# USA Basketball Youth Development Guidebook

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INTRODUCTION
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USA Basketball is a nonprofit organization and the national governing body for men’s and women’s basketball in the United States. As the recognized governing body for basketball in the United States by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA) and the United States Olympic Committee (USOC), USA Basketball is responsible for the selection, training and fielding of USA teams that compete in FIBA sponsored international basketball competitions, as well as for some national competitions, and for the development of youth basketball initiatives that address player development, coach education and safety.

USA Basketball’s Youth Development Division was formed in 2013 to promote, grow and elevate the game of basketball throughout the United States. As part of the initiative, the USA Basketball Development Model was created to help guide players, coaches, parents and administrators through the sport. The model includes many types of initiatives, tools, resources and offerings, all of which focus on the health and well-being of young people to enhance enjoyment, participation and development in the game.

USA Basketball is excited to present this guidebook as a resource for players, coaches, parents and administrators. Inside the guide is the USA Basketball Player Development Curriculum, a robust and progressive teaching and playing standard for all levels of the game. Whether you are a basketball novice or a veteran of the game, we hope that you will utilize this curriculum while guiding young people.

We urge you to continue your development in the game by visiting us at www.USAB.com to take advantage of all the resources and initiatives that USA Basketball Youth Development has to offer.
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THE USA BASKETBALL DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY

The USA Basketball Development Pathway describes the road that we take in experiencing the game. The experiences that make up the pathway should be designed to promote “Basketball for Life”, which encourages everyone to continue on in the sport. Positive basketball experiences ensure that those who enjoy the game will continue to take part as players, and will also stay involved in the sport as coaches, trainers, administrators, fans, officials and referees.

START. Everyone starts the game in a different fashion. Some of us are first introduced to basketball in school, while some of us start as toddlers with a toy hoop in our home. In either case, this introduction sparks our interest in the sport.

EXPLORE. With initial interest comes exploration. Often, we are entered into our local basketball league or registered for instructional lessons as children. Also, we begin to play the sport with friends in our neighborhood or in pick-up games at school. Exploring opportunities to play basketball are vital to our continued interest.

LEARN. During the exploration phase and beyond, we learn a basic understanding of how to play. Basketball is often learned from parents or guardians, local coaches, and from those that we play with and against. Many players develop skills by emulating their peers or the athletes they watch at higher levels of play.

PARTICIPATE. The next stage is participation, where players take part in the sport at all levels. This includes continued structured play on local recreation teams, travel teams, club programs and school teams. Participation also includes non-structured play without coaching, such as pick-up games, playing in the driveway, or perhaps at an outdoor court.
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ADVANCE & PERFORM. Some of us will find that we will advance into higher levels of basketball. Through hard work, dedication and natural talent, we may perform basketball well enough to become very good high school players or college athletes at both the scholarship and non-scholarship levels.

ADVANCE & EXCEL. There are a small number of players that possess the attributes of talent, physical and mental ability, and extreme dedication who will go on to excel in the sport. These players move from the perform stage into the excel stage to play basketball professionally. An even smaller number of those players will be selected to play for their country’s National Team.

BASKETBALL FOR LIFE. It is important to understand and accept that while some will advance to play basketball at higher levels, and some will simply continue to participate in the game, everyone will eventually enter the “Basketball for Life” stage. This stage includes continuing to play the game, but also includes those who continue to take part as coaches, trainers, administrators, fans, officials and referees.

USA Basketball’s Development Pathway is a road map to enjoying the sport forever. Great experiences along the path will ensure growth of the individual, growth of the game, and the future of the sport.
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*USA Basketball’s Development Pathway* is a road map to enjoying the sport forever. Great experiences along the path will ensure growth of the individual, growth of the game, and the future of the sport.
There are many reasons why an individual has decided to become a basketball coach. Some of us are former players who are looking to give back or stay involved in the game. Some of us have children who play and we volunteer to coach their team. Others are asked to coach within their community to fill a need. There are also coaches, often referred to as trainers, who workout players in the off-season but don’t coach them in games. Whatever your reason, coaching young players requires a high level of responsibility and maturity.

Coaching young players should be thrilling, exciting, rewarding and fun. To prepare yourself, take into consideration the following characteristics that make for a successful youth coach:

**PATIENCE.** Remember that you are coaching kids. Young people need teaching but they also need the opportunity and freedom to make mistakes. Your role as coach is to teach and then help your players learn from their mistakes. Rather than expecting your players to play flawlessly, allow them to demonstrate mistakes. This approach requires a substantial amount of patience but will maximize long-term player and team development.

