provide everyone with a handout of the coach's expectations for the athlete.
- Expectations of coaches
  - Explain the expectations you want your athletes and parents/guardians to have of you and your coaching staff.
- Policies
  - Explain the team policies, including being late, unsportsmanlike conduct, and practice and game behavior.

### 3. Goals for the Season



- Explain your goals as a coach for your team and athletes.
- 4. **Logistics**
  - Schedules
    - If practice dates are already established, share that information with the parents/guardians and athletes.
    - If schedules are not determined, discuss with parents/guardians what practice days and times work well with them.
  - Contact List
    - Hand out contact information to each parent/guardian if the document has been completed before this meeting.
    - If the contact information document has not been finalized before the meeting, pass around a blank copy of the contact information template for parents to fill out.
- After the meeting, update the digital form of the contact information template and distribute to parents/guardians via email or in person.
- Discuss communication preferences.
- Equipment
  - Provide parents/guardians/athletes with a list of the equipment that the athletes will need. For example: Cleats, glove, baseball pants, socks, helmet, bat, mouth piece, batting gloves, and catcher's gear.
- 5. **Volunteers**
  - Ask parents/guardians if they would like to volunteer for any of the following:
    - Provide snacks after games.
    - Be the scorekeeper for games.
    - Be the "Team Mom/Dad" to



promote open communication between the coach, parents/guardians, and athletes.

- Be the “Team Pitch Counter” and track each pitcher’s pitch count to stay within the Pitch Smart guidelines.

#### 6. **End of Meeting**

- Ask parents/guardians/athletes if they have any questions.
- Thank them for their time.
- Let them know you’re excited for the season to start!

## Athlete Responsibilities

The field is your team’s home, and represents your community. The hard work put into taking care of it shows the hard work will be put in when playing on it. It is important to involve athletes in the upkeep and care of the facility as an act of service to your

community. The following outlines some guidelines for taking care of the field and responsibilities that can be divided among the athletes. Responsibilities can be assigned for the season or on a weekly basis.

#### • **Rules:**

- Take pride in what you do.
- When finished, help with another job.
- You are done when the team is done.

#### • **Example Responsibilities:**

- Sweep the home dugout
- Sweep the visitor dugout
- Rake, groom, and tarp home plate
- Rake, tamp, and tarp the pitcher’s mound
- Pick up clay on field
- Broom the edges of the field
- Get out/set up hose
- Pick up trash (stands, dugouts, etc.)
- Clean up food/lockers
- Rake and groom bullpens (Home and Visitor)



## RELATED LINKS

- [Team Facility Responsibilities](#)

## Managing Conflicts

Athletes can find themselves in difficult situations sometimes. Knowing how to manage conflicts with athletes and other staff members is important to retaining the athlete and showing respect. Keep in mind that athletes come from all different backgrounds and family dynamics. Take this into consideration for how to treat and develop each individual athlete.

One of the main causes of team conflict is confusion over athletes' roles. Coaches who clearly communicate the roles with each of their athletes are able to maintain control of the team's atmosphere. Successful teams practice open and honest communication.

The following are recommendations on managing conflicts between the athlete and coach:

- Guide and direct the athlete. Be careful not to be a dictator. Coaches need to find out what makes the athlete tick, how they feel about making adjustments, and how they handle adversity. "What are they going to do personally about their situation?" "What is their action plan?" Questions like these are important and should be addressed with the athlete. Discovering each athlete's learning style is important as well. Are they a visual learner? Do they learn better by doing? Can they hear instruction and then make corrections?
- Coaches should establish a positive and trusting relationship with each athlete and always be a great listener. When coaches develop a caring and trusting relationship, they minimize a lot of conflicts. Creating this type of relationship takes time, but it minimizes conflicts and reassures the team

that these relationships take priority within the entire program.

- Coaches should be open to their athletes about how important it is to communicate about issues on and off the field.
- Agreeing to disagree on issues is acceptable in coach/athlete and athlete/athlete relationships. A coach modeling this behavior is vital to the process.
- Coaches that follow through with their philosophy and discipline in a consistent and fair manner minimize team chemistry issues. When athletes know the coach is consistent in handling team and athlete issues, they respect the process.
- When coaches get feedback from athletes on establishing standards and policies, the athletes feel a part of the process and this inclusion helps them with accountability and ownership of their behavior.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Avoiding and Managing Conflict](#)

# The Parents/ Guardians

## Communication

The relationship between the coach and the parents/guardians is a key factor in the team's success. If the coach and parents/guardians are all on the same page, it makes the messages that the athletes are receiving on and off the field more impactful.

