

Advice to Prospective Coaches

So, you're thinking about coaching. Please read on.

Why should I coach?

Do it for the kids. Do you have something to offer them about baseball, teamwork, exercise or just having fun? Can you organize a group of kids and keep them focused on a goal?

You should have fun too. You get to skip out of work early and play outside. You can spend more time with your kids.

But, I don't know if I can get off work?

It's great if you can be at every practice and game, but it's not necessary. If there are other coaches, just make sure that everything is covered. Often, a manager will make every event and coaches will come when they can.

Try to find a way—you won't regret it. Nobody reflecting on their life said, "I wish I had spent more time at work."

How much baseball do I need to know?

That depends on the level, but the odds are you need less baseball knowledge than you think?

If you are coaching **T-Ball**, you need to know only the basics: The positions, object of the game, basic terminology, and the basic skills (throwing, catching, fielding, hitting). You can learn how to teach these skills from books and videos, but it is good if you can demonstrate a proper throw and catch, and can teach the kids a good batting stance. Kids learn from the visual.

As you move up, you will need more knowledge and skill.

You can learn along the way for t-ball, machine pitch, and coach pitch divisions. If you played Little League, you probably have enough basic skills for any of these levels. You can pick up on strategy by reading or working with a more experience coach or manager. We all learn as coaches as we go.

By the time you get to Majors, kids are able to do most skills well (or they should be – if we are doing our jobs in the younger divisions!) and are working on mastering subtle aspects of the game.

If you're not sure, ask the Division Coordinator. Their contact information can be found on this web site.

What's the best way to learn?

If you're unsure, the best bet is to team with a more experience coach or manager. It's the best way to learn.

If you can, start young. When your kid is 5 or 6, you don't need to know much to stay one step ahead. As they grow, so do you.

We supply training, primarily around safety areas. We will offer classes in first aid, positive coaching (we are members of the Positive Coaching Alliance) and basic coaching techniques. We are looking at making coaching segments on this site – with drills, etc. to help you better coach a LL player. Look to this site as it develops for more coaching information, tips, links, etc.

Who can coach?

- The Rules
 - Major Managers are chosen by the League President with input from the Board of Directors. Managers may choose their own coaches – subject to league approval. In other Divisions (tee, A, AA, AAA) the Managers are chosen by the Coordinator. Although almost anyone is allowed to coach, it is not automatic that someone will be approved, even if they had coached before.
 - Those without a criminal history. Anyone with a criminal conviction involving children should not apply. We do a background check and reject anyone we feel should not be with children.
- The Guidelines
 - San Mateo National Little League supports Positive Coaching. www.positivecoach.org If you believe that coaching is as much about child development as it is about winning, you're a good candidate.
 - People who are good role models for kids. Sometimes people approach coaching with the best of intentions, but when it comes to game time can't prevent themselves from yelling at kids, parent or officials. Everyone slips up sometimes, but good role models make good coaches.

What's the difference between a "coach" and a "manager?"

The "manager" is the head coach of the team.

I want to coach, what now?

When you register, please select coaching on the volunteer page. Don't forget to specify which child or children you are coaching for.

If you are not sure, you can contact the Division Coordinator for the division in which your child will play. .

If you decide last minute, you can contact the manager at the Parent's Meeting. Managers are usually interested in having help. You can discuss your qualifications and the manager can submit your interest to the Coordinator.

I'm not sure what to do. Where can I get more information?

If you have other questions or are just not sure what to do, you can contact a Board Member

Little League International has a whole section of their site dedicated to coaches: <http://www.littleleague.org/coaches/index.asp>. They publish a newsletter for coaches called *The Coach's Box*.

Hints for New Coaches

This is targeted primarily to new coaches, although experienced coaches might find a tip or two.

Elements of a Good Practice

A good practice should:

- **Be fun**—If the kids are having fun, they'll work harder and learn more. Plus, they'll look forward to practice. You should have fun too.
- **Be diverse**—Don't spend all the time on one thing (skills, scrimmage, conditioning, etc.). Break practice drills into stations.
- **But not too diverse**—The kids can only absorb so much.
- **Teach skills** the players can use at the next game.

Basic Practice Structure

Every manager needs to find what works for him. But, here is a basic template to start from:

- **Before practice.** Plan your practice. Think about where players need improvement and find drills to work on those skills. Figure out what you

- want to tell them. Coaching team should exchange email about practice ahead of time so all adults come to practice knowing what will happen.
- **10 minutes before practice:** Manager and coaches arrive. It's good to be there and set up before the kids arrive. Make sure the field is safe for play.
 - **5 minutes before practice.** Some kids will arrive early. Don't leave them sitting there. As they arrive, have them play catch in pairs. No hard throws yet.
 - **First 10 minutes:** Once everyone has arrived, have them warm up (see "Warm Up and Stretching" below)
 - **Next 50-60 minutes:** Work on drills for about 15 minutes each skill. Younger players will probably not be able to stay interested for that long. Three skills plus breaks will be about 50-60 minutes.
 - **Scrimmage (option):** This is not an essential element. In many ways, it's undesirable because too many kids are standing around. Can use "game situation" drills as an alternative.
 - **Plan B:** No matter what you do, sometimes it just won't work out (the drill might not work, the field might be too wet, and the players you wanted to focus on might not show). Always have an alternate plan; at least a few additional drills you could run in lieu of the ones you originally planned.