**EMOTIONAL MATURITY.** Even at foundational levels of play, basketball games can become heated. It is your duty to act like a responsible adult under any circumstance. This means keeping your temper under control even when you know that you are right in a particular situation. Your dealings with players, officials, parents, scorekeepers and others are under a microscope as a leader, and it will require you to demonstrate restraint in all situations.

**BASKETBALL KNOWLEDGE.** As the coach of a team, group or individual, you will need to develop an understanding of fundamentals, rules and various strategies based on the level you are working with. Introductory levels of play will require only basic education but will also require a deeper sense of your impact on a
COACHING THE GAME

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beginner’s continued involvement in the sport. Advanced levels will require deeper basketball education as well as a more philosophical approach to coaching. This guidebook and our online resources at www.USAB.com will serve as a valuable resource to you as you develop as a coach.

**TIME COMMITMENT.** Games are certainly important, but being a good coach involves more than simply showing up for the game. To be effective you will need to organize and execute practices, provide fundamental skill instruction, decide on playing time, communicate frequently with players and parents, and much more. Coaching is a commitment of your time to the development of players both on and off the court. Make the full commitment to coaching, it will maximize the benefit to your players and make the experience more rewarding for you.

**PRIORITIZE.** Winning can be a healthy goal, but striving to win is where lessons are learned regardless of the final score. A truly effective coach will evaluate a team’s level of play, will set attainable goals, and then will assess outcomes based on development rather than on wins or losses. Identify your players’ values and establish your values as a coach, then use those values as guiding principles in prioritizing team and player goals. Perhaps you are coaching a recreation team and a goal is for everyone to play equal time, or maybe your coaching at the high school level and a goal is to win a state title. In either case, make the journey to achieve the goal a priority.
IMPARTING LIFE SKILLS
COACHABILITY

“Coachability describes someone who wants to be coached. This manifests itself as someone who likes being challenged, loves learning, strives for more and more and then works tirelessly at what they’re taught.” – Coach Geno Auriemma

Being coachable and being teachable go hand in hand. Above all things, coaches are teachers, players are students, and basketball is the subject matter. Coaches want to feel that the players care about what they say. During training, practice and games, a coachable player will give the coach their undivided attention. Also, a player that is coachable will act on what the coach teaches.

There are four main traits that a player needs to possess to be considered coachable. When selecting a team, or deciding to coach a group of young people, you should look for these characteristics among each prospective player.

HUMILITY. A player that has humility accepts and admits that there are things they do not know, and cannot do, within the sport of basketball. Further, the player is willing to concede when they cannot accomplish a certain task alone, and are willing to allow the coach to help.

SENSE OF PURPOSE. A player who is willing to state their goals and demonstrate their motivation will typically be easier to reach through coaching.

SURRENDERING CONTROL. A player who can give up control to another, in this case a coach, is initially doing so without seeing results. For a player to make true change to improve their game, a journey into uncertainty will happen along the way. Once you have been verified as a credible and qualified teacher, a coachable player will be fully invested in the journey.

FAITH. Improvement or non-improvement as a player can only be determined after the player has been through the experience with you as the coach. A player that puts faith in you is forgoing the benefit of hindsight, understanding that sometimes things need to get worse before they get better.

At the same time that you are seeking or imparting these characteristics to your players, you should also encourage players and their parents to seek the same in a prospective coach.
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COMMUNICATION

It has been proven that the vast majority of all communication is non-verbal. Your actions as a coach speak much louder than your words. Through posture, facial expressions, body language, gestures and tone, players and coaches send each other unspoken cues. It’s important that you coach your players to say what they mean and mean what they say. This is extremely valuable as your players communicate amongst themselves and others.

Interactive communication is needed to effectively send and receive messages. There are many obstacles in the way of clear communication, and pushing through those obstacles is a challenge that you must overcome as a coach. Obstacles such as non-listeners, misinformation, and interpretation are barriers to interacting with your players and having them interact with each other. A major barrier in modern day communication is sarcasm. It is your duty as a coach to remove sarcasm from all communication in order to keep messaging clear and effective.

Here are six communication principles to impart to your players:

**CARE.** Communicators must have a genuine concern for other people, their development, and their needs.

**CREDIBLE.** Great communicators remain consistent, fair and competent. Their actions dictate how they are perceived and valued.

**CONSTRUCTIVE.** Communicators are consistently positive, full of energy and only see challenges as temporary obstacles.

