



# GOOD SPORTS

## GUIDE FOR COACHES



# WHAT IS GOOD SPORTS?

The Good Sports project is all about creating quality sporting experiences for children, ultimately to help children to grow a lifelong love of sport.

We do this by working together with the key adult influencers in children's sport: parents, coaches, teachers, and sport administrators; with a particular emphasis on facilitating adults' learning and understanding about how they can support children to have these 'quality sporting experiences'.

Quality sporting experiences for children don't just focus on building children's sport skills, but instead consider a wider concept known as their physical literacy<sup>1</sup>. This includes developing the physical skills they need, and just as importantly, looks at developing the motivation, confidence, knowledge and understanding they also need, to choose to be involved in sport now while they are kids, but also throughout their life.

The philosophy of the initiative goes back to basics and reminds us of what's important in children's sport - the children. Based on robust research, it recognises the need to take a holistic approach when supporting children's learning and development, and emphasises the importance of having fun and enjoyment for everyone involved to foster a lifelong love of sport and being active.

Led by Active – Auckland Sport & Recreation, Good Sports is funded by Sport New Zealand, New Zealand Community Trust, Massey University and Auckland University of Technology.



<sup>1</sup>Sport New Zealand, 2015 <http://www.sportnz.org.nz/about-us/who-we-are/what-were-working-towards/physical-literacy-approach/>

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# INTRODUCTION

Every year, thousands of New Zealanders find themselves, often by default, appointed to the position of coach. It is likely you are reading this book because this is or recently was you – a coach. If so, we would like to congratulate you on taking the dive into one of the most rewarding roles we know of (even if we are a little biased) – coaching children!

**Good coaches are critical to the growth of individual athletes and teams.**

**If the role is done well a good coach will:**

- Support children to grow their confidence,
- Support children to learn, motivate children to develop a lifelong love of sport.
- Help children to develop as an athlete and as a person

Coaches are faced with many challenges. If they have played the sport themselves there will be some comfort around the basic skills required. However,

there is more to effective youth-coaching than skill development. It's also about ensuring young people are engaging in their sport in a fun and positive environment that meets their needs.

**Remember as a coach in children's sport you will very likely lead children's first introduction to the sport. As such, your actions will have a lasting impact on whether they grow to love the sport.**

Good Sport's Guide For Coaches has been written for coaches working with children. It follows the principles of Good Sports. This book provides advice and tips for coaches on how to support children to learn, have fun and ultimately promote a 'Climate of Development' for all children involved.

## Why Do Kids Play Sport?

As coaches, we often get caught up in children's sport and wanting to see our children and athletes succeed and do their best. Because of this we can lose sight of the most important question, why do kids play sport?

### What does this mean for a coach?

Good coaches understand why the children they coach play sport.

Research indicates that the main reasons children give for playing sport are to have fun, play with their mates and learn new skills. What about winning then? Children do like competition, but what is surprising is that winning is not as important as fun; in fact, an overriding emphasis on winning can make sport less fun.

Often the most challenging aspects for coaches is understanding what 'fun' looks like for different kids. For some it's the competition, for others it's the feeling of being part of something or it might just be for the sheer joy of being active and challenged.

**Children's needs are holistic and as coaches we need to recognize and respond to this.**

Throughout this book there is an underlying message that sport should be fun and enjoyable. This is in line with the Good Sports philosophy, which seeks to help all adults understand how they impact (sometimes unknowingly) on children's sporting experiences.

# THE GOOD SPORTS SPINE

Take a moment and think back to when you were a child playing sport. What did you enjoy about playing sport back then? It might have been the thrill of competing, it might have been that you were playing with your friends, it could have been that you learned how to kick a spiral punt, or maybe it was the half time oranges. The key thing is that what you enjoyed about sport as a child was probably unique to you and this hasn't changed – each child is different. So, what makes a child have a quality sporting experience and ultimately fall in love with sport?