There are many online sites and books. This site will provide information as it develops.

What makes a good drill?

- **Everyone doing something.** The worst drills have one kid doing something, while others watch (e.g., batting practice). If you have skills that are focused on an individual, set up a drill for the rest of them and pull one kid out at a time for that individual skill.
- **Teaches something.** Sounds silly, but some drills don't sink it. Pick something that they can use the next game.
- **Conditioning.** Not all drills should involve conditioning because the kids will drop from exhaustion, but some drills should include conditioning. Ideally, the kids don't know they're conditioning—no running just for running sake. Teaching base running here & you get both.
- **Age and skill level appropriate.** Don't teach turning a double-play to coach pitch because you'll lose most kids. Professional ball players do drills that Little League players might consider below them (e.g., practice batting off a tee). Don't dismiss a drill because it seems like a "little kid" drill. One famous SF Giant player with a knack for hitting balls into the Bay used to hit off a tee for 30 minutes prior to most games.
- - **Younger Players:** Focus almost entirely on skills. The most important "strategy" concept at this point is to start thinking about what they are supposed to do. Backing up a base is a good skill to

work on—it also helps keep outfielders awake. This is where you as a coach can make an immediate impact – teach them the basics! Throw and catch properly!!

- **Middle.** Introduce more difficult skill concepts. For example, for an outfielder, the first step should be backwards. Positioning for the cutoff, low throws, etc.
- **Older Players.** Keep working the skills. Add more conditioning. Work on game situations. Push concepts like “every player moving every play”, proper footwork, etc.
- **Progressive:** The same drill can be used, but gets harder as they get better. Some drills get faster or farther. Others introduce more complex skills. For example, a drill that throws to the correct base might change to double-play. A drill running to a base, might add sliding.
- **Mix**—Mix some old and new drills.
- **Fun** - It is a good idea to break up a practice or end a practice with a little fun drill. It can still be a teaching opportunity – but give the kids something to look forward to (they are still kids). Throwing a ball into a garbage can from the outfield can teach good throwing technique & accuracy – while making it fun for the kids. A pack of trading cards (or whatever) for the kids who make it in the can!

Warm Up and Stretching

The “old school” says stretch, then warm up. The new thinking suggests warming up muscles a bit before stretching. A short jog (two laps around the bases for little kids, and maybe a little throwing is good. Yes – a little run before the stretch is the way to go. Make it a team jog – not a race.

Warm up and stretch should take 10 - 15 minutes depending on age.

Teach warmup as a major-league skill. It’s important both to prevent injury and to maximize performance. This is not goof off time. While playing catch – emphasize proper throwing & catching techniques. Too many coaches just let their kids go off into the outfield & warm up while they prep the field or whatever. They are missing the most important fundamental we can teach these kids – proper catching & throwing techniques. It ALL starts here!

Where can I find drills and other information?

The League provides training in coaching and double-goal coaching. There are many on the internet. There are also books and videos.

Here are a couple of sample sites:

<http://www.qcbaseball.com/drills/drills1.aspx>
http://www.y-coach.com/CD/Baseball_Softball_Drills.htm
<http://www.baseball-articles.com/drills/>
<http://eteamz.active.com/baseball/instruction/index.cfm?>

Teaching skills

If you don't know the details of the skills yourself (e.g., how to hold a baseball), then ask or check out the many good books or web sites. You can also enlist the help of others with skills (older siblings are great!) and don't be afraid to ask another coach. Our goal here is to teach the kids – there are few secrets!

Also, attend the Coach's training session offered by SMNLL. Check the website for our next training seminar. Also look for more "position specific" information to follow on this site.

Scrimmage sample:

There are many different ways to incorporate a scrimmage in a practice setting – don't stop doing the drills that improve the fundamentals – but the kids tend to enjoy this "game situation" setting & it can provide valuable teaching.

Fielders: Put players in the field (9-10 depending on level). Define a rotation (e.g., pitcher->catcher->first->second->short->left->center->right.) that makes the most sense (and you can use this to occasionally. You can adjust the scrimmage to the number of players at the practice (eg – 4 on 4).

Batters: All the other players are batters.

Coach pitches, but "pitcher" fields balls to that position.

Batter hits. If they get on base, they become a base runner. If they score or get out, they become a fielder. Everyone rotates and batter goes fills the empty spot. Everyone must run to their new position. If you want them to run more, have the rotation to positions that are far apart.

The advantage of this approach is every time someone is out, players have to move.

You can come up with variations such as: batter bats until he gets out; only rotate after 3 outs out, then rotate x3. Another variation is to start with a 2 strike count – encouraging the kids to swing the bat...

Where can I get more information?

If you have other questions or are just not sure what to do, you can contact a Division Coordinator for age appropriate information or specifics.