**CONNECT.** Use every opportunity to communicate at the appropriate level, with simple and direct language to keep and hold someone’s attention.

**CONFIRM.** Check back with the other person or group to ensure messaging is understood.

**CONCENTRATE.** Give opportunity for others to respond, listening intently to responses and feedback.

CONFIDENCE

Confidence is the players’ belief in their ability to perform. Some players derive this confidence from possessing natural talent, and some acquire it from training and mastering skills. As a coach, it is imperative that you provide your players with enough confidence to drive their passion to advance in the sport.

Here are five ways to promote and instill confidence in the players you coach:

**HELP PLAYERS COPE WITH FEAR OF FAILURE.** Fear of failure is a natural trait that derives from a player’s desire to succeed. The fear is based on the player’s need for social acceptance and approval. Talk openly with players about their personal fears. Coach them to identify and openly discuss what scares them the most.

**ASSIST IN SETTING EXPECTATIONS.** It’s great to have expectations, but when players set their own expectations too high they will lose confidence and, perhaps, interest in basketball. Assist your players in identifying reasonable expectations so they don’t sabotage their experiences.

**AID IN NAVIGATING DISTRACTIONS.** The ability for a player to concentrate can become blocked by distractions. For that reason, help your players to focus on processes rather than outcomes. Emphasize the importance of living in each moment so as to minimize the distraction of outside forces. For example, teach your players to keep focus on a particular play instead of emphasizing how that play may win or lose the game.

**SERVE AS YOUR PLAYERS’ BIGGEST FAN.** As a coach, you should teach and support your players throughout the confidence-building process. Help players erase doubts and beliefs that undermine their confidence. Demonstrate loudly to your players that you are behind them using positive reinforcement during both favorable and unfavorable situations.
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HELP PLAYERS DEAL WITH SETBACKS. Mistakes, errors and poor judgment on the part of young people is inevitable, especially in sports. Helping your players cope with those setbacks instills composure in them. Teach your players to learn from, and then let go of, the past. Keep your players moving forward at all times.

HARD WORK & DISCIPLINE

Hard work and discipline compliment each other in basketball. A hard working player will often demonstrate a sense of self-discipline. Likewise, a disciplined player will typically appreciate the value of hard work in achieving goals. As a coach, you must set this tone by putting in extra effort and training yourself to uphold the same expectations you have for your players.

It is important to recognize that the definition of hard work for one player may not be the same as it is for another. For example, players with high stamina may perform the same sprinting drill as their teammates but may find the drill unchallenging. Encourage players to discipline themselves to do more when they are able. Conversely, it is equally as valuable for players who struggle with a drill to acknowledge that struggle and work with you to learn how they can improve. Train your players to accept situations that require hard work, and also train them to demonstrate discipline while performing that work.
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LEADERSHIP

Leadership plays an important role in basketball, especially in team situations. A team can be made up of different levels of leaders both on and off the court. Ultimately, the coach will lead the group, however the coach will need to rely on others to lead at various points. Teaching your players and assistant coaches how to lead allows your coaching philosophy to spread consistently throughout the group.

There are multiple ways to select leaders, though as coaches you should recognize that leaders aren’t always your best players. Players learn to lead from the experience of both leading and following. There is value in your players learning by emulating the best player, but there is equal value in players learning from those who have had the experience as followers. As a coach, make it a point to identify, train and appoint both types of leaders within your team or group. This will help to build trust in you as a coach amongst your players, parents and administrators.

As a leader yourself, it’s important to gain the trust of those who follow you. Those who are unfamiliar with you as a person will be apprehensive to trust you as a leader, especially at first. Demonstrate to your players that, as their coach, you embrace initial skepticism and encourage them to do the same. Inform players from the start that you are under the microscope as their coach, and let them know that tomorrow it could be them under that same microscope. Finally, impart to your entire group that being under scrutiny doesn’t have to be viewed as bad. We should encourage constructive feedback to better ourselves as coaches, players and as people.

RESPONSIBILITY

Coaching basketball provides a great opportunity to teach young players the value of responsibility. Responsibility involves making choices and then accepting the results of the choices that were made. Often, young people allow circumstances to dictate poor choices. Players will often minimize or ignore their power to choose so that they can satisfy short-term wants and needs.

For example, a player may miss a practice or training session when a perceived better opportunity presents itself in the moment, such as playing video games with friends. This doesn’t necessarily mean the player doesn’t want to improve, but in that moment the player casts aside their long-term goals in basketball to fulfill a short-term desire, which in this case was playing video games instead of practicing. As a coach, it is your duty to consider a player’s long-term growth and impart true responsibility in your players in order to produce long-term results.

