



*WABL Coaches*  
*Handbook*  
*2025*

Revised 2025

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WABL is a proud partner with Positive Coaching Alliance and therefore has utilized many of the Positive Coaching Alliance resources to create this handbook.

WABL Coaches,

Thank you for being a coach this year! No matter how experienced you are with being a coach, or even as a former player, the boys and girls of the league really appreciate it and you are the reason we can play so, thank you.

What do we do now? Being a coach means juggling a lot of various tasks through the year.

A document that explains everything about coaching would fill large volumes – that is not the intent of this document. This document is meant to give you an idea of some of the best practices we have found that successful coaches use.

Depending on the league, your team will be either drafted by you, or assigned to you by the league commissioner. Make a plan to communicate with your new team families immediately.

WABL will provide you with a list of your team, and the contact information for your team's parents. Please send out an introductory email to the parents of your team and plan to have an initial team meeting, before or at your first practice. This is the time to select a team communication app to easily send messages to parents. The GameChanger app is required for F and G Leagues, and is recommended for use by all teams for communication with families.

At the team meeting, it is important to establish your protocol and the way you want things to work. Let parents know that you will communicate the dates, time and location of all practices and games. That you will let them know if there are any changes, rainouts, etc. Instill in your parents that they should ask you questions regarding game status and not to email the league president or commissioner.

It is extremely important to communicate this at the beginning of the season, and to reinforce this early and often. This is information that will be asked, so absent any direction from you at the beginning of the year on how things will be handled, parents will be unsure of the protocol and unsure who to ask for clarity. Be proactive!

Let parents know practice starts on time, so best to be there before that time. Do not punish players who are late. Parents have work and family responsibilities that may prevent them from arriving on time, but do stress the importance of timeliness. Discuss with your team transportation issues prior to practice and games. The Board of Directors for the West Akron Baseball League respectively asks that you do not transport any children, other than your own, to and from practices and/or games.

Discuss with your team the proper method to encourage each other during practices and games. The worst thing that past coaches have indicated, is for an atmosphere to exist where

players are criticized by other players for an error. Set an example early and often to build up players and encourage the players to do so for one another. Fill up their emotional tanks.

Other parents are a key to helping the team practice. For practices especially, having a parent help run a station or assist on a practice will help with the amount of work that can be completed in a short time. The more buy-in parents have in helping with the team, the greater chance that they will be an ally and help to make the season run smoothly. While most parents can't be at all practices, even the occasional help of a parent will prove to be an asset. Other non-practice tasks that can be assisted with include scorekeeping (be it with the book, or the app), snack calendar if so desired, field prep, and clean up post game.

Regarding rainouts - there are days when it is obvious that the rain will prevent the game from being played. On those days, WABL will send out a message by the afternoon regarding the cancellation of games and closure of fields. However, other times a rain shower may hit the area an hour before the game, and while there was a downpour, the fields may still be in pretty good shape. There is not time for WABL to look at every field in this instance - use your judgment on the condition of the field. Most of the time - the fields will be playable. There are rakes and brushes at the fields that can assist in the prep for the game to make the field level and ready for action. Unsure of what to do? Ask another coach or watch a video on field prep on Youtube.

## **Program Introduction**

This handbook was prepared in an effort to establish guidelines to help those who are connected with West Akron Baseball League. While the information presented is designed for the entire coaching staff, it is extremely vital to understand that all personnel involved in our program are volunteers. The guidelines on the following pages are meant to enable all the volunteer members to function with increased confidence and effectiveness.

The coach of an athletic team is primarily responsible for the compliance of his/her team members to the rules, regulations, and policies related in this manual.

The WABL President, Board and League Commissioners will administer these rules and regulations as they relate to coach relationships. You have chosen an honorable volunteer position and must be an example of honor and dignity for our athletes.

## **PHILOSOPHY**

Competitive activities mean more than competition between individuals and teams. It is, rather, a means of learning a way of life which exemplifies the philosophy that hard work, drive, and determination bring eventual success. Good sportsmanship, both as a winner and a loser, and the concept of self-discipline and self-esteem are inherent parts of any athlete's participation. Co-curricular activities are a part of the total education program and as

such contribute to the development of desirable learning habits and outcomes in knowledge, skills, and emotional patterns.

