

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 fourth core practice of fostering belonging and inclusion.



What It Is and Why It Matters

Fostering belonging and inclusion means creating a team environment where every athlete feels accepted, supported, and celebrated for who they are. When coaches intentionally build inclusive cultures, athletes feel safe to show up fully as themselves and contribute their unique strengths. Belonging is a fundamental human need and is linked to confidence, connection, and long-term well-being. When athletes feel they belong, they're more engaged, motivated, and likely to stay in the game.



What It Looks Like In Practice

CREATING AN INCLUSIVE TEAM ENVIRONMENT

- Reflect on your own background and how it shapes your coaching.
- Give all athletes equal opportunities to develop their skills and learn new ones.
- Intervene when comments or actions limit athletes' ability to participate.
- Use intentional, respectful language.
- Call all athletes by the name they want to be called.
- Use person-first language when referring to athletes with disabilities.
- Refer to the team as "our team."
- Create a gender-inclusive space that welcomes all genders into sport.
 - ➔ Support athletes in finding comfortable and safe options.
 - ➔ Make sure girls' bathrooms are accessible and appropriately stocked.
 - ➔ Find ways to help girls see pictures of inspirational adult role models in sport.

Quick Tips from MCC Partners



From Coaching Girls (How to Coach Kids):

- ➔ How do great coaches motivate girls?
 - **Build team relationships.** Being part of the team is one of the top reasons girls below the age of 12 play at all so encourage girls to celebrate each other and make time for them to connect at the end of practice.
 - **Have fun.** Choose age-appropriate activities, celebrate a lot, give kids choices, and make sure everyone plays.
 - **Reward effort and taking risks.** So often, girls are celebrated for being perfect. How about we celebrate their effort to be daring?



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