

Practice Advice for Coaches

Here are some ways to keep their attention and keep practice flowing smoothly:

Keep lectures short (2 minutes or less). If you lecture any longer than this, most kids will be in “lala” land by then. And kids don’t come to practice to hear you talk the whole practice, they come to have fun.

Keep drills short and fun (half court – 5 minutes or less, full court – 10 minutes or less). If you stay on a drill for too long, it becomes monotonous and the kids lose interest.

Clap Method – You tell the kids at the very beginning of your first practice that whenever you clap, they have to clap the same number of times you clap. You clap twice, they clap twice. Make sure to also tell them that this is time for them to listen.

You can usually get everybody’s attention after 2 to 3 sequences of claps and that only takes normally 3 to 5 seconds. Much better than yelling so much you can’t talk the next day.

Line Method – Whenever you blow whistle or yell “lines”, the kids race to an assigned line and sit down. You might have 5 lines of 6 or 3 lines of 3 depending on the size of your group. The team that lines up and sits down first wins. Congratulate them with some enthusiasm by giving them fist-pounds, high fives, and/or verbal praise.

Kids need to be highly active!

Just by using fast paced drills and keeping things moving, your players will have more fun and get in better condition. Your kids should be breathing hard and their hearts should be pumping. It's good for them!

Avoid standing in lines as much as possible and keep the ball in their hands as much as possible.

Kids want to feel successful!

With very young kids, competition doesn't always serve as a motivator. You should always provide activities that help them build their skills and confidence. Strive to focus on the learning process instead of measuring up to those around you.

You'll want to avoid adding pressure and competition until the players have developed their skills, confidence, and become proficient with the basics. Put them in situations where they can succeed.

Kids want to have lots of fun!

This is an important stage for young players and your actions could determine whether they enjoy sports or not.

It's important to make things fun so they can improve and become confident.

[Youth basketball drills](#) don't have to be boring. Almost any drill can be modified to provide high activity, high success, and high enjoyment.

Best Overall Advice for Youth Basketball Coaches

Keep things fun!

Did you know that the #1 reason kids quit sports is because it's not fun anymore?!? It's very important to play plenty of games and keep a positive attitude.

Be positive and make things fun. Even if the kids get cut from the team or decide not play basketball at an older age, they'll still have a positive image of basketball and may continue to play it recreationally when they get older.

If you act like a drill sergeant when coaching a bunch of 10 year olds, the kid will get a negative image of basketball and have negative emotional feelings when thinking of basketball. Kids will also get sick of basketball if they play TOO many games each year. As a result, they will not likely play basketball when they get older. It can even affect their feelings towards fitness in general. If a person dislikes fitness and becomes inactive, they are more likely to be unhealthy!

Be Positive & Do NOT Correct Every Mistake!

Don't be too critical and stop them to make a correction on every mistake. Let them play and learn themselves. If you stop or correct them on every mistake, you'll get a basketball player with low confidence that is always unsure of what to do, instead of a confident player that reacts to the defense.

Now, if they continue to make the same mistake over and over and over, show the player a better way to do a certain thing. For example, if you see one of your players stand straight up every time they touch the ball and a defender crowds them and causes the offensive player to travel. Say to the player, "Way to hustle, Johnny! Let me show you something that will help you when the defender crowds you. When catching the ball in this position, keep your hips back with your knees bent, and pivot. Be ready to attack. Then if the defender comes to crowd you, it will be easy for you to dribble right by him!" Notice, I did NOT focus on the negative and say "Stop bringing the ball up!"

Don't focus on the negative. Focus on the way to help them. Let's be positive as coaches!

Allow your players to be successful!

Sometimes competition is not a motivator for young kids. However ALL kids need to taste success (and hopefully lots of it). Now this doesn't mean winning. It means getting better and succeeding in practice. Allow your players to run drills that they can succeed at and feel good about. Celebrate small accomplishments and successes with your players.

Don't worry about winning!

You don't have time to worry about winning. There's only time to do the right thing... If you do things "right", winning will eventually be a by-product of your actions. Be patient. True success takes time to do things right. It doesn't happen overnight.

You must first build a SOLID foundation for these kids to build on. Taking the time to build that foundation will cause you to sacrifice winning some games. Trust us. This is better for your players in the long run.

Teach the right things!

Just keep in mind that if you can teach your young players the following skills, then you should feel good that about what you accomplished and know that you're teaching your player the right things (that they need to be successful)!

Your young players should be able to:

- Dribble with their left and right hands equally well.
- Make lay ups with their left and right hands equally well -- and jump off the proper foot (left foot when shooting with right hand, and vice-versa)
- Perform a jump stop without traveling.
- Pivot on their left and right foot without traveling.
- Perform accurate chest, bounce, and overhead passes.
- Perform a defensive slide (feet wide, good balance, staying between the offensive player and the basket).
- Shoot a basketball with proper form.

These simple skills should be your number priority and your goal should be to help your players master these skills. Once they have truly mastered these skills, you can start building from there.

How to Coach a Team of Players With Different Skill Levels

When you work with a wide range of skill levels it's important to know that the best players are sensitive to knowing when they aren't being pushed.

If they feel like they are grouped with players that are less skilled in a drill or skill work, they will tend to not take the drill as important.

They need competition to push them. When attacking skills in a practice you want to split the players up into groups 3 or 4 different groups. Don't just split up guards and bigs on each end.

Make their workouts more about skill development and not so much about competition. Make sure small sided games are just as much about learning with certain rules as it is about winning.

Don't water down the practice/drills for the kids who haven't developed the skills yet. That will bore the kids who already have the skills.

Let the kids practice in small groups. Kids with better skills work together on those skills and moving those skills to the next level. At the same time, kids with weaker skills work together (maybe with more attention from the coach) to improve their skills. With a smaller group, focus on specific errors that the weaker kids are making and teach them how to correct their errors.

Vary Drills

Give players options in drills. Give them an advanced way and beginner way or an advanced, middle and beginner way to do a drill. This can be done in most drills with a little bit of forethought and planning.

In a layup drill an advanced layup might be with an inside hand finish and the beginner way might be off of two feet.

In ball handling drills an advanced move might be between the legs and the beginner way would be a crossover.

Allow the player to choose which way they would like to try the drill. This gives players the opportunity to be more successful in a drill and will likely enjoy the game more.

If it is a drill where there is a defender involved, have the defender play demonstration or guided defense with lower skilled players.

Keep it fun

Don't bore players with drill after drill of skill development without making it some type of game or competition. Play small sided games that work on skills you are trying to improve. This can help speed development, but also keeps it fun for all players.

I think we need to allow players to fall in love with the game or at least enjoy it before we make them take it so serious.

Peer coaching

Allow and encourage players teach each other. There have been so many times when a player has been able to explain a skill or concept to another player better than I was able to because they were able to bring it to the player's level.

I often steal the language players use to explain something to each other because it clicks with them better.

Live with growing pains

Don't limit players. Encourage them to take chances and help them grow when mistakes are made.

I often watch youth practices or games and lower skilled players aren't allowed to do or try something because they may turn the ball over or not make the correct play.

When coaching youth sports there are going to be a lot of mistakes, but coaches must help players overcome and learn from these mistakes.