## The Holistic Needs of a Child in Sport

The Good Sports Spine recognises a holistic approach to the needs of a child in sport is essential; consider their physical; social and emotional; cognitive; and spiritual needs. When taking into account what we've seen in sport with our study of the research there are five things that have been shown to most affect the quality of their experience in sports and this is what you need to focus on.

### 1) Inspiration

No one wants to feel like they aren't good enough and can't do it. This can kill spirit and make a child lose interest. At the same time, activities and exercises that are too easy can quickly become boring. Children need challenges that aren't too easy or too hard and the feeling that with effort, good things will come.

### 2) Connection

It is very important that children feel a sense of belonging to the group both on and off the court/field. This means that they feel liked by the coach, have friends on the team and have a role to play in the game. Crucially, children need to feel loved and supported by their parents (regardless of the result).

### 3) Empowerment

Who likes being told what to do all the time? When children feel trusted and their feelings and ideas are valued, they are more likely to feel self-reliant and self-directed.

### 4) Play

Children need to play games! Games are best when they challenge movement, teamwork and imagination in new and exciting ways. Research tells us that play does more than 'just give children a chance to run around' (even though that is important). Play is key to a deeper learning of the sport, injury prevention and long-term development.

### 5) Variety

Children need a chance to try out a few different sports before deciding which one to focus on. Research shows that year-round training, in a single sport to the exclusion of others, can make children susceptible to overuse injury, burnout and disaffection with that sport.

In the same way a healthy spine maintains the body, the health of these five needs shapes a child's motivation, confidence, learning and enjoyment and the quality of the experience, leading to their love of sport.



## The Environment We Create

As a coach in a child's life, your behaviour matters. Through your daily actions, you can do things that support and/or undermine a child's experiences and their needs for development. We've found that the attitudes and behaviours of adults in children's sports tend to cluster into two patterns that we call (1) a Climate of Development and (2) a Climate of Performance. We use the term climates because we're talking about the environment that surrounds a child.

### Climate of Development

This climate is most likely to support children's needs and creates engagement, interest and learning, but ultimately supports children to develop a love of sport. Focusing on effort and improvement encourages children to strive to play hard and focus on developing to please themselves as oppose to others. It also supports children to develop resilience as mistakes become something to learn from.

### Climate of Performance

Being within this climate you work against what children need and increase the chances of losing interest, burnout and overuse injury. Correcting every mistake has a way of making children feel like they aren't good enough. While adults who focus on performance tend to focus on the 'best' at the exclusion of others.

**As a coach, you have a duty of care to the children you coach, which includes their physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Your #1 job is to provide a quality experience that means kids keep coming back!**

We have created a tool that will help you as an adult take a step back and reflect on the bigger questions; am I helping a child have a quality sporting experience and am I helping children fall in love with sport? The Good Sports Spine looks to help you answer these questions. The Good Sports Spine is a great tool for reflecting on what kind of environment you're promoting in children's sports. As a coach you should use this tool to guide how you coach.

<b>Climate of Performance</b> <i>Attitudes &amp; Behaviours</i>	<b>CHILDREN'S NEEDS</b>	<b>Climate of Development</b> <i>Attitudes &amp; Behaviours</i>
<b>Winning &amp; Losing</b> Focus on results Mistakes to be avoided Recognise ability	<b>INSPIRATION</b> Growth Mind-set Process focus Coping skills	<b>Effort &amp; Improvement</b> Focus on getting better Mistakes necessary for growth Recognise effort and trying
<b>Only the Best Matter</b> Playing favourites Selective support Encouraging gossip & rumour	<b>CONNECTION</b> Support Sense of belonging Trust & fairness	<b>Everyone Matters</b> Including everyone Unconditional support Encourage friendship & care
<b>Strict Adult Control</b> Adults make all decisions Mistakes immediately corrected Dismiss children's ideas	<b>EMPOWERMENT</b> Ownership Self-direction	<b>Kids Share Control</b> Children involved in decisions Time to correct own mistakes Recognise children's idea
<b>Performance Training</b> Repetitive drilling Direct instruction Punishment & reward	<b>PLAY</b> Opportunity Imagination Fundamental movement skills	<b>Learning Through Play</b> Modified games Discovery approach Smart questioning
<b>Early Specialisation</b> Single sport focus Year round training Pressure to select one sport	<b>VARIETY</b> Sampling Appropriate structure	<b>Late Specialisation</b> Trying out multiple sports Balance with school and friends Waiting to select one sport

