



**ROCKLAND SOFTBALL LITTLE LEAGUE
COACHES GUIDE**

THANK YOU!!

This might be one of the only times you hear this, so from all of us at the Diamond Dogs, thank you for volunteering to make this program successful. We appreciate your time, effort, and dedication that you give to the Town of Rockland as a coach of our program. We hope this handbook will be helpful as you navigate the world of youth girls softball.

Thank You,

Diamond Dogs Board of Directors

Purpose of This Manual

This manual exists to support our volunteer youth softball coaches by clearly defining expectations, responsibilities, safety standards, and player development principles. The goal is to ensure a **safe, positive, fun, and development-focused experience** for every player.

Youth softball is about more than wins and losses. It is about teaching life skills, confidence, teamwork, and respect through the game.

Mission Statement

The mission of the Rockland softball little league program is to provide **quality, accessible opportunities** that enhance the physical, social, and emotional development of all participants while promoting sportsmanship, fun, and lifelong enjoyment of athletics.

Coaching Philosophy

- Softball is a **game**, and youth play sports primarily **to have fun**
- Skill development, confidence, and enjoyment are more important than outcomes
- Equal participation and age-appropriate instruction are essential
- Sportsmanship, respect, and character development are key to our success

A successful season produces **better people**, not just better players.

Role of the Coach

Youth coaches wear many hats. Every coach is expected to act as:

1. Facilitator

- Create a positive, stress-free learning environment
- Use encouragement instead of criticism
- Emphasize learning, effort, and improvement
- De-emphasize winning and losing
- Invite parent involvement when appropriate

2. Positive Role Model

- Treat all players equally and fairly
- Demonstrate respect for officials, opponents, parents, and spectators
- Display professionalism at all times
- Model good sportsmanship in victory and defeat

3. Youth Development Leader

- Recognize that children develop at different rates
- Provide age-appropriate instruction and expectations
- Understand that players participate for different reasons
- Build confidence and self-esteem in every athlete

Coach Responsibilities and Expectations

All coaches are expected to:

- Be reliable, prepared, and on time
- Communicate schedules clearly to families
- Carry emergency contact information at all practices and games
- Ensure first aid kits are present
- Never leave players unattended
- Never allow injured or bleeding players to participate
- Enforce league playing-time rules
- Ensure equipment and facilities are cared for and left clean
- Shake hands with opponents after games
- Maintain professional behavior at all times

Coach Code of Conduct

Coaches must:

- Place children's well-being above personal desire to win
- Maintain a positive, respectful attitude
- Avoid abusive, sarcastic, profane, or negative language
- Promote inclusion regardless of ability, background, or identity
- Support league officials and fellow coaches
- Address concerns privately and appropriately
- Refrain from alcohol, tobacco, and drugs at all youth events

Violations may result in ejection, suspension, or removal from coaching duties.

Player Development & Age Characteristics

Ages 7–9

- Learning teamwork and basic concepts
- Short attention spans
- Highly influenced by adult feedback
- Need positive reinforcement and encouragement

Ages 10–12

- Improved coordination and understanding of game concepts
- Beginning strategic thinking
- Social dynamics increase in importance
- Eager to learn and improve

Ages 13–16

- Significant physical and emotional development
- More abstract thinking and goal setting
- Peer influence increases
- Coaches serve as important role models

Playing Time & Practice Expectations

Playing Time

- Every player must receive **minimum playing time**
- Continuous batting lineups are used where permitted
- Equal participation is encouraged whenever possible

Practice Attendance

- Practices are essential for safety and skill development
- Missed practices may result in limited playing time
- Excess tardiness to practices or games may also limit playing time

Player Responsibilities & Code of Ethics

Players are expected to:

- Listen to coaches and respect officials
- Show good sportsmanship at all times
- Care for equipment and facilities
- Avoid taunting or negative behavior
- Prioritize school and family
- Participate for enjoyment and growth

Players have the right to:

- Fair playing time
- A safe, drug-free environment
- Respect from coaches and teammates
- A fun and positive experience

Player Safety

Safety is the **highest priority**.