The goal should be to maintain open lines of communication with all parents/guardians throughout the entire season. In order to do this, consider some of the following tips:

Provide parents/guardians with contact information for the entire coaching staff and other parents/guardians at the beginning of the season.

Set clear rules and guidelines for how to address concerns with the coaching staff. This should be done in the season opening parent/guardian meeting.

Provide parents/guardians with a detailed schedule and communicate any schedule changes as soon as possible. Additionally, include any duties that parents/guardians may have throughout the season.

Ask that parents/guardians give you as much notice as possible if their child is going to miss a game or practice.

Establish an email group to be able to send out messages to all of the parents/guardians.

## Coaching Your Own Child

The coach and the parent play a central role in the sport experience. Children who learn about baseball often have their first baseball experience shaped by their first coach, who might also be their parent. For some, this is a great sport experience, leaving the young athlete wanting to come back for more. For others, that first experience may be the opposite. Having a negative first experience can cause the young athlete to not want to participate or not want to try again. Coaching your own child can be difficult and many parent coaches are either too tough on their own child(ren) or not tough at all. You want your child(ren) to feel as if they are being treated in the same manner as their teammates, no more and no less. It is important to keep in mind that one day, you will no longer be their coach, but you will always be your child's parent.

Here are some suggestions that could help you if you are involved in this coaching situation.

- Have your child refer to you as coach in team settings.
- Refrain from spotlighting your own child in a single priority position.
- Provide equitable character development opportunities.
- Prioritize your off-field relationship over your on-field relationship.



#### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Coaching Your Own Child\*\*](#)

## Parent/Guardian Involvement

The following are ways the parent should be encouraged to be involved with the baseball program:

- All parents/guardians have a substantial emotional investment in their children. All relationships that the coach has with parents need to be kept professional. Remember, coaches should avoid becoming personally involved with any parent/guardian(s). Relationships should be kept as neutral and respectful as possible. Everything a coach





does needs to be in the best interest of the team and individual athletes.

- Parents/guardians should be encouraged to attend practice sessions and workouts as they are an integral part of their child's development in the sport.
- Parents/guardians are encouraged to volunteer to provide team snacks, work the concession stand, or serve in any other volunteer role for the team.
- Community service projects can involve both athletes with their parents/guardians or just athletes only. This choice depends on the type

of service project and the help it might need to complete it.

- During games, parents/guardians should be encouraged to enjoy the game as a spectator, and allow the coaching staff to coach their child. Sideline behavior should be kept positive at all times.

## Managing Conflicts

Every parent/guardian wants the best for their child, and sometimes that desire can make emotions run high. It is inevitable that conflicts will arise with parents/guardians throughout the season. Whether it is over a topic that is small or large, the following are strategies to navigate the conflicts that arise.

- Establish the parent/guardian-coach relationship at the season opening meeting.
- It is important that the coaching staff communicates that both the parent/guardian(s) and the coaches want a positive experience for their athlete.
- Coaches need to be very clear in stating the acceptable issues and situations that are appropriate for parent/guardian-coach meetings. These can be stated in the pre-season team meeting. Playing time, what positions athletes are playing, and where athletes are placed in the lineup should not be discussed with parents/guardians at any time during the season, unless you as the coach want to discuss those items.
- State the proper times to set up a meeting with the coach. Typically, after games would not be the best time. The coach should choose when and where this meeting will take place.
- Information can sometimes be miscommunicated between the athlete and parent/guardian(s) on what the issues are that the athlete is experiencing; therefore, the athlete should be present in coach-parent meetings. Information can be miscommunicated between the athlete and parent/guardian on issues that the athlete is experiencing and sometimes an athlete fails to give their parent/guardian the total picture, therefore the athlete should be present in coach-parent meetings. The athlete and coach should first try to resolve issues between themselves. If the coach emphasizes the importance of this, then there will be less parent/guardian conflict because the coach

and the athlete have handled the situation in a positive and productive environment.