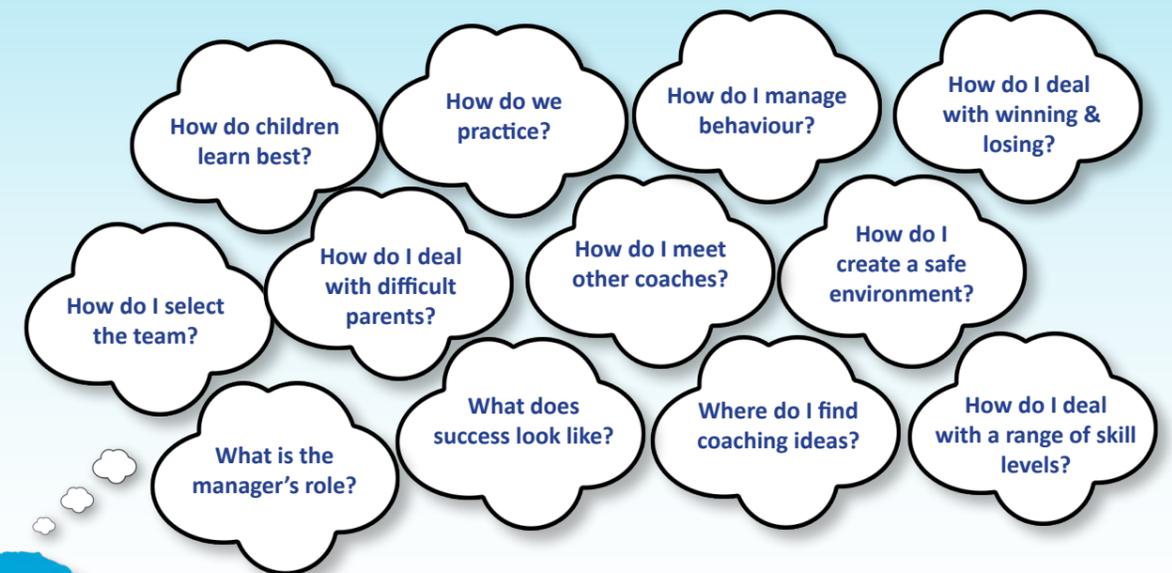
# HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The aim of Good Sports' Guide For Coaches is to support coaches to create quality experiences for the children they coach. The guide is best used in conjunction with code-specific coaching resources available from your sport, particularly about what skills, drills and outcomes are appropriate for the children you coach.

To support you with your learning process, you will note that topics are sometimes framed using the following prompts to the right:

This book is not meant to be read front-to-back. While we think we have done a good job outlining the most important areas that will have an immediate impact on how you coach, we would suggest that you skim through this book and start with the areas that interest you most!

- 1) Reflect
- 2) Consider
- 3) Take Action



Still don't know where to start?  
Have a look at the thoughts of this coach and reflect on the things you will need to consider.

# CREATING A CLIMATE OF DEVELOPMENT

One of the significant challenges a coach faces is providing a Climate of Development for the children they coach. Children need to explore and feel safe that their mistakes will be accepted as an important part of the learning process.

## REFLECT:

Am I coaching in a Climate of Development?

## CONSIDER:

What does success look like? Do the reasons I coach match the reasons the kids are playing?

## Do my outcome, session plans and behaviours:

- Provide all children opportunities to be creative, experiment and try different things?
- Provide all children equal opportunities to be creative, experiment and try different things?
- Reward effort and attitude over results?
- Acknowledge that mistakes and failure are an integral part of the learning process?
- Teach important life skills like communication, the value of working hard and teamwork?

## TAKE ACTION:

Write down answers to the above questions. Explain how and why. Describe the behaviours and actions. A good starting point is to ask your athletes what they hope to achieve this season.