Coaches must:

- Provide constant supervision
- Never leave players unattended
- Use proper safety equipment
- Prohibit jewelry during play
- Ensure hydration and rest
- Complete accident reports for all injuries
- Require medical clearance before injured players return

If an injury occurs:

- Stay calm
- Assess consciousness
- Call emergency services if necessary
- Do not move injured players if injury appears serious

Parent Communication & Orientation

A preseason parent meeting is encouraged to:

- Explain team goals and expectations
- Review safety policies and playing-time rules
- Clarify communication procedures
- Build trust and partnership with families

Key topics to cover:

- Coaching philosophy
- Age-appropriate development
- Equal playing time
- Sportsmanship expectations
- Basic rules overview

Youth Softball Rules Overview

Age Divisions

- Age divisions are set by the leagues in which we will be playing
- Generally follow the age guidelines set by USA Softball
- Spring is typically set by grade
- Summer is typically set by age

General Rules

- No alcohol, tobacco, or profanity
- No negative cheering
- Proper safety gear required
- Helmets with face guards required
- Free defensive substitutions
- Continuous batting lineups
- Time limits enforced
- Refer to league commissioner/president if unclear

(Division-specific rules apply for pitching, stealing, bunting, and field dimensions.)

Discipline & Penalties

Unsportsmanlike conduct by coaches or players may result in:

- Immediate ejection
- Game or season suspension
- Removal from league activities

Serious offenses include:

- Verbal abuse
- Physical aggression
- Discrimination or hate speech
- Substance use violations
- Weapons or illegal activity

All disciplinary actions are enforced to protect players and uphold program integrity.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Development by Age Group

Skill development should follow a **progressive, age-appropriate pathway**, touching core skills at every practice.

Ages 4–6 (Intro / Tee-Ball / Coach Pitch)

Primary Focus: Fun, fundamentals, and confidence

Offense

- Proper bat grip and stance
- Hitting off a tee or soft toss
- Understanding running the bases

Defense

- Basic throwing motion
- Catching with two hands
- Fielding rolling ground balls
- Begins building confidence with fly balls
-soft/squishy balls

Key Emphasis

- Shorter practices
- Keep drills short and simple (10-15mins)
- Simple instructions
- Constant encouragement

Ages 7–8 (Developmental)

Primary Focus: Skill repetition and game awareness

Offense

- Hitting a moving ball
- Base running fundamentals (running through first, rounding bases)

Defense

- Improved throwing mechanics
- Fielding ground balls and basic pop-ups
- Getting the ball back to the infield

Key Emphasis

- Slightly longer practices
- Still keep drills and instruction short/simple
- Repetition
- Positive correction
- Introduction to basic team concepts

Ages 11–12 and 13+

Primary Focus: Advanced fundamentals and game strategy

Offense

- Pitch recognition
- Situational hitting
- Aggressive base running and sliding

Defense

- Fielding bunts
- Covering steals
- Blocking balls in the dirt (catchers)

Pitching

- Distance from plate increases
- Consistency, control, and pitch development

Practice Planning

Effective practices are:

- Organized
- Paced for age group
- Skill-focused
- Fun
- Team Oriented

Recommended Practice Structure

1. Dynamic warm-up
2. Throwing and catching
3. Hitting stations
4. Defensive stations
5. Team concepts or scrimmage

THROWING

Standard Softball Grip

- The ball should be held **with two fingers on top** (three fingers may be used for beginners)
- The ball should **not sit in the palm**
- Fingers should be placed **across the seams**, preferably across the large horseshoe
- The index finger aligns along a visual "stripe" across the ball
- The thumb rests underneath the ball, below the index finger
- The pinky finger rests lightly on the side of the ball

This grip allows the fingers to pull down on the seams during release, promoting control and accuracy.

To help players understand proper grip:

- Use a marker to draw a stripe across the ball
- Refer to the stripe when explaining finger placement
- Reinforce grip before every throwing drill

Grip instruction should be consistent and simple, especially for younger players.

