

## Practice Tips for youth coaches©

By Coach Mark Zender

[www.marinerscamps.org](http://www.marinerscamps.org)



- The first 10 minutes of every practice should be identical. Typically, a few kids are late. With a standard routine, they will jump right in without causing any interruption. Begin each practice with a jog, (head to toe) stretch routine, and throwing warm-up. Never deviate and your practices will begin efficient and focused.
- Plan your practices! Don't "wing it." Elementary-aged kids have a sensitive radar device that detects any hesitation or wasted time. An immediate reaction called "causing trouble" will immediately break out and you will lose all control.
- Bring a whistle. Kids are trained in school in Physical Education class to respond to a whistle. To elicit the same response from the kids requires a loud, intimidating voice and that breaks down the relationship you want and need to have with the kids. A whistle will be the best small investment you make.
- Teach toward the positive. The brain is a literal learner. For example, if you say, "don't take your eye off the ball," the brain hears "take your eye off the ball." It is better to say "Keep your eye on the ball."
- When speaking to a group:
  - ✓ Have them "take a knee" rather than sit. This promotes them paying attention and discourages playing with grass
  - ✓ Place all gloves/balls in a pile away from the kids. In hand, the glove or ball serves as a distraction.
  - ✓ Make ALL players be quiet before beginning to speak. Ask for their silence and then you be silent. Provide talkers with "the look."
  - ✓ With a difficult group be sure you stand – to provide imposing body language. But, most of the time drop to eye level with the group. Take a knee and speak. It gets their attention and shows respect for them. This is highly effective. Choose your posture to create the needed outcome.
- Discipline. If an individual needs discipline, don't make an example of them. Pull them aside, 1-on-1. 1) Warning – only one. 2) Remove from activity or drill. 3) Send to bench for remainder of practice/game + speak to the parent (with the child present).
- Between every drill have the kids take a run that lasts about a minute – to the fence and back, etc. This provides time to collect your thoughts and organize the next activity.
- Don't be a buddy. Do keep the environment fun. Baseball is a game and should be fun. This balance is a challenge. Coaches and players each have their respective roles and being buddies on the field is not one of them.
- Separate your ego from coaching. Pride is significantly different from ego. Stay calm and observant during failure. When a player fails or you find yourself getting upset, this is a "teaching moment." Teach; don't yell. They're kids!
- Wear a watch or keep your eye on the clock on your phone. Begin practices on time – not even one second late! This will train your parents to get to practice on time. End practices on time. If you say 5:30, don't go over. You will lose the respect of your parents. If a parent is not prompt in picking up their child, DO confront them and remind them that you are a volunteer.
- With many drills implement a goal-oriented tactic. For example, when playing catch have the players count how many throws hit the target "out-of-ten" they achieve. Or have them count how many in a row they complete successfully. Using goals in drills will increase concentration. This is highly effective!
- Utilize competitive drills. Competition always breeds excellence. Relay races in teams, timing individuals against themselves from one practice to another always builds extra effort. You will also find out a lot about the mental make-up of your team members. Don't buy into the philosophy that competition is not good for young kids – that is wrong! With healthy competition you can teach winning with humility and losing with honor.
- Do not accept put-downs of any kind amongst your team. Even the smallest derogatory phrases should be squelched. Also, encourage positive phrases from the kids to each other AND in their self-talk. Encourage them to say "You can do it" or "I can do it."