Tell me, I'll forget  
Show me, I'll remember  
Involve me, I'll understand



# PLANNING FOR SUCCESS

A key skill in delivering quality coaching is understanding the benefit of planning for the season. Planning is a key component of good coaching. It gives your season structure and makes each session easier, more enjoyable, and beneficial for you and your athletes.

Within this section we outline a five step planning process that will help you make the upcoming season successful.

## PLAN-DO-REVIEW

The ability to plan and deliver sessions and then evaluate their effectiveness will lead to ongoing continued improvement. We call this **Action Learning** or **Plan-Do-Review**. This process is not linear but more a cycle as demonstrated.



### REFLECT:

What is the role of planning in my season?

### CONSIDER:

How will planning assist me to deliver effective coaching sessions?

### TAKE ACTION:

Read each step in the planning process and list the key components that will assist you. Ask an experienced coach for assistance.

## 1) Managing Your Season

As a coach, your job starts well before any competition begins. Pre-season is a great time to work out what you need to make the experience enjoyable and rewarding for everyone.

See the suggested season timeline and tasks below on how to make your season a successful one for your players and your development as a coach.

### Ask yourself the following questions:

- When does the season start?
- Do I need any training as a coach?
- Do I need any support to understand the needs of children?
- Where do I get training and support?
- How do I plan a coaching session that meets the needs of children - inspiration, connection, empowerment, play and variety?
- What age group is my team and what are their developmental characteristics?
- How will I know if I'm getting it right?
- How and when am I going to develop relationships with parents?
- When is my first meeting with team?

### Season Timeline



## 2) Session Planning

Planning and preparation is done before your session or game. It involves setting practice and game goals, outlining programming activities and looking at session goals. It will maximise the use of your time during practice to ensure the needs of the children are being met and allow you to track progress.

### Things to consider when developing a session plan are:

- Does my session allow all children to succeed (most of the time) by
  - ▶ Providing equal attention to each child in the team
  - ▶ Maximising childrens time on task
  - ▶ Ensuring optimal opportunities to explore, practice and learn skills
- Does my session flow from task to task and use time efficiently?
- Does my session plan align with a Climate of Development?

### TOP TIP!

An example of a session plan can be found on the next page

One model that can help you put the Goods Spine into practice is the Sport New Zealand Let Me Play model...

**LET me LEAVE**  
HELP WATCH

A model for helping parents and coaches work better with young people.

SPORT NEW ZEALAND

**LET me**  
Give me the time and opportunity to play.

**LEAVE me**  
Just let me have a go, have fun and work it out for myself.

**WATCH me**  
Be there, be interested and understand me.

**HELP me**  
Give me the support I need so I can work it out and feel proud of what I can do.

TEAM NAME:		DATE:	SESSION#:
What went well in the last game/event?	What areas do we need to work on?	Resources/Equipment:	
1.	1.		
2.	2.		
3.	3.		
Aims of the session:			
1.			
2.			
3.			

			COACHING POINT / KEY FOCUS / QUESTION:
	Let me	Give me the time and opportunity to play!	Allow kids some choice in how sessions are shaped; what warm up games do you want to play? Allow time for some free play... let kids make up their own new game.
	Leave me	Just let me have a go, have fun and work it out myself!	Set objectives and constraints of the activity and then step back and allow the kids to explore solutions. Allow kids the space and time to figure things out.
	Watch me	Be there, be interested and understand me!	Focus on the positives and what can be done rather than what can't. Understand what each child can do right now! Are they ready for a new challenge?
	Help me	Give me the support I need so that I can work it out and feel proud of what I can do!	Give me the time and opportunity to play!

Visit [www.goodsports.org.nz](http://www.goodsports.org.nz) for a coaching plan template or contact your local regional sports trust or your sports regional or national governing body and they will be able to help you.

### 3) Deliver

This is the actual doing part of the process to implement and manage your various coaching strategies, game tactics and goals for your athletes. Some days even the best laid plans just don't seem to work. That is alright. If a session doesn't go to plan, reflect on what you might change for the next one.