- Parent/guardian-coach meetings ultimately need to be productive. Coaches need to let the parents/guardians voice their concerns as the coaches remain good listeners. It is helpful for the coach when this is done because a better solution can be attained. Keep calm and most times a solution will be the result even if it is agreeing to disagree. The athlete should always be the major focus in this process. Avoid any comparisons to other athletes, or evaluating another athlete. Comparisons are not productive and can add to a possible negative confrontation.
- Another coach should be present in the parent/guardian-coach meeting to verify everything that was discussed.

### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*6 Ways Parents Can Help Their Athlete Resolve a Coach-Athlete Conflict\*\*](#)



# The USA Baseball App

A free resource aimed at raising the standard of education for coaches, umpires, and parents in order to provide athletes with unparalleled development and competitive opportunities in a safe environment.

## Features Include

- › Baseball Athlete Safety Education (BASE)
- › Minor Athlete Safety Policies
- › BASE Organizational Compliance Program
- › Ineligible List and Reporting Abuse
- › American Development Model
- › Certification pathways for coaches, umpires, and parents
- › Coaches Clinic Registration
- › Develops Blog
- › High School and Youth Baseball Manuals
- › Online education courses
- › Drill Library
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# Practices

Practice time should make up at least 65% (at least 75% for 12 and under age groups) of your team's time during the season on the field. The remaining percentage should be time spent in games. With that much emphasis on practice, it is important to ensure your athletes are engaging in developmentally appropriate baseball skills and activities. It is equally as important to make sure your athletes are having fun! To review the developmentally appropriate activities per age group, please visit [www.USABADM.com](http://www.USABADM.com).

As a coach, you set the tone for your practices. Whether you want your practices to be more businesslike or looser and more relaxed, it is important to be consistent with your practice demeanor, day in and day out.

The development of your athletes should come before anything else. Here are some checkpoints for making sure the development of your athletes is the first priority.

- You arrive at practice prepared with an organized practice plan.
- You ensure your athletes are having fun and enjoying the game.
- You focus on teaching your athletes the fundamentals of the game.
- Athlete development and fun are priorities over winning.
- Communication is open and respectful between athletes and the coaching staff.
- You praise your athletes to build their confidence, not tear it down.

Your coaching style and philosophy will influence how you run your practices. When determining how to make the most out of your practices. Consider the following:

- **The Age We Live In**
  - Proliferation of academies, camps and private lessons.
  - Challenge of getting athletes to "buy in" to the learning process.
  - Potential sensitivity to and/or misunderstanding of constructive criticism.
- **Your Philosophy And Personnel**
  - What kind of team do you want to be?
  - Coaches at the high school level and below coach in a non-recruiting atmosphere; your athletes are who they are, and that cannot be changed.
- **Practicing What's Important To You**
  - Based on your personnel and philosophy.
- **Athlete Capabilities**
  - What can you expect from your athletes?
  - What are their limitations?

Ultimately, athletes should be fully engaged in practice and should enjoy their time at practice. The key to achieving effective practices lies in the planning and preparation of practices.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Matching Coaching Philosophy to Context](#)
- [The Importance of Practice](#)
- [Get Your Team to Love Practice](#)
- [Practice](#)
- [Run Practice the Same...Yet Different](#)

# Goals of Practices

The overarching goal of practices is to provide an efficient, productive, and purposeful training session that gives every athlete the opportunity to improve mentally, emotionally, and physically. The goal should always be to provide a safe and positive environment for athletes to grow.

Individual practices can have specific, skill-based goals as well. For example, if today's goal is to learn bunt coverages, then focus first on the specific individual fundamentals that each position player and pitcher will need to learn (e.g. how to position your feet and body to pick up a slow-moving ball; and footwork around each of the bases to receive throws, etc.) and then spend time with the entire team learning and executing the various plays. Always begin with instruction and a slow walk-through before moving to full speed practice. Specific activities during practices can also have their own

goals. For example, during infield and outfield fungo, the goal could be to practice eventually at game speed, but first spend time reviewing or emphasizing fundamentals at a slower speed.

Like the physical warm-up, the mental warm-up routine must be specific and purposeful. Begin by stating the goals for today's practice. Practice goals should be intentional and purposeful. By communicating the goal with athletes at the start of practice, the team can all be on the same page and work towards achieving the goal together. Communication is key!

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [Teams Play Like They Practice](#)
- [In Practice, Fresh = Fun!](#)



## Planning

The key to planning a fun and impactful practice is to prepare. Play to your own strengths as well as those of your coaching staff when dividing up responsibilities during practice so as to maximize the learning and development of your athletes. By diligently preparing you can have a practice that is both organized and efficient.