When these activities are planned they:

- \*Extend and reinforce the instructional program.
- \*Build athlete morale and promote positive support.
- \*Provide social and recreational activities.
- \*Contribute to the enhancement of all segments of multi-cultural athletes.
- \*Promote cooperation and team work.
- \*Develop self-discipline and self-esteem.

## **Sportsmanship and Code of Conduct**

### Board Policy

Athletes and Coaches who participate in WABL's activities are representatives of WABL therefore they are expected to model positive behaviors. Participation WABL activities is a privilege which is voluntary and will be subject to eligibility criteria established by the WABL Board. Each athlete participant and his parent/guardian are required to read and agree to the WABL Code of Conduct before participation in WABL activities.

### Expectations

- \* Athletes will demonstrate cooperative attitudes and participate to personal capacity
- \* Athletes will demonstrate high standards of ethics and sportsmanship
- \* Athletes understand and strive to maintain excellence in sportsmanship

## **Expectations and Tips for Coaching Staff**

First-time coaches often are parent volunteers. A typical scenario has mom or dad registering a young child in a youth sports organization, which then asks parents to volunteer. The parent might consider him or herself capable of being an assistant coach, and then all of a sudden is named a head coach! Many first-time coaches find this role harder than they expected, so here are concrete tips to ease matters and help your youth athletes.

1. Let your child know you're considering coaching. Explain that you're really looking forward to this, and ask for feedback about it. Your child's opinion may or may not change your decision about coaching, but it's good to have your child in on this new role you'll be playing from the beginning.

2. Be clear on your own goals for coaching. Coaches of kids just starting to play a sport may have the simple goal of a season enjoyable enough that everyone returns for next season.
3. Share your goals with your players and their parents from the start. Having a pre-season parent meeting is ideal. If it's too late for that, just get the parents together at the end of a practice and let them know why you're out there. It might sound like this: "My number one goal this season is to give your kids such an enjoyable experience that they all can't wait for next season. And, yes, I hope to teach them some skills, too!" Of course, if you have more ambitious goals in terms of skill development or imparting life lessons, share those, too.
4. Invite the parents to help. It often helps to have some parents pitch in at practices and games. If you invite them directly, they will likely support you with a few extra hands. Getting them involved at your practices also makes it more likely they'll be comfortable practicing the sport with their child outside of official practice time.
5. Welcome each player by name at every practice and game. When kids arrive to coaches who are smiling and greeting them by name, they feel welcome and positive from the start.
6. Plan practices that keep kids active. When kids are moving and active, they are more likely to stay focused. At the younger ages, avoid lines. Bring plenty of equipment, kids are not standing around waiting for their turn. Find games/drills that give kids a lot of repeated practice of the skills.
7. Face the sun, take a knee and be brief. When you're talking to your athletes, get onto their level (at least physically!) by taking a knee, so you can (literally and figuratively) see eye-to-eye. Find the sun, and make sure you're facing into it. Then make the most of the 30-60 seconds you've got their attention! Six 60-second conversations with your players at a practice are much better than two 5-minute conversations!
8. Pick 1-2 areas of focus per practice/game. You likely only have one hour for your practice. Pick one topic (two at the most!) to introduce and repeat over and over again. At the start of practice you might say, "Today is going to be all about passing." Then each time you bring the players in, ask them, "What is our focus today?" Then have this same focus for your competition that week. Whenever you see it being executed well, let your players know it, "Milo, awesome pass to Nathan!"
9. Create a team cheer and do it often. Young kids love having adults who are willing to be silly with them. Bring them in multiple times during practice to do their cheer, and make sure they see and hear you as an active participant.
10. End practice/competition on a positive note. At the end of practice or a competition call in all of the athletes and the parents. Ask the kids: "Who saw one of your teammates do something well?" The kids are actually good at answering this question.

Then ask the parents, “Parents, what did you see that you liked?” This gives the parents a nice chance to recognize specific, positive things they saw, and it ends the practice/competition on a high note.

11. Don't forget, this can be hard! Most parents are surprised by how hard it is to feel successful coaching. We go in with very high expectations, and we don't have control over the outcome! You are not alone. Find other coaches who have been doing this for a while, and share your challenges. They can serve as a wonderful resource.