Good coaches continually ensure that the activities they have planned are both challenging and enjoyable. Regardless of the situation it is important to stay positive and provide your athletes with plenty of praise.

### 4) Review

This should be completed after each training session or game to assist in evaluating your coaching effectiveness and whether your athletes are having fun and learning. The information you have collected will also assist you to start planning for your next coaching session/game.

### 5) Reflection

Reflection is an important tool in coaching and part of the review process. While reflecting on your strengths and weaknesses may make you feel uncomfortable, it is an important part of your development as a coach.

#### Ask yourself the following questions:

- How do I know the way I coach is working?
- Do the things we do in training work in competition?
- Are children developing and improving?
- Am I meeting the needs of all my players - inspiration, connection, empowerment, play and variety.
- Am I coaching in a Climate of Development?

#### TOP TIP!

Ask your players what they want to get out of the season and incorporate responses into your session planning.



## LET PLAY AND GAMES BE THE TEACHER

A great coaching tool to develop children's technical and tactical skills is games. Research shows that children will have more fun and learn more by playing adapted games. Good coaches use small sided and modified games that are appropriate for their players physical, social, emotional, spiritual and cognitive development stage.

There may be a number of small sided and modified games already specifically designed for your sport that you are unaware of. A great place to start is contacting either your sport's regional or national governing body to see if they have any suggestions. A search of the internet could also provide you with games that are appropriate for children.

Try searching '[your sport] + small sided OR modified games' to find ideas for training games.

The process of finding which games work best with the children you coach may be trial and error. Remember games are meant to be challenging, and promote problem solving, however, if it's too difficult or challenging and the children may lose interest and find the experience unenjoyable.

Great coaches think of themselves as 'game designers'. They set problems for children to solve with little to no intervention once the games are underway.

#### Games allow children to:

1. Try out and master new skills or concepts and experiences.
2. Come up with new ideas and solutions.
3. Spend more time 'doing' rather than 'watching' and 'waiting'.
4. Allow children to gain tactical awareness of the game.



# GAME DAY COACHING

## REFLECT:

Is my role different on game day?

## CONSIDER:

The impact of sideline coaching on the players. How will the state of the game affect my coaching decisions? How will I manage winning and losing?

## TAKE ACTION:

Draw up a game day plan.

**The role and behaviour of the coach can vary depending on circumstance and this is no more apparent than on game day. You should strive to ensure that your approach on game day reflects a climate of development.**

## Some key points to consider on game day are:

- Game time is a time for athletes to be allowed to figure stuff out for themselves.
- Keep team talks brief and messaging simple; limit yourself to three key messages.
- Avoid over coaching during the game. This includes the breaks. Rather reiterate key messages.
- Focus on praising positives, not critiquing mistakes
- Know your substitution policy beforehand and communicate it to the team. When games get tight it is tempting to change things around.
- Lead by example. Be aware of your body language and demeanour. Respect officials and thank the opposition.
- Keep perspective whatever the result – treat winning and losing the same.
- Look for teachable moments as failure is part of learning.
- Avoid providing excuses for a poor result e.g. the officials or the conditions
- Focus the post-match review on the three key messages you outlined. Ask the children for their thoughts.

# HOW DO WE KNOW THE PLAYERS ARE DEVELOPING?

Children generally learn new skills by observing others and trying it themselves. This self-discovery can be assisted by the coach (guided discovery). Ideally coaches should always display a positive, encouraging demeanour, and be selective with interventions. Feedback should be focused on progress brought about through positive learning behaviours. This encourages a growth mindset and inspires children to continue trying and playing.

**TOP TIP!**  
Want to know more about learning and a Growth Mindset?  
Visit [www.trainugly.com](http://www.trainugly.com)

## REFLECT:

How will I know if my players are developing?

## CONSIDER:

What do I know about my players? How am I meeting all my players needs physically, socially, emotionally, spiritually and cognitively?