Keep in mind that practice does not make perfect. Planned, purposeful teaching optimizes learning and impacts growth both in sport and life.

The following are some considerations when planning practices:

- Delegate responsibilities among the coaching staff.

- Use indoor and outdoor facilities to maximize efficiency.
- Arrive at practices with a positive and enthusiastic attitude.
- Create a written practice plan inclusive of drills and time frames. Email the plan to the parents and team members in advance of practice, if possible. Post the written plan somewhere it can be viewed by all athletes during practice.
- Establish and communicate practice goals at the beginning of practices.
- Focus on development and fun, providing constructive feedback to athletes and

teaching the relationship between process and results.

- Celebrate achievements and milestones your athletes reach.
- Practice the situations that happen most often in games.
- Allow athletes to practice in many different positions.
- Evaluate each practice and be flexible enough to change something for the next practice. Include the coaching staff in these evaluations and ask the team what they feel they need to work on to better prepare themselves to execute in games.
- Offensive and defensive signs should be reviewed every practice, but especially before games.
- Be cognizant of the time frame for practices and any outside factors that may impact practice times.
- Establish consistency in all aspects of practice. When athletes know what to expect, as well as what is expected of them, they will be able to develop more comfortably. Your routine should be adjusted if you can tell that practices are becoming mundane and/or athletes are no longer having fun.
- Failure will occur in every practice. Teach athletes how to embrace this failure, learn from it, and move on. Make those moments fun challenges instead of stressful experiences that produce fear and doubt in athletes' minds. There are many professional athletes who have overcome major obstacles because they chose to make adjustments. It is a choice.

If you keep your practices both productive and fun, your athletes will be excited to come back. You will have a positive impact not only on the athletes you coach, but also on the future growth of the game.

## USA Baseball App

USA Baseball's free app provides an on-the-go practice planning tool for coaches at all levels. Download the app from the Apple or Android stores to start building your practice plans.

### **Download The USA Baseball Mobile Coach App**

For a sample practice plan, please see the USA Baseball app.

### **RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES**



### **RELATED LINKS**

- **[Practice Planning for Fun](#)**
- **[The Routine: Our Path to Consistency](#)**





## Skill Development

Skill development is one of the main goals of practice and should coincide with the ADM developmental benchmarks for each age group. For example, athletes ages 7 and younger should be focusing on fundamental movement skills while athletes ages 12 to 14 can focus on more specific and advanced skills.

There are many different skills within the game. USA Baseball hosts a library of Online Education Courses that cover the various baseball skills that athletes can practice and develop. The courses, geared towards coaches, provide insight into teaching new skills and helping athletes build confidence while mastering skills.

To view the course catalog and take the courses, please [click here](#).

## Basic Throwing Program

One of the staples of a practice should be the warm-up throwing program. Proper arm care and warm ups are important for all athletes, not just pitchers. Throwing programs can and should begin prior to the start of the season as well.

For pitchers, preseason throwing programs help to build up arm strength safely after following the recommended rest period per the Pitch Smart guidelines. Pitch Smart provides preseason throwing programs by age. These guidelines were created for the use of healthy throwers preparing for their upcoming season. Pitchers who are returning to play from an injury should consult their doctor as part of their rehabilitation plan. Pitchers should progress at their own pace and only throw at distances and for quantities at which they are comfortable; and

they should start out throwing at short distances and gradually increase distance and intensity of throws over the course of the session and during the later weeks of the progression.

To view the preseason throwing programs for pitchers, [click here](#).

Position athletes should also follow a preseason throwing program, but their program should consist of interval throwing. Interval throwing should also be used as the warm up for practices and games. Interval throwing is performed through the following progression, with a focus on the accuracy of the throws:

- **One Knee (5-10 ft.)**

- Athletes are down on their throwing side knee with their glove side knee up and their shoulders square to their partner. They throw back and forth, making sure

to follow through completely on each throw.

- Athletes each make 10 throws, then move to the next progression.

- **Close Squared Throwing (10-15 ft.)**

- Athletes stand with shoulders square to their partner and their feet are shoulder width apart. Starting with their hands together, they throw back and forth, keeping the front elbow close to the body on release. The feet should stay stationary, and the athlete should be in an athletic stance with some flex in their knees.
- Athletes each make 10 throws, then move to the next progression.

