

While most coaches recognize the key role they play in promoting youth development, fewer than one-third of coaches have received training in how to do so. To close that gap, partners of the **Million Coaches Challenge** have trained one million coaches in youth development practices. The **MCC Practice Guide for Youth Coaches** identifies **12 core practices** and provides coaches with practical and actionable strategies that they can use, no matter the sport, age of their athletes, or experience level. This mini-guide is focused on the first core practice of creating a safe environment.

What It Is and Why It Matters

Athlete safety is holistic—it creates a foundation to support positive youth development and sport-specific practices and skill-building opportunities. When coaches are intentional about supporting athlete safety, they create an environment where athletes can learn new skills, connect with their teammates, take positive risks, and feel a sense of belonging and enjoyment. Centering athlete safety also reduces the risk of injury from overuse or misuse, which can keep athletes healthy and engaged in sports. Athlete safety includes:

- **Physical safety** focuses on preventing injury and physical harm.
- **Emotional safety** means youth athletes feel accepted and valued for who they are.
- **Psychological safety** means youth athletes feel free and safe to be themselves, speak up, ask questions, and make mistakes without fear of being judged or punished.



What It Looks Like In Practice

CREATING A PHYSICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Check team equipment and safety supplies regularly.
- Have a plan for all practices, scrimmages, games, and competitions.
- Teach proper technique and conditioning to prevent injury.
- Model and teach healthy body care.
- Supervise youth athletes and support those at risk.
- Build in developmentally appropriate and sport-specific rest and recovery time.
- Complete safety training, undergo background checks, and adopt policies that ensure youth safety.

CREATING AN EMOTIONALLY AND PSYCHOLOGICALLY SAFE ENVIRONMENT

- Learn more about the interests of youth athletes and their life beyond the sport.
- Model empathy, gratitude, and kindness toward all.
- Codevelop their team code with athletes.
- Acknowledge all types of contributions.
- End competitions and scrimmages with cool-downs to lower emotional intensity and connect as a team.
- Allow youth athletes to share their experiences, feelings, and ideas.

Quick Tips from MCC Partners



From Positive Coaching Alliance:

- ➔ Integrate opportunities to fill youth athletes' "emotional tanks."
 - Aim for the magic ratio of 5 "tank fillers" to 1 "tank drainer."
 - Connection, safety, and belonging fill tanks.
 - Incorporate fun activities that honor athletes like a winner's circle or teammates sharing appreciation with each other.

Explore the full Million Coaches Challenge Practice Guide for more strategies, examples, and coach tips on bringing these practices to life.