## **Player Expectations**

**RESPECT** — Treat all people with respect all the time and require the same of all athletes.

**Class** — Be a good sport, teach and model class, be gracious in victory and accept defeat with dignity; encourage athletes to give fallen opponents a hand, compliment extraordinary performance, and show sincere respect in pre- and post-game rituals.

**Taunting** — Do not engage in or allow trash-talking, taunting, boastful celebrations, or other actions that demean individuals or the sport.

**Respect Officials** — Treat contest officials/Umpires with respect; don't complain about or argue with official calls or decisions during or after an athletic event.

**Respect Parents** — Treat the parents of other athletes with respect; be clear about your expectations, goals and policies and maintain open lines of communication.

**Profanity** — Do not engage in or permit profanity or obscene gestures during practices, sporting events, or any other situation where the behavior could reflect badly on WABL's sports program.

**Positive Coaching** — Use positive coaching methods to make the experience enjoyable, increase self-esteem and foster a love and appreciation for the sport. Refrain from physical or psychological intimidation, verbal abuse, and conduct that is demeaning to athletes or others.

**Effort and Teamwork** — Encourage athletes to pursue victory with honor, to think and play as a team, to do their best and continually improve through personal effort and discipline. Discourage selfishness and put less emphasis on the final outcome of the contest, than upon effort, improvement, teamwork, and winning with character.

**Professional Relationships** — Maintain appropriate, professional relationships with athletes and respect proper boundaries. Sexual or romantic contact with athletes is strictly forbidden as is verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature directed to or in view of athletes.

**RESPONSIBILITY** — Always strive to enhance the physical, mental, social and moral development of athletes and teach them positive life skills that will help them become well-

rounded, successful and socially responsible.

**Advocate Education** — Advocate the importance of education beyond basic athletic eligibility standards and work with parents to help athletes set and achieve the highest academic goals possible for them.

**Advocate Honor** — Prominently discuss the importance of character, ethics and sportsmanship in materials about the athletic program and vigorously advocate the concept of pursuing victory with honor in all communications

**Privilege to Compete** — Assure that athletes understand that participation in sports programs is a privilege, not a right and that they are expected to represent their team and teammates with honor, on and off the field. Require athletes to consistently exhibit good character and conduct themselves as positive role models.

**Self-Control** — Control of one's ego and emotions; avoid displays of anger and frustration; don't retaliate.

**Integrity of the Game** — Protect the integrity of the game. Play the game according to the rules.

**CARING** — (Safe Competition) Put safety and health considerations above the desire to win; never permit athletes to intentionally injure any player or engage in reckless behavior that might cause injury to themselves or others.

**Caring Environment** — Consistently demonstrate concern for athletes as individuals and encourage them to look out for one another and think and act as a team.

**CITIZENSHIP** — (Honor the Spirit of Rules) Observe and require athletes to observe the spirit and the letter of all rules including the rules of the game and those relating to eligibility, practices and other provisions regulating competition.

**Improper Gamesmanship** — Promote sportsmanship over gamesmanship; don't cheat. Resist temptations to gain competitive advantage through strategies or techniques (such as devious rule violations, alteration of equipment or the field of play or tactics designed primarily to induce injury or fear of injury) that violate the rules, disrespect the highest traditions of the sport or change the nature of competition by practices that negate or diminish the impact of the core athletic skills that define the sport.

## **Parent Involvement Guidelines**

It is important to set some rules for the players, but more importantly, the parents will require direction. Parents can be the greatest help and asset. They can also think rules don't apply to



them. Here are some suggestions to bring up in welcome letters and first team/parent meetings:

1. No arguing or yelling at the umpire - ever. That is not what we do in WABL. If a parent has concerns regarding the game, they should address you with their concerns. If you are in agreement, then between innings, calmly going to the umpire and discussion your concern is absolutely permissible. This is youth baseball, and yelling and screaming at a umpire is never OK.
2. Recommend going to the Positive Coaching Alliance website and reviewing articles and videos that spark your interest. This is an amazing resource that WABL has, pays for, and is for you to use to better your skills in interacting with parents and players alike.
3. Is a parent questioning your coaching tactics? Talking directly to the parent is the best way to handle. Look at the PCA website - there are some great resources there. Remind the parents that WABL is always looking for coaches, and that they should sign up (since they have so many great coaching ideas :)  
[https://devzone.positivecoach.org/sites/uploads/files/AskPCA\\_QuestionCoachingDecisions.pdf](https://devzone.positivecoach.org/sites/uploads/files/AskPCA_QuestionCoachingDecisions.pdf)
4. Practice starts - in a perfect world there will be multiple weeks of rain free and warm conditions to get your team ready. In the real world, April is a rainy and chilly month at times. Expect to not get all the practice in that are scheduled. Make it work.
5. In reality WABL has a wide range of players. Some players are obviously very skilled and know and play the game at a high level. Others, even at older ages, may be playing for the very first time. At the first practices, work on the basic baseball knowledge. Where is each position, what is each base. Once you have an idea where your team's knowledge level stands, then you can start to get into more detailed points.
6. Understand what the playing requirements are for your age group and league. WABL is not a "win at all costs" league. The most important thing we do is provide opportunities to play baseball and softball to the children in our community - and have fun doing it. Some leagues will require you to not sit a player on your bench for more than an inning at a time, others will require that everyone plays the infield at least 1 time a game. Make yourself aware of this and plan your game lineup accordingly.
7. Similar with pitchers. There are pitch count limits for pitchers and rules for rest between appearances. These are not suggestions - these need to be followed 100%.

## Parent Pledge

Our organization is committed to the principles of Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA). Therefore, we ask that you read, sign and return this form to your child's coach or any appropriate representative of our organization.

In keeping with PCA's ideal of the **Double-Goal Coach®** – who has a goal of winning and an even more-important goal of teaching life lessons through sports – I will be a **Second-Goal Parent®**, focused on the goal of **using sports to teach life lessons**, while leaving the goal of winning to players and coaches.

I will use positive encouragement to **fill the Emotional Tanks** of my children, their teammates, and coaches. I understand that, like the gas tank of a car, a full Emotional Tank can take people most anywhere.

I will reinforce the “**ELM Tree of Mastery**” with my child (E for Effort, L for Learning, M for bouncing back from Mistakes). Because I understand that a mastery approach will help my child succeed in sports and in life, I will:

- encourage my child to exert maximum **Effort**
- help my child Learn through sports
- urge my child to get past Mistakes by using a Mistake Ritual, such as a flushing motion, to trigger a reminder to flush the mistake and move on to the next play.

I will set an example for my child by **Honoring the Game**, respecting ROOTS (Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates, and Self). If I disagree with an official's call, I will Honor the Game and be silent.

I will use a **Self-Control Routine** to avoid losing my composure if I grow frustrated. I will take a deep breath, turn away from the game to refocus, count backwards from 100 or use self-talk (“I need to be a role model. I can rise above this.”)

I will **refrain from negative comments about my child's coach** in my child's presence so that I do not negatively influence my child's motivation and overall experience.

**I will be as prompt as possible** dropping my child off and picking my child up from practices and games.

# Sample Practice Plan for 7-8 Year Olds

Here's a fun and engaging **baseball practice plan for 8-year-old boys**, focusing on developing basic skills, keeping players active, and fostering a love for the game. Keep it light, positive, and enthusiastic!

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## 8U Baseball/Softball Practice Plan (60-75 Minutes)

### ✓ 1. Warm-Up & Stretching (10 Minutes)

- **Light Jog:** Run the bases once or twice.
  - **Dynamic Stretching:** Arm circles, leg swings, high knees, butt kicks, side shuffles.
  - **Throwing Warm-Up:** Partner up and play catch, starting close and gradually increasing distance.
  - Focus on proper grip and throwing form.
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### 2. Fielding & Throwing Fundamentals (20 Minutes)

**Goal:** Build confidence with throwing, catching, and fielding.

- **Ground Ball Drill:** Roll balls to players; focus on getting in front, staying low, and using two hands.
  - **Pop Fly Drill:** Toss fly balls underhand and teach calling for the ball (“I got it!”).
  - **Bucket Toss Game:** Set up buckets and have players throw balls into the buckets for accuracy.
  - **Relay Race:** Split into teams and practice relay throws for fun.
- 