To teach responsibility in your players, take these steps:

- Develop and adhere to consistent consequences for every player you coach. Apply grace to situations that warrant it, but do so equally for all players.

- Reward positive behavior as often as you correct negative actions. If you only recognize negative behavior, a player will respond negatively and you will impede the long-term growth of the player and the team.

- Model responsible behavior by acknowledging your own choices and how they may impact the player or group.

A responsible player has more of an ability to decide between right and wrong than an irresponsible player. Insist that all players you coach own their responsibilities so that they can make informed decisions when faced with choices.
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SPORTSMANSHIP & FAIR PLAY

Young players should treat teammates, coaches, opponents and officials the same way that they would like to be treated – fairly and with respect. Coping with winning and losing is a major part of sportsmanship in basketball. Ideally, young people first learn about how to deal with challenges that arise from a modeled behavior by their parents or guardians. However, as a coach, it’s up to you to reinforce the appropriate behavior for winning and losing, as well as during individual situations.

Rarely does a player enter a game or contest exhibiting poor sportsmanship. Typically, an unfavorable situation arises within an activity that prompts the player to act unruly. Prepare your players for these moments ahead of time by simulating challenging situations in training or practice sessions. For example, have an assistant coach purposely make a wrong out-of-bounds call while officiating a scrimmage. Then, explain to the complaining players that calls like that will happen frequently over the course of basketball. Emphasize to all that acting unruly and complaining about a call is a backward action, and that it takes important focus away from the next play.

Do not tolerate regressive thinking by your players, and do not exhibit regressive thinking in your coaching style. Players will mirror the behavior of their coach as their leader. Set the example for your team by controlling your own emotions toward officials, parents, your own players as well as your opponents. Don’t allow unfavorable situations to permit you, your assistant coaches or your players to cause discredit to your team.

TEAMWORK

“To me, teamwork is the beauty of our sport, where you have five acting as one. You become selfless.”

– Coach Mike Krzyzewski

Teamwork is the essential part of basketball success. Every player and coach has a specific role to play in accomplishing team goals. Although it may seem as if one player scored the basket, that basket was made possible by planning, coordinating, and cooperating to get that player the ball. As a coach you develop people to work well with others, but you also need to ensure that every player understands their particular role in that process. When everyone focuses on performing within their role then everyone achieves more.

Teaching the value of teamwork and becoming an effective member of a team is an important first step to developing leadership skills. For impressionable youth, the development of these skills is critical. Young people that lack a team experience have limited exposure to positive and proactive support systems in basketball. Affording young people experiences through which they learn to rely on themselves and on others is an important factor in the development of a productive mentality.

As a coach, encourage each of the following habits in all players:

- Cooperation.
- Contributing with ideas, suggestions, and effort.
- Communication (giving and receiving).
- A sense of responsibility.
- Respect and toleration for different opinions, customs, and individual preferences.

Teach your players that “we over me” is what most often leads to “us over them,” in team sport competitions. Encourage your players to be selfless and supportive teammates in both losing and winning efforts.
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TEACHING TECHNIQUES
Behavior Management is the focus on maintaining order and behavior with a group or an individual. As a basketball coach or administrator, you will find an infinite amount of personalities, behaviors, and mentalities on your team, in your camp or clinic, and throughout your organization. Without effective behavior management techniques, it is impossible to keep athletes focused on training, practices, games, or other team activities. By keeping athletes engaged, you will find that group activities can be effective and efficient.

The key to effective behavior management is to develop clear and concise expectations for each and every member of the group. Try to include your athletes and parents in this development process as much as possible while still maintaining your authority as the leader. It is very important that everyone in the program is involved in upholding the set expectations. Also, the group should discuss and agree upon the repercussions for not maintaining expectations. Any player, coach, parent or staff member who fails to behave accordingly should be held accountable for their actions. The decided course of action must be performed by the coach as the leader in order for the message to resonate throughout the program.

By establishing clear and concise expectations in your organization, and by following up with appropriate action when those expectations aren’t met, you will instill a sense of personal responsibility in others for their behavior. This will set a consistent tone and help alleviate challenges that arise within your program.

Building Self-Compassion

Having compassion for oneself is no different than having compassion for others. Just like recognizing and acknowledging when someone else is going through a difficult circumstance, self-compassion is the ability to recognize and accept your own difficult circumstances. As defined by researcher Kristen Neff, self-compassion is made up of three main components: mindfulness of your own thoughts, a sense of common humanity, and treating yourself kindly. Applied to coaching, self-passion involves giving young players opportunities to learn how to deal with their emotions.

