



BETTER ATHLETES  
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# Coaching Grit Without Being Too Tough on Kids

*This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.*

**“How does one coach toughness (aka grit) to youth athletes (10 to 14 years old) without being too tough on the kids? It will be demanded of them in high school and in life.”**

## PCA Response by Cameron Campbell, High School Football Coach & PCA Trainer–Houston

As a high school football coach in Texas, I know firsthand the importance of toughness on the playing field. Youth coaches commonly misinterpret the word “toughness.” Toughness in this context essentially means overcoming adversity. Therefore, coaches should create opportunities to build physical and mental toughness into players as a byproduct of every day challenge and adversity rather than trying to instill it through coach-speak.

When coaches establish the parallel between sports and other aspects of life, on-field characteristics can translate to off-field situations. Including toughness.

An open dialog on why these life skills are important is key. The 10-14 age group you mention is a large range. Introducing toughness in conversation, or in simulated scripted scenarios is probably best for the younger players.

You can create situations and drills that address mental and physical toughness simultaneously: challenging early morning practices, memorizing a series of numbers while running sets or plays, etc., are great tools. Simulating a detailed must score/stop situation puts players in a game-like situation.

The coach can modify time, points, position on the playing field, time outs, and schemes to create a “just right challenge.” This allows the coach to throttle the simulation and consequences of the outcome to push the players to stretch their horizons. Reinforce these physical and mental challenges by verbally framing and defining toughness during the drills and in team meetings, practice-ending rituals and game reviews.

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