## TAKE ACTION:

Ensure you are prepared to meet the needs of all your athletes. Evaluating a child's needs must consider, age, gender, size and their motivation for playing. A good starting point is to ask your athletes what they hope to achieve this season.

## Consider the following actions when you begin coaching:

- Allow the children some choice in how sessions are shaped e.g. what warm up game do you want to play?
- Make sessions fun, challenging, and age/stage appropriate.
- Allow athletes the space and time to figure things out themselves.
- Avoid being an 'error detector' - focus on the positives and praise progress.
- Provide appropriate feedback that is focused on effort and attitude.
- No two children are the same so consider strategies for dealing effectively with differences at training and on game day.
- Ask questions rather than give answers in training and during breaks in games.
- Each athlete needs to feel they belong so connect individually with every athlete e.g. a high five at the start and end of every practice or game.

# WORKING WITH YOUR MANAGER

It is important to establish a good working relationship with your manager and this enables you to speak with one voice on topics which in turn will avoid confusion for everyone. This is particularly important when you speak with parents, other teams and sport organisations.

A good manager is an important asset to any coach, and as such it is important that you can establish clear roles and responsibilities.

## Some responsibilities that you may need to consider with your manager;

- Choosing the team
- Arranging players' uniforms
- Finding a place to train
- Entering the team in the competition draw
- Dealing with demanding parents
- Letting parents know where and when the next game is
- Chasing up missing players
- Challenging bad behaviour by team members
- Understanding competition rules
- Challenging bad sideline behaviour at games
- Competing and submitting score cards at games

As you can see, some of these responsibilities are easily defined, while others aren't. While there are no hard rules it helps if they share your coaching philosophy to establish guidance on how you view the manager's role.

## REFLECT:

What is the role of my manager?

## CONSIDER:

How do we communicate? Who does what?  
How do we resolve conflict?

## TAKE ACTION:

Develop a list of roles and responsibilities and meet with them regularly.



# WORKING WITH PARENTS

Parents of young kids are generally the most influential enabler of a child's approach to sport. Think of the parents of the children on your team as partners. To ensure clarity of message it is important to outline your coaching philosophy and that you will value their support over the season. Be consistent and fair in your dealings with them.

In an ideal scenario, parents will continue to support your coaching philosophy away from the team environment by reinforcing the attitudes and behaviours encouraged in the Good Sports Spine. A Code of Conduct may be helpful if this is something that children and parents agree upon. This would need to be developed prior to the start of the season.

## REFLECT:

How do I develop and maintain positive relationships with parents?

## CONSIDER:

What's the value of engaging with parents?  
What's the best way to communicate with parents?  
Have I sent parents a coach introductory letter?  
How best can parents support and promote the team climate?  
How do I deal with inappropriate sideline behaviour?  
Do parents know what a climate of development looks like?

## TAKE ACTION:

Review the information and decide on how you will deal with parents. Email an introduction letter to parents - visit [www.goodsports.org.nz](http://www.goodsports.org.nz) to share the Good Sports Spine with parents.



**Remember, there are many different reasons why people coach. Make sure you are coaching for the right reasons.**

# WANT OR NEED MORE?

## FOR INFORMATION ABOUT

### PLAYER SAFETY AND WELLBEING

please visit Sport New Zealand Coaching Safety Net  
[www.sportnz.org.nz](http://www.sportnz.org.nz)

### FIRST AID

please refer to your sports regional or national governing body to find out what you will need in a first aid kit

### ACC SPORTSMART

please visit  
[www.accsportsmart.co.nz](http://www.accsportsmart.co.nz)

If you want or need more coaching resources like this one, or have any other questions around coaching, contact your local Regional Sports Trust or Delivery Partner and they can help you.



[www.sportauckland.org.nz](http://www.sportauckland.org.nz)



[www.sportwaitakere.co.nz](http://www.sportwaitakere.co.nz)



[www.harboursport.co.nz](http://www.harboursport.co.nz)



[www.clmnz.co.nz/counties](http://www.clmnz.co.nz/counties)

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To find out more information on Good Sports visit  
[www.goodsports.org.nz](http://www.goodsports.org.nz)

