

A Practice Guide for Youth Coaches

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 second core practice of building trust and relationships.



What It Is and Why It Matters

Trust and relationships are foundational to the work of coaching. Young athletes need to know that their coach can be counted on, will get to know them as people, cares about them beyond their athletic skills, and creates opportunities for teammates to connect with each other. A caring adult is a key ingredient in helping youth buffer stress, build resilience, and help them develop important skills, build relationships, and feel a sense of belonging.



What It Looks Like In Practice

BUILDING TRUST

- Follow through on commitments every time.
- Discuss mistakes transparently and not as individual failures.
- Coaches show up consistently and predictably.
- Create structured, low-pressure ways for young athletes to share feedback or discuss issues privately.

Quick Tips from MCC Partners



UNITED STATES
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE

From the United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee (USOPC):

- ➔ Balance between connecting from the heart and from the head. Athletes will have a different balance of what type of connections they need to build trust, so pay attention to how they respond and consistently find opportunities to connect.



From the heart:
showing you care
and supporting
their emotional
development



From the head:
teaching and
challenging their
technical skills

DEVELOPING COACH-ATHLETE RELATIONSHIPS

- Greet all athletes as they arrive.
- Use athletes' preferred names.
- Ask questions about athletes' interests and ideas.
- Share power with athletes by allowing them to use their voice and share in decision-making.

SUPPORTING RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT AMONG ATHLETES AS A TEAM

- Encourage athletes to greet each other as they arrive.
- Use varied grouping strategies during practice so everyone connects with different teammates.
- Incorporate icebreakers and team conversations so athletes learn more about each other.
- Create opportunities for conversation during conditioning or sport-specific skills.
- Create opportunities for group celebration as a team.
- Carve out time for athletes to connect informally, where they get to talk and connect.

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