### 3. Hitting Practice (20 Minutes)

**Goal:** Develop basic swing mechanics and timing.

- **Tee Work:** Set up tees and work on proper batting stance and swing path.
  - **Soft Toss:** Gently toss balls underhand for them to hit into a net or field.
  - **Front Toss:** Coach or assistant tosses easy pitches for players to practice hitting.
  - Emphasize head down, balanced stance, and follow-through.
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#### 4. Base Running Drills (10 Minutes)

**Goal:** Teach base running fundamentals.

- **Home to First:** Practice quick starts and running through the base.
  - **Turn & Go:** Practice rounding first and sprinting to second.
  - **Sliding Practice:** Introduce proper sliding form on a slip-and-slide or soft surface if available.
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#### 5. Fun Mini-Game or Scrimmage (15 Minutes)

- Divide players into two teams for a short, fun scrimmage.
  - Use modified rules to keep the game moving quickly (e.g., 3-pitch limit, coach pitch).
  - Encourage cheering and good sportsmanship.
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#### 6. Cool Down & Wrap-Up (5 Minutes)

- Light stretching.
  - Positive feedback: Highlight what players did well.
  - Remind them to practice throwing and catching at home.
  - End with a fun team cheer!
- 

#### **Tips for Success:**

- Keep stations short and rotate often to maintain engagement.
- Provide lots of encouragement and celebrate small victories.
- Use plenty of water breaks, especially in warm weather.
- Teach by demonstrating — kids learn well from visual examples.

This plan will ensure the players have fun while building the fundamental baseball skills they need!

# Sample Practice Plan for 9-10 Year Olds

Here's a well-rounded **baseball practice plan for 10-year-olds** that builds on fundamentals while introducing more structured drills and situational play. Keep it active and engaging to maintain focus at this age.

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## 10U Baseball/Softball Practice Plan (90 Minutes)

### 1. Warm-Up & Stretching (10 Minutes)

- **Light Jog:** Run around the bases twice.
  - **Dynamic Stretching:** Arm circles, lunges, high knees, butt kicks, and side shuffles.
  - **Throwing Warm-Up:** Partner up for catch. Focus on proper footwork, grip, and follow-through. Gradually increase distance.
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### 2. Fielding and Throwing Drills (20 Minutes)

**Goal:** Improve glove work, footwork, and throwing accuracy.

- **Ground Ball Progression:**
    - Start with rolling ground balls.
    - Progress to hitting ground balls to players using a fungo bat.
    - Emphasize staying low, using two hands, and making accurate throws.
  - **Pop Fly Drill:**
    - Toss or hit pop flies to outfielders.
    - Teach proper foot positioning and glove placement.
  - **Relay Throws:**
    - Set up a relay line to practice quick transfers and accurate throws.
  - **Around the Horn:**
    - Infielders practice throwing the ball around the bases quickly to build communication and quick decision-making.
- 

### 3. Hitting Practice (25 Minutes)

**Goal:** Develop consistent swings and good contact.

- **Tee Work:** Focus on swing mechanics and proper stance.
- **Soft Toss:** Partner tosses balls underhand from the side for the batter to hit into a net.

- **Front Toss or Coach Pitch:** Coach tosses live pitches for batters to practice timing.
  - **Situational Hitting:** Simulate game scenarios (e.g., runner on third with less than two outs).
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#### **4. Base Running Drills (10 Minutes)**

**Goal:** Develop base running instincts and proper technique.

- **Home to First:** Practice explosive starts and running through the base.
  - **Turns and Secondary Leads:** Practice rounding first base and taking secondary leads.
  - **Sliding Practice:** Teach proper sliding form using a safe surface.
- 

#### **5. Situational Play (20 Minutes)**

**Goal:** Develop baseball IQ with live-action scenarios.

- Set up runners on different bases.
  - Simulate specific scenarios (e.g., runner on second, one out).
  - Rotate defensive and offensive roles.
  - Emphasize decision-making, communication, and positioning.
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#### **6. Cool Down and Wrap-Up (5 Minutes)**

- Light stretching.
  - Discuss what went well and areas for improvement.
  - Encourage players to practice at home.
  - End with a team cheer and positive reinforcement.
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#### **Tips for Coaches:**

- Adjust drill difficulty based on player skill levels.
- Use small groups to maximize reps and keep kids engaged.
- Provide plenty of positive feedback and encouragement.
- Focus on teaching the fundamentals before advancing to complex plays.

This practice will keep the players active while steadily developing their baseball skills!