

Evanston Parks and Recreation

Volunteer Coach Handbook



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Welcome

Welcome to the City of Evanston Parks & Recreation Youth Sports Program. Thank you for volunteering your time to serve as a coach. Coaches are among the most influential adults in a child's recreational experience. Every practice, game, and interaction provides an opportunity to build confidence, teach teamwork, encourage healthy lifestyles, and foster a lifelong enjoyment of recreation.

This handbook establishes the expectations, responsibilities, and best practices for volunteer coaches. It is designed to create a consistent, safe, inclusive, and positive experience for every participant regardless of skill level.

Mission

The mission of City of Evanston Parks & Recreation Youth Sports is to provide safe, welcoming, affordable recreational opportunities that promote physical activity, sportsmanship, inclusion, character development, and community engagement.

Winning games is never more important than ensuring children have fun, develop skills, build friendships, and leave each season wanting to participate again.

Coaching Philosophy

- Place participant safety above winning.
- Treat every child with dignity, patience, and respect.
- Provide equal encouragement and meaningful participation.
- Teach age-appropriate skills in a positive learning environment.
- Model honesty, integrity, teamwork, and respect for officials, opponents, parents, and staff.
- Create an environment where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities.

Core Values

Respect: Treat teammates, opponents, officials, volunteers, and facilities with courtesy.

Responsibility: Arrive prepared, follow rules, and take ownership of actions.

Integrity: Demonstrate honesty and fairness in every decision.

Inclusion: Ensure every participant feels welcome regardless of ability or background.

Sportsmanship: Compete with humility, celebrate effort, and respect the game.

Season Timeline & Coach Responsibilities

The timeline below provides an overview of key coach responsibilities throughout the season. Completing each step helps ensure a safe, organized