

## Coaching Conduct and Principles

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### General Youth Coaching Principles

Coaching is an extremely important responsibility. A good coach always places the best interests of a player before winning.

Coaching youth sports is a difficult job because parents expect professional results from people who are mostly volunteers. High school, college and pro coaches start as assistants and work their way up through years of intense professional training.

The players and their parents have placed you in a position of leadership, and you have a responsibility to give them your best effort. Additionally, this football experience will play a significant factor in determining whether the players continue participating in football.

If you follow the coaching guidelines and general principles below, the players and their parents will be better served.

### Coaching Tips

Whether you are an experienced coach or a novice taking the reins of your first team, your main goal should be to create a fun and safe learning environment for your players. Many of the skills your players will practice and play with are just like those of their NFL heroes. Feel free to emphasize this connection to the real-life game!

### Everybody Plays

NFL FLAG games were designed to make it easy for every player to participate in their team's success. While size and skill certainly come into play when the action starts, your coaching should emphasize this aspect of "working together."

### Tackle Tackling Early

Don't let your practices dissolve into a giant pile of rambunctious kids. For both their safety and your sanity, make sure to discourage any tackling or roughness early on. Remind them that they won't help their team in a game by tackling or being rough.

### Sportsmanship Rules!

Help your players be good sports. After a game, shake hands with or do a cheer for the other team. Applaud good play by both sides. Treat officials with respect. While imitating you, your team won't even recognize the good lesson they're learning.

### Let Them Play Football!

The temptation to be another Don Shula or Bill Walsh will have to wait. This is NFL FLAG. While teaching football skills and strategies is important, keep your lessons as simple as possible. As your team grasps the basics, move on to more advanced ideas. Overloading young players with too much information too early

can cause confusion for them and headaches for you.

## Have Fun!

We thank you for your volunteer service. NFL FLAG couldn't happen without you – but remember to have fun too!

## Ten Coaching Guidelines

1. A coach should be enthusiastic without being intimidating. They should be sensitive to the children's feelings and genuinely enjoy spending time with them. A coach should be dedicated to serving children and understand that football provides physical and emotional growth for its participants. Remember, NFL FLAG is for the children.
2. A coach needs to realize that they are a teacher, not a drill sergeant. They should help children learn and work to improve their skills. Personal gains are never a consideration. The job does not depend on winning. The best interest of the child transforms into the best interests of the game.
3. The safety and welfare of the children never can be compromised. A coach will consider these factors above all others.
4. Be patient. Don't push children beyond limits in regards to practice. Children have many daily pressures – the football experience should not be one of them. Playing football should be fun.
5. Care more about the players as people than as athletes. The youth football program is a means to an end, not an end in itself.
6. A coach should encourage players to dream and set lofty goals. It is important to remain positive and refrain from discouraging remarks. Negative comments are remembered far more often than positive affirmations.
7. Remember that the rules of the game are designed to protect the participants, as well as to set a standard for competition. Never circumvent or take advantage of the rules by teaching deliberate misconduct. A coach who puts his or her opponents' team at risk should not be involved with children.
8. Be the first person to demonstrate good sportsmanship. Take a low profile during the game and allow the kids to be the center of attention.
9. Parents and players place a lot of trust and confidence in the coach. The coach has an important role in molding the athletic experience of the child.
10. A coach can measure success by the respect he gets from his or her players, regardless of victories or defeats. Children who mature socially and physically while participating in sports are the best indication of good coaching.

## The Referees' Responsibilities

1. On the youth level, referees should be aware that participants are new to the game. Often, it is their first experience with organized sports.
2. Be familiar with rule modifications and their implementation.
3. A referee can act as a teacher by explaining a rule or call that is made.
4. Make calls consistent with the level of play.
5. Insist that the playing field and equipment are safe for the children. Use good judgment in assessing weather conditions (e.g. cancel games immediately in the event of lightning).
6. Promote good sportsmanship through respectful behavior to both coaches and teams.

Coaching tips are offered by Jerry Horowitz, retired head football coach at John F. Kennedy High School in the Bronx, New York. Horowitz guided John F. Kennedy High to the 1984, 1991, 1994, 1996 and 2000 New York City High School Football Championship. In 1984, 1996 and 2000 John F. Kennedy High won the New York State High School Football Championship.