

TECHNIQUES FOR COACHING YOUNGER CHILDREN

One of the greatest rewards in life may very well be that of parenthood. Having the chance to watch your children grow from demanding infants, to demanding teenagers, to mature and stable young men and women may be life's greatest compensation. Perhaps second to that honor, is the distinction of being a youth athletic coach. Once you make the decision to coach, you instantly create a responsibility to many and dive headfirst into a situation that you may not know how to handle.

In coaching today's youth, the first thing to remember is always be yourself. You probably know the best lessons to teach, but **the problem is that most of us do not remember what it was like to be 7 or 8** again. Imagine being taken from the safety of your backyard with your parents, and placed on a field bigger than you had ever imagined, and with a group of total strangers. Try to see yourself through those innocent eyes, so eagerly watching your every move. The simple concept of being a good person with the kids is what coaching is all about.

Get down to their level and make them feel comfortable. Make sure they never feel like they will be swallowed up by their mistakes, as they tend to turn their backs and hide any talent they may have in such a situation.

Above all, make coaching challenging for yourself and fun for the kids. Always remind them that this is a game and it must be fun to play. Your goal is to make baseball fun for the players. That is a hefty goal but one that you must strive for.

Do not get too technical with younger children. Yes, you must teach the basics, but do it in a way they can understand. For instance, when you teach how to field a ground ball, use the alligator method. Never teach the technical way to field grounders, as you would do for a teenager. The alligator will accomplish the same thing. "The alligator has a big mouth and we use our hands like an alligator. The glove hand is the bottom and the throwing hand is the top of the mouth." Young kids can relate to this type of learning.

Never scold or criticize in front of the entire team. Take a child aside and show them what they did wrong. Always start out by praising the player, and then explain what they did wrong. Once you have done this, always finish with a positive. No one, especially a youngster, needs to constantly hear negative criticism.

Always emphasize the need for a parent - player - coach relationship. As a coach, be a leader, a role model, a doctor and a friend to the players. To the parents, be the boss but also someone they can trust with their youngsters.

As a coach, your job is to reward them with high fives, hand shakes, words of encouragement and above all, smiles. When a player gets hurt, be the first to their side. Make sure they know you care. Be sure to make practice fun, and games competitive only to the point of competition itself - never for the sake of winning at all costs.