Coaching Points for Effective Throwing Instruction

When teaching throwing mechanics, coaches should:

- Emphasize **form over power**
- Keep explanations short and clear
- Demonstrate correct technique
- Correct gently and positively
- Reinforce progress, not perfection

Throwing mechanics improve through **repetition and reinforcement**, not speed or force.

Coaching Mistakes to Avoid

- Allowing players to throw with the ball deep in the palm
- Prioritizing distance over accuracy
- Over-correcting young players
- Skipping throwing instruction during practice

Throwing is a core defensive skill and should never be treated as a warm-up only.

CATCHING/FIELDING

NOTE: Defensive Skill Progression

Defensive expectations increase gradually as players grow physically and mentally. Coaches should focus on mastery of fundamentals before advancing complexity.

Fundamentals

- Learning and improving to catch the ball with two hands
- Developing comfort and control with the glove
- "Softball Ready" and prep-steps

- Catching progression
 - tossed or rolled balls
 - harder rolled/hit balls
 - pop flies
 - tracking/moving to the ball
- "Ball, Base, Backup"
 - play the "Ball" if it is hit to you
 - play a "Base" if it is not hit to you
 - be a "Backup" if you do not have a ball or base

Fundamental Catching Principles

Key coaching points:

- Use two hands whenever possible
- Watch the ball all the way into the glove
- Keep the glove out front, not tight to the body
- Secure the ball before attempting a throw

Confidence in catching comes from repetition and positive reinforcement.

Fundamental Fielding Principles

Key coaching points:

- Stay low with knees bent
- Glove on the ground for ground balls
- Body behind the ball
- Field first, then throw
- **controlled, athletic movement.**

Players should never rush the throw at the expense of securing the ball.

Teaching Pop-Ups

Coaching emphasis:

- Move feet first, then catch
- Position body under the ball
- Call for the ball
- Catch above eye level when possible

Pop-up skills are introduced gradually and reinforced as players advance in age/division.

Common Defensive Teaching Mistakes to Avoid

- Rushing players to throw before securing the ball
- Skipping fundamentals in favor of advanced drills
- Overloading young players with instructions
- Expecting perfect technique immediately
- Avoid yelling out what to do as the play is happening

HITTING

Hitting Development

Hitting instruction should match the physical and cognitive development of each age group. Coaches should focus on fundamentals first and add complexity gradually.

Key Fundamentals

- Properly hold the bat (grip)
- Balanced batting stance
- Eyes on ball
- Hitting off tee, soft toss or coach-pitched balls
- Controlled, consistent swing

Bat Grip

While detailed grip mechanics are not deeply expanded in the manual, it emphasizes teaching players how to properly hold the bat at young ages.

Basic coaching cues:

- Hands together on the bat
- Grip firm but not tight
- Comfort and control over strength

Coaching cues to avoid:

- Emphasis on power over form
- Constant corrections during games
- Comparing another players stance
- Expecting immediate results

Stance

Each athlete may have a different stance. Ability to swing comfortably should be prioritized.

Pre-Pitch:

- Feet even and spaced just outside the shoulders
- Athlete bend at the hips and knees
- Hands should be held high around ear level
- Bottom of bat (butt) should face the catcher
- Eyes focused on the pitcher
- Chin on front shoulder

“Look and Load”

- “LOOK” Eyes on the pitcher for her wind up
- “LOAD” Your body when the pitcher moves
 - We lean athletically into our back leg
 - Maintain your bat grip
- Always believe you will swing each at bat, until you know the pitch is no good

Swing

- "YES, YES, YES" ("NO")
 - Always think or say "YES" to a pitch unless it's a bad pitch "NO"
- First movement is transfer of weight from the loaded position
- Second is focus on Hips and Hands working together
- Hands should stay inside of the ball
- Hands should be "Palm up, Palm down" as they travel through the zone
- Front elbow above hands, hands above the barrel
- Strong, straight wrist
- Eyes and Head focused on the ball
- Finish with bat extension