



Advantage Certified Coaching Standards

Thank you for your interest in becoming an Advantage youth coach. The league's success depends on interested parents and friends such as you to ensure that our children get the very best experience possible while playing in an Advantage Sports program. Please take the time to read over the following material regarding coaching standards in Advantage Sports.

As a coach of an Advantage Sports program, we are far more interested in your ability to communicate with the children on your team to effectively impart a positive sports experience, than we are in your ability to teach the nuances of the perfect pass release or precision route running.

Benefits of Athletic Participation for Kids

Research points out many benefits of getting kids to continue to participate in youth sports, noting that, kids who stay in sports tend to, stay in school, get better grades and have fewer behavioral problems. It is extremely important that coaches remember that a successful youth coach is defined *not* in terms of a won-loss record, but in terms of *how many kids decide to return to play again next year*.

Equal Playing Time

The primary purpose of youth sports should be to teach fundamental sports skills in a non-threatening environment. That is, children should have the opportunity to learn new skills and improve previously learned skills and have fun doing it. Coaches must create an environment both in practices and games where children are not afraid to make mistakes. Using fear of failure as a motivational technique is unacceptable. Mistakes happen as part of the learning process. Children who hope to become better skilled so they can move on to more advanced levels of competition have to be willing to take risks and experiment with more advanced skill techniques and strategies. They will not do this if they are afraid of making mistakes. All members of any team come to the team expecting equal opportunities. They have the right to expect equal quality and quantity of coaching in practice. They all must be given the same opportunity to try out what they learn in practices in game situations. In fact, games should be considered an extension of practices, another opportunity to learn. An athlete can't learn much by sitting on the bench. Sports involve movement, physical skills. They are best learned by doing, not watching.



As a helpful reminder here's a checklist of some behaviors connected with positive coaching:

Kids deserve praise for participating/trying

The child chose to play a sport rather than hang out during free time. We need to credit each player just for being there. The youngster chose to sign up, come to practice and come to the games. We need to remind ourselves not to notice and praise kids only when they achieve. It's easy to praise the kids who do well in a sport. We also need to praise the youngsters who don't shine but who stay with a sport day in and day out.

Make a BIG deal out of even the SMALLEST positives

Promoting a positive self-image in kids while they play sports is essential! Look for positives and then encourage them with animated praise. At practices and games, a good goal is to try and keep a healthy ratio of positives to negatives. The more positives to negatives the better! Additionally, you want to be specific in your praise. "Atta-boy", while a good effort won't go quite as far in building up kids as a more specific compliment such as, "I like the way you kept hustling after that play." Finally, it's equally important to "make a big deal" out of it, to praise with animation. Kids respond to public accolades, so the more animated as a coach you are when praising, the better. In fact, a good motto is: "Praise in public and criticize in private."

Stay calm when mistakes crop up, help kids learn from their mistakes.

Dealing with a child after a mistake has been made is one of the most critical issues facing youth sports coaches.

Ideally, youth sports offer kids great lessons in life:

- 1) It is OK to make a mistake
- 2) Mistakes WILL happen
- 3) Mistakes are stepping stones for learning.

When a youngster makes a mistake in a sport, one of two things can occur:

- 1) The youngster can learn from the mistake and try to improve the next time
- 2) The youngster can become preoccupied with the fear of making another mistake.

The coach is the focal point that will help determine which path the youngster will travel. If a coach stays calm and tries to instruct the child, there's a chance that the child will see the mistake as an opportunity to learn. If the coach stays calm there's a chance that the kid will stay calm, focus on the mistake and learn from it. Unfortunately, as human beings, we often tend to have more animation in our reactions to negatives than in our reactions to positives. So it takes an extra effort on our part as coaches to remind ourselves to do all in our power to try to stay calm when mistakes occur.



Have reasonable, realistic, and reachable expectations.

Trying to live up to expectations can be a major frustration for kids whether they are their own expectations, or those of adults in their lives. Despite the fact that they may not show it, kids have a strong desire for adult approval, the lack of which, can be a major source of low self-esteem. Since a coach often plays a major role in the life of a youngster, it is important to keep expectations reasonable and attainable. A good coach's skill expectations are based on the knowledge that all youngsters are different in their physical skills, skill development potential, and growth rate, all of which can affect their coordination.

A good coach's motivation expectations are based on the awareness that there are three levels of motivation for kids in youth sports:

- 1) Some kids, especially the entry-level youngsters, are playing because their parents enrolled them
- 2) Many youngsters are playing because it's a social event allowing them to be with their friends
- 3) A smaller group of youngsters, beginning at about age 11 or 12, are playing because they enjoy sports for sports' sake.

A good coach's dedication expectations are based on the knowledge that the level of dedication to practice and mastery of skills depends upon the level of motivation in a youngster. A good coach also knows that dedication wanes when playing the sport is no longer fun.

Treat kids with respect. Do not tolerate put-downs, sarcasm, or ridicule.

