

A Checklist for Beginner Coaches (and those who want to be better)

Create a positive environment

- Learn names quickly.
- Smile, praise and encourage.
- Be patient and supportive.

Set achievable goals

- Keep the player's maturation in mind.
- Make sessions challenging.
- Ensure skill development is progressive.

Vary your sessions

- Change format and activities regularly.
- Ensure equal opportunity for all players.
- Avoid elimination games where players sit out.
- Include non-competitive team work.
- Include supervised play with minimal guided instruction.
- Use different teaching/coaching methods (tabloids/cards).

Teach skills

- Plan skills for sessions and introduce easiest ones first.
- Teach one skill, or one part at a time.
- Regularly revise skills from previous weeks.

Demonstrate

- Remember 'a picture paints a thousand words' .
- If you can't demonstrate a skill, choose someone who can.
- Demonstrate what to do, not what not to do.
- Make sure all players can see the demonstration.

Involve all players

- Have ample equipment available.
- Use several small groups rather than one large one.
- Aim to have every player practicing the skill each 30 seconds at least.

Provide instant feedback

- Use lots of praise.
- Be supportive - shouting and criticising won't achieve anything.

Use your voice well

- Don't shout or talk too much.
- Try to have as much one-to-one as possible.

Making improvement

In order for players to improve they need

- Attention
- Praise
- Competition

The coach

As a coach you have a huge responsibility as to the tone of a session. All coaches should adopt an enthusiastic and positive manner. To a degree you become an actor, the positive persona that you show will be passed on to the players. As a famous coach once said "If you're not fired with enthusiasm you will be fired with enthusiasm"

Positivity

Too often coaches focus on the errors and the mistakes a team make during a drill or a game. Counting the mistakes only serves to reinforce them in the player's minds. You would be far better off by emphasising the positive aspects of a performance.

Fairness

All children have a great need to be treated equally. They must see that they are being given a fair chance and thus have equal value to their peers.

Teamwork

The importance of teamwork and co-operation cannot be over emphasised in any team sport. The players must see teamwork in action and feel part of the group. Great team spirit and cohesion allow the group to be more than the sum of their parts.

The great challenge

Children's desire to win V's Coach's desire for skill improvement.

This is one of the great challenges in coaching youth sports. The participants all want to be first and to win the races. The coach recognises that this is important but more important is that the children need to learn the skills correctly. The greater need is for the young players to learn the skill properly especially at the young age. The challenge for all coaches is how these 2 competing aspects can be accommodated.

Start off on the correct hand

Not a single player in the top 1000 tennis players in the world plays with their non dominant hand. Yet too many children are introduced to hurling and are allowed to put their non dominant hand on the top of the stick. It is crucial that the children start off in the correct manner.

They must have their dominant hand at the top of the handle.

They must keep the toe of the stick pointed away from their body.

The golden distance: 7 yards.

7 yards is considered to be the perfect distance for children when learning a new skill. It allows the children develop their skill, it allows them to get a turn and it also allows for rest and competition. Not only this but most adult runs in a game involve sprints of about this distance too.

Getting people involved.

Most adults are reluctant to get involved with their children's team for fear of being presented with a difficult and demanding job. The best way to entice people into joining in is to give them a simple job initially. Most people are happy to give a hand when they know that they will be able to manage the job asked of them.

Demonstration is king.

Only 7% of effective learning takes place through words. In order for real learning to take place coaches need to address the more important areas of

- Actions
- Body language
- Look
- Tone
- Clear demonstration
- Exaggerated movements

Forget failure

Children will not learn a new skill when they are worried about making a mistake or getting something wrong. Distract the children from the worry of failure and this in turn allows them to be successful.

Somebody must be in charge

In order for the players to develop, improve and reach their potential there must be somebody in command of the training and coaching. Whether this is a group or an individual directing the learning doesn't really matter as long as the following points are in place.

- There is a clear central plan.
- The plan is known to all in charge and agreed on.
- There is control of the group.
- The planning takes into account the progress and evolution of the group.
- The plan will allow for the children to be challenged and stretched in order to learn and improve.
- The person in charge should arrange for the stations and equipment to be set out prior to the players arrival. This ensures less wasted time.
- Keep the groups as small as possible. In this session they were 3 per group and a ball or bean bag per group.