First-time youth coach: a checklist for volunteer parents

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A checklist for parents coaching a youth sports team for the first time: the parent message, the practice plan, equal playing time, game day and the free tools that help.

You don't need to have played the sport. You need one message to parents before the season, a plan for each practice, a fair way to share playing time, and a team that has fun. Here is the checklist, with the free tools on Peabody's Sports coach wing that do the planning and the maths. Peabody is free through the end of 2026.

Before the season

- [ ] Ask your league what training it requires or offers. Many have a short coaching course and a safety course.
- [ ] Send parents one message: practice times and place, what to bring, how playing time works (everyone plays), how to reach you.
- [ ] Get cones (shoes work), a ball for every child if you can, and a whistle.
-] Make your first practice with the [practice plan maker, or use a ready plan for your sport and age.
-] Let the kids pick a team name at the first practice. The [team name generator helps.

Every practice

- [ ] A warm-up game, not laps.
- [ ] One or two skills, taught as games in small groups. No long lines.
- [ ] A small-sided game: two or three a side, lots of touches.
- [ ] A scrimmage to finish.
- [ ] Talks under a minute.

The guide to running a fun practice for young kids has an hour broken down minute by minute.

Game day

-] Make the lineup before you arrive. The [equal-time lineup shares minutes fairly.
- [ ] Give each child one thing to try.
- [ ] Cheer effort out loud.
- [ ] After the game, one good thing about the team, whatever the score.

End of season

- [ ] A small celebration with a word for every child.
- [ ] Thank the parents who helped.
-] A [bracket for an end-of-season mini-tournament, if your league allows.

Safety

Follow your league's rules. The CDC's free HEADS UP training on concussion is listed in the Sports directory. On rest days, the kids can read a story in Peabody's library.

What to say at the first practice

Kids and parents both want to know what the season will be like. Two minutes at the start of the first practice, with everyone sitting down, covers it:

- Your name and how they should call you ("Coach Sam").
- The three team rules. Keep them short: listen when the coach talks, try hard, be kind to teammates and opponents.
- How playing time works: everyone plays.
- That the most important thing this season is having fun and getting better.

Then play straight away. The first practice sets the tone; let it be mostly playing.

Helpers make it easier

Ask one or two parents to be assistant coaches. One can run a small group while you run another, which halves the waiting. Another can handle snacks, the schedule and messages, so you can focus on the kids. Most parents are happy to help with a specific job when they're asked.

Questions grown-ups ask

Do I need to know the rules perfectly?

No. Learn the basics, keep the game moving, and ask the referee or another coach when you're unsure. Kids care far more about playing than about perfect calls.

How do I handle a parent who wants more playing time for their child?

Say how playing time works in your first message, and use the lineup tool so the minutes are on paper. Most problems start when the rule wasn't said early.

Does Peabody keep my players' names?

The lineup tool keeps what you type on your device only. Nothing is sent.

What if I've never played the sport?

Then you'll learn alongside the kids, and that's fine. The ready plans explain each drill, and a short league course covers the basics.

Free at peabody.kids/blog/first-time-youth-coach-checklist