When a youngster signs up to play sports, he/she deserves to be treated with respect. This means no put-downs, no sarcasm and no ridiculing by the coach, or fellow players. Any youth sports coach who volunteers to take on the job of guiding kids in any given sport needs to be careful of how he/she comes across to the youngsters.

Remind kids not to get down on themselves.

A youngster making a mistake is going to happen, and kids can go from the top of the world, to down in the dumps in a matter of moments. The key is not to let the child get down on himself for an error, but rather make a positive out of the mistake whenever possible. A youngster misses a wide open pass reception. The coach substituted for the youngster. He then said to him, "Son, I didn't take you out because of dropped pass. I took you out because after you dropped it you hung your head, delayed in getting back to the huddle and allowed your opponent and teammates to see your attitude. If you get down on yourself after you make a mistake all it does is give your opponent an advantage. Now, get back in there, learn from your mistakes and quit beating yourself up!"



Remember not to take yourself too seriously during the game.

Remember, this is a volunteer position; nobody is being paid to pace the sidelines here. You don't need to make this your "life", too many times in youth sports, the same person who seems to have it all together away from the field, is a different person as a coach. Kids will respond much more positively to a coach that does not look at mistakes on the field as a poor reflection of his coaching ability and his team's preparedness. Rather, mistakes can be looked at by a coach as another opportunity to give encouraging feedback to a young athlete.

Maintain Fun is #1 focus, with lots of laughter and sense of humor.

The #1 motivator for kids to play sports in the first place?...FUN! If you ask a child his motivation for playing a given sport, you are not likely to hear "to increase my self confidence" or "to learn sportsmanship", or "to better prepare me for life". Kids enjoy competing, but the fun is the act of competing, the excitement of competing, not just the winning. The effective coach is the coach who learns what fun is for the kids by getting into their shoes and seeing the world from their point of view, the world of fun. The effective coach knows that fun, laughter, and humor are second nature to kids.

Emphasize teamwork, and help kids think "WE" instead of "ME."

For these youngsters, self-esteem = a sense of belonging. Humans are a very social group and even our youngest members need to feel as though they belong to a group. Youth sports offer an automatic sense of belonging. Coaches are pivotal in making the "team" concept become a reality. The coach needs to ensure that ALL players are recognized, not just the best players. Parents should be encouraged to praise all the players on the team, not just their own.

Be a role model of good sportsmanship.

These days, sportsmanship has taken a distant back seat to the outcome of the contest. Coaches have a responsibility to promote sportsmanship



Youth Sports Coach Behavior Checklist

- Kids deserve praise for participating/trying
- Make a BIG deal out of even the SMALLEST positives
- Stay calm when mistakes crop up, help kids learn from their mistakes.
- Have reasonable, realistic, and reachable expectations.
- Treat kids with respect. Do not tolerate put-downs, sarcasm, or ridicule.
- Remind kids not to get down on themselves.
- Remember not to take yourself too seriously during the game.
- Maintain a Fun is #1 focus, with lots of laughter and sense of humor.
- Emphasize teamwork, and help kids think "WE" instead of "ME."
- Be a role model of good sportsmanship:
 - a) Win without gloating
 - b) Lose without complaining
 - c) Treat opponents and officials with fairness, generosity, & courtesy.



TRAITS OF THE IDEAL COACH

- A coach should be enthusiastic without being intimidating. He or she should be sensitive to the children's feelings and genuinely enjoy spending time with them. He or she should be dedicated to serving children and understand that football provides physical and emotional growth for its participants. Remember, Advantage Sports is for the children.
- A coach needs to realize that he or she is a teacher, not a drill sergeant. He or she should help children learn and work to improve their skills. Personal gains are never a consideration. The job does not depend on winning. The best interest of the child transforms into the best interests of the game.
- The safety and welfare of the children never can be compromised. A coach will consider these factors above all others.
- A coach needs a tremendous amount of patience. Don't push children beyond limits in regards to practice. Children have many daily pressures and the football experience should not be one of them. Playing football is supposed to be fun.
- A coach should care more about the players as people than as athletes. The Advantage Sports program is a means to an end, not an end to itself.
- A coach should encourage his players to dream and set lofty goals. It is important to remain positive and refrain from discouraging remarks. Negative comments are remembered far more often than positive affirmations.
- A coach needs to remember that the rules of the game are designed to protect the participants, as well as to set a standard for competition. He or she never should circumvent or take advantage of the rules by teaching deliberate misconduct. A coach who puts his or her opponents' team at risk should not be involved with children.
- A coach should be the first person to demonstrate good sportsmanship. He or she should take a low profile during the game and allow the kids to be the center of attention.
- Parents and players place a lot of trust and confidence in the coach. The coach has an important role in molding the athletic experience of the child.
- A coach can measure success by the respect he gets from his or her players, regardless of victories or defeats. Children who mature socially and physically while participating in sports are the best indication of good coaching.