Things will not always go the way your players would like them to. Use these five techniques to instill self-compassion in your players so that they can understand the good and bad moments in basketball, as well in life:

- Take time to teach players the truth that, no matter what they try to control, life will always be made up of highs and lows. Getting them to accept this reality sets the foundation for dealing with issues that arise.
- Listen to your players emphatically to help them label what they are feeling. For example: “It sounds like you are feeling aggravated.” “Did the situation make you angry?” Young people need to trust that you are hearing them.
- Honestly critique the player’s behavior within a situation, but don’t criticize the player’s overall character. For example: “That situation caused us to lose possession of the ball, you can do better than that.” is far more effective than saying, “You never listen.”
- Speak to a player’s past behavior but shape the future of the behavior with action. An example would be discussing the ramifications of a past turnover, and then next practice working extensively on technique to prevent future mistakes.
- Model self-compassion by showing your own composure to your players when faced with unfavorable situations. Coaches with self-compassion are better liked, have higher standards and present a greater work ethic to those that follow them.
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CRITIQUE VS. CRITICISM

It is important that all coaches understand the differences between the terms Critique and Criticism. A critique is an evaluation or an assessment of a particular skill. An example of a critique would be assessing how effectively a player can use their strong- and weak-hand during a lay-up drill. Criticism is expressing disapproval of someone based on a mistake that they have made. An example of criticism would be simply telling a right-handed player that they are awful at left-handed lay-ups. Knowing the difference in these terms is crucial in teaching and evaluating players in youth basketball.

While coaching young people, it is essential to consider the psyche of the players that you are coaching. It has been proven at all levels that players are more likely to build long-term confidence in their game after receiving positive feedback as opposed to negative feedback. For the sake of the lesson, let’s say that Michael just completed a basic lay-up drill session. During the drill, Michael makes 15 right-handed lay-ups and only 2 left-handed lay-ups.

An example of critiquing would be communicating to Michael that you have noticed he did extremely well on his right-handed lay-ups and that, with proper practice, his left-hand will perform just as well. The comment would confidently motivate Michael into training for the long-term on his left-hand lay-ups.

An example of criticism would be telling Michael that his left-handed lay-ups are useless and that he’s wasting his time in trying them. This comment can only produce poor results for Michael, his progress as a player, and for you as his coach.

It is important that, as coaches, we strive to critique athletes instead of criticize them. The method used to provide feedback to players will instill long-term confidence to excel on and off the court, and stay active in the game.

ESTABLISHING POSITIVE BEHAVIOR

One of the largest challenges coaches face is establishing positive behavior within the team. Whether it is personality conflicts, playing time, parental concerns, or win/loss records, it is difficult for coaches to maintain a positive culture in the program. In order to establish a culture that promotes positive behavior, you must establish clear and concise expectations on behavior from day one. All coaches, players, and personnel must be involved in the process of establishing guidelines for the team, and develop the repercussions if said rules were violated. It is important that you maintain a positive attitude with the team, and players should be recognized for demonstrating positive behavior. By having clear and concise expectations, involving the players in the process, and commending positive behavior, you will produce a positive atmosphere for your team.
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GOAL SETTING

As a coach, it is important to require that each player set personal goals for themselves. The team or group must also establish a set of goals to accomplish throughout their time together. Goal setting is choosing the skills and concepts that a player or a team wishes to accomplish throughout a set period of time. By setting attainable goals, the team will have a focus and motivation on the areas in which they need to improve upon. This provides everyone with a series of finish lines to cross. Once the individual or team has achieved the goal they can build upon these skills to set more rigorous goals.

In order to implement goals, coaches must facilitate discussion with the team or group and the individual. There are three steps that should go into goal setting:

- While it may seem obvious, insist that players discuss why they chose the established goal(s). For example, while watching film, a team realized that they do not rebound well. The team decides to focus on rebounding to improve on a deficiency. Remind players of the reasoning while working toward the goal.

- The player or the team must identify the actions they will take to achieve this goal. For example, the team decides they will make a concentrated effort to box out an opponent on every shot attempt.

- Focus players on what they would like to achieve in a specified amount of time. For example, during drill work, set a requirement that the team must secure 3 rebounds in a row before moving to the next drill.

By following each of the steps, players will grow, teams will grow together, and growth will take place in areas other than wins and losses. As coaches, we must continue to encourage all players and teams to set realistic goals and make constant plans to achieve those goals.