- **Squared Throwing (15-20 ft.)**

- Athletes stand with shoulders square to their partner, and their feet shoulder





width apart. Rotating their torsos and shoulders with their hands together, they throw back and forth keeping the front elbow close to the body on release.

- Athletes each make 10 throws, then move to the next progression.

- **Standing Throwing Position (30-40 ft.)**

- Athletes stand in the normal starting position of throwing, making sure to get their throwing side foot (back foot) positioned and posted properly in order to establish balance and power. They should point their front shoulder to the target each time that they throw and then rotate and follow through properly.
- Athletes take their time throwing back and forth, even taking a deep breath before each throw.
- Athletes each make 10 throws.

- **Athletes 45 Feet Apart**

- Athletes throw the ball back and forth using good throwing mechanics.
- Athletes each make 10 throws, then move back to the next progression.

- **Athletes 60 Feet Apart**

- Athletes throw the ball back and forth using good throwing mechanics.
- A crow hop or a shuffle can be used to reduce strain on the arm.
- Athletes each make 9 throws, then move back to the next progression.

- **Athletes 90 Feet Apart**

- Athletes throw the ball back and forth using good throwing mechanics.
- A crow hop or a shuffle should be used to reduce strain on the arm.
- Athletes each make 8 throws, then move back to the next progression.





- **Athletes 120 Feet Apart**

- Athletes throw the ball back and forth using good throwing mechanics.
- A crow hop should be used to reduce strain on the arm.
- Athletes each make 5 throws, then move back to the next progression.

- **Athletes 130-140 Feet Apart**

- Athletes throw the ball back and forth using good throwing mechanics.
- A crow hop should be used to reduce strain on the arm.
- Athletes each make 5 throws, then move back to the next progression.

- **Cool Down**

- Athletes should slowly start working their way back to the 45 foot distance, making throws on their way back in.

Key points to remember throughout the interval throwing progression are to:

- Keep good throwing form with elbow closed on release to prevent flying open.
- Keep throws as accurate as possible. It is okay if the ball bounces before getting to the partner.
- Cool down by slowly moving back in after making 5 throws at the farthest distance so that the interval throwing progression ends back at 45 feet.



# Games

Game time should make up no more than 25% of your team's time during the season on the field. While the emphasis should be more on practice time, your athletes will likely be most excited for games. Games are a great developmental tool for athletes to gauge their mastery of skills. At the youth level, the focus should be on development over winning.

## Goals of Games

The goal of games should be about more than just winning. Development and enjoyment for your athletes should always come before winning. The ultimate goals of games should include athletes mastering and successfully performing skills learned in practices. Just like in practices, there can be goals for games as a whole and goals for sections of games (like innings, half innings, and individual plays). For example, the goal of the game could be for athletes to have fun, while the goal for a specific inning could be to get three up and three down, or to have three quality at bats.

As with practice goals, it is important to communicate goals with athletes prior to the game or inning. The more involved athletes are in the goal setting process, the more invested they will be in achieving the goal.

### RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



### RELATED LINKS

- [Setting Goals](#)

## Planning for Games

There are many considerations when planning for games. The age and level of play should dictate the plan for the game. At the youth level in particular, it is important to provide athletes with experience in a variety of different positions so that they can become fundamentally sound in all areas of the game. However, the athlete's skills should match the position. If athletes are put in positions that do not play to their strengths, it could hurt their self-confidence, as well as the overall feeling of success. It is important to develop your strategy around the talent you have, rather than trying to force the talent to fit into your strategy.

While it is important to play to the strengths of your athletes, you also have a responsibility to challenge them. As a coach, teach your athletes to embrace adversity. In doing so, you will be able to see how your athletes handle pressure and rebound from failure. Every play in baseball results in both a failure and a success. When a batter successfully gets on base, the pitcher has failed to get him out. The exposure to failure and success can teach athletes how to deal with setbacks not only in baseball, but in life as well.

Planning for games is an important part of a game day. The following is a list of things to have organized that involves the events of a game day:

1. **Line Up:** Before getting to the ballpark, have the lineup drafted out. Communicate the line



up to the athletes as part of the pre-game warm up.

2. Plan for substitutions: In addition to the lineup, have a plan for when substitutions will be made. Try to make sure all athletes are involved in the game.
3. Pitching Rotations: The starting, relief, and closing pitchers should be planned out days

in advance to ensure all athletes have rested the required number of days per Pitch Smart.

4. Pre-Game Warm Up: There should be a plan for the time of the arrival at the field, stretching, practicing hitting, pre-game, and a bullpen plan for the starting pitcher. This should have been communicated at the practice before the game.
5. Responsibilities of the Coaching Staff During the Game: These can include calling pitches, first and third base coaching, defensive play

calling, positioning of athletes, and ensuring that the bench athletes are focused and into the game.

6. **Coach Behavior:** Remember that the athletes react to the coach's game management and behavior. If the coach reacts negatively to a play or athlete, it reflects in the athlete's reaction as well. Teams take on a coach's personality and approach to the game, therefore the coach needs to keep their approach positive and process driven. Keeping a sense of humor in managing the game keeps a team loose and confident.
7. **Respect for Others:** A coach needs to address how the athletes should address umpires, especially to the catcher and pitcher, as they have the most contact, as well as the opposing team and coaches. All interactions should be respectful and positive.
  - For more ways to create a respectful environment with umpires, check out the [\*\*Introduction to Umpiring Course\*\*](#).

#### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Mental Preparation\*\*](#)

## In-Game Management

Game management starts in practice. If the coach has the team prepare at game speed, then the atmosphere is already set for game conditions and the athletes will be prepared mentally, emotionally, and physically for handling adversity that every contest presents to an athlete.

### Warm Up Approach

In-game management begins as soon as your team takes the field to warm up. A proper warm-up is essential to every position on the field. A dynamic or static stretching program and then some light cardio

work is the first step in getting ready to take the field. Additional methods, such as band work can be effective as well. Coaches should make sure athletes take warm ups seriously and are staying focused.

### Pitching Staff

On game day, a common mistake made by young pitchers is an anxiousness to jump right on the mound without playing proper catch. More than any other day, it's imperative that a full throwing program be employed prior to a start. An interval throwing program that extends well past the mound distance should be used. It's also acceptable to work on the flat ground prior to moving to the bullpen, emphasizing any mechanical points as needed before getting ready for the game. The mound work done prior to a start should include attention to mechanics and pitch variety as much as about actually warming up.

If the schedule for the team does not allow for a proper warm up due to field usage or travel, then encourage your pitcher, catcher and a coach for supervision to arrive earlier than the team in order to have sufficient time to complete a proper warm up. Always find space where the pitcher and catcher can safely execute a proper warm up.

Managing and developing a pitching staff involves more than just teaching pitchers the Xs and Os of pitching mechanics. A pitching staff is built from the coach's thorough knowledge of their pitchers' strengths and weaknesses. With that understanding,







pitchers can be slotted in roles that best fit their ability. Coaches should challenge every pitcher on the staff to get better and take improvements from practice bullpen sessions into the games.

On game day, the pitching staff bears significant responsibility for the outcome of a game. A team relies on their pitchers to bring competitive intensity to the mound, and that requires preparation. Prior to toeing the rubber to start any game, pitchers should have a well-defined routine to get themselves physically and mentally ready to pitch.

Coaches should help pitchers think through their strategy and have a basic philosophy that can be modified for each game. In general, a pitching staff should have a core set of principles to follow, backed by the individuality of each member of the staff and the role they serve. As a coach, communicating these “big picture” objectives to pitchers should be a top priority. Doing so will establish a consistent message that will make expectations clear to pitchers while also maximizing their chance for success. For example, one objective could be to throw a strike for the first pitch of every new batter.

Coaches should keep track of pitch counts and adhere to the Pitch Smart guidelines for daily pitch count limits. No pitchers should exceed the daily pitch count limit for their age. Once pitchers are removed from the game, they should follow the Pitch Smart rest guidelines for the number of calendar days they should rest their arm before pitching again. It is up to the coaches, parents and athletes to communicate with each other on how many rest days should be taken and when the pitcher is available to pitch again.

In the midst of the game, it is important that the coach and pitcher have open lines of communication. If the pitcher is struggling, hurting, or just not feeling his/her best, the pitcher should feel comfortable approaching the coaching staff about what is going on. As a coach, you should be monitoring your pitching staff for fatigue and discomfort.

## Position Athletes

Coaches should provide support for position athletes during games as well. Both offensively and defensively, coaches should be aware of what is going on with their athletes, and should have open lines of communication with athletes if changes need to be made. All athletes should be engaged in the game and ready to participate when needed, even if they are not in the starting lineup.

If the coaches prepare the team correctly with the process, the athletes will have the freedom to figure the game out on their own. Try to avoid over-coaching during games and let the athletes test out what they have learned in practice. For example, instead of telling position athletes where to stand for each batter, allow them to figure out where to play certain opponents on their own, or speak to your position athletes between innings, allowing them freedom to make decisions between the lines. By encouraging your athletes to think on their feet, you are helping to set them up for success within the game.

## RELATED USA BASEBALL COURSES



## RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*5 Strategies to Help Your Athlete Manage Performance and Social Anxiety\*\*](#)

## Postgame Team Meeting

At the conclusion of a game, coaches should gather the team for an end of game meeting. This meeting should be used to recap the game, highlighting the positives. The negatives of the game can be briefly discussed as well, but should not be harped on. The best practice for constructive criticism is to sandwich the criticism between two praises. For example, a coach could say “Good job team, you executed all of the hit-and-run situations perfectly this game. We weren’t able to get any of our bunts down though, so we need to work on that in practice. However, with the outstanding performance of our defense, we were able to hold the other team to only one run for the game!” Coaches should be taking notes throughout the game on the positives and negatives.

Post-Game meetings need to be kept short and to the point. It is better to cover most of everything from the game at the next practice. No matter how a team played, a coach should end on a positive and move forward. Coaches and athletes can get emotional after a tough defeat, therefore meetings after a game should be carefully thought out. Teams are aware of when they do not play well. If it is evident the athletes are not taking care of the preparation for games in practice, then coaches can address the issue of preparation. Coaches should get other coaches’ advice on the next practice and focus on continuing to build skill sets from game to game. The key for team meetings is for the coaches to make them positive, purposeful, timely, and to the point.

One of the takeaways from games for the coaching staff should be a list of what to work on in next practice. Games expose skills that need to be further developed. The coaching staff should meet prior to the next practice to discuss areas of the game they would like the team to work on based on the last game performance. For example, if the opposing team effectively used the short game and your team was unable to defend against it, then bunt coverages

and short game drills should be implemented during the next practice. Using games as a developmental checkpoint will help to continue to develop your athletes both on and off the field.

### RELATED LINKS

- [\*\*Pivoting for the Goal\*\*](#)
- [\*\*How To Help Athletes Have Confidence in Tough Situations\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Embracing Failure is a Vital Part of Success\*\*](#)
- [\*\*Grit: How to Get Back Up After Failure\*\*](#)
- [\*\*How to Overcome Failure\*\*](#)

# **In an effort to work towards the advancement of the youth baseball experience,**

we hope this manual helps you as a coach feel supported as you strive to create fun, development-centered experiences for your athletes. Managing relationships within your program, emphasizing your athletes' best interests, and developing appropriate practice and game plans will facilitate maximum engagement, movement, and physical activity. While there are many important concepts in youth baseball, keeping the game safe and enjoyable for your athletes should always be a top priority. Thank you for your commitment to our pastime's future.



# Resources



TEAM: \_\_\_\_\_ AWAY/HOME

OPPONENT: \_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_ TIME: \_\_\_\_\_

COACH(ES): \_\_\_\_\_

FOUL BALL DUTY: \_\_\_\_\_ DUGOUT CLEANUP: \_\_\_\_\_

#		PLAYER	POS	SUB	POS
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					

#	PLAYER	#	PLAYER

## Team Contact Information

[illegible][illegible]

## Team Roster

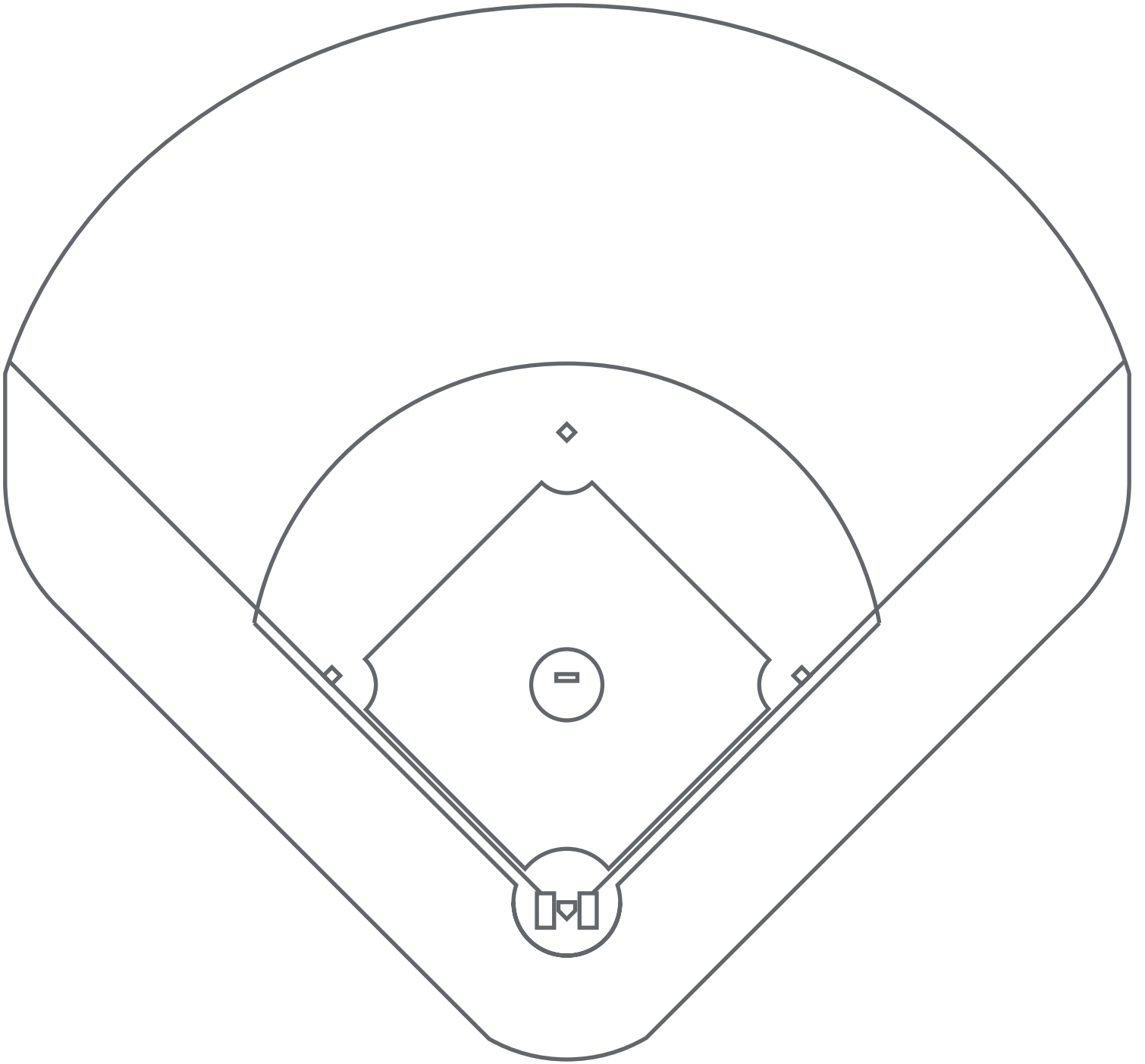
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# Sample Practice Plans

The following outlines two practice plans that can be found on the USA Baseball app. For more practice plans, [click here](#) or download the free USA Baseball app in your app store.

<b>Rep-based Youth Practice plan</b>	<b>1 hour 45 minutes</b>
<b>Throwing warm up</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>Pitcher fielding practice (PFP)</b> PFP - Bunts on 3rd base side	<b>15 minutes</b>
<b>WATER BREAK</b>	5 minutes
<b>Stations</b> Defensive Stations - In & Out	<b>1 hour 5 minutes</b>
<b>WATER BREAK</b>	5 minutes
Offensive Stations - Tee and Live Hitting	
<b>Baserunning Conditioning</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>Game Situations Youth Practice Plan</b>	<b>1 hour 50 minutes</b>
<b>Throwing warm up</b> Daily throwing program	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>4 Corners</b>	<b>10 minutes</b>
<b>PFP Circuit</b>	<b>25 minutes</b>
<b>WATER BREAK</b>	5 minutes
<b>Stations - Infield Game Situations</b>	<b>25 minutes</b>
<b>WATER BREAK</b>	5 minutes
<b>Baserunning Circuit</b>	<b>20 minutes</b>
<b>Post-Practice Clean UP</b>	<b>10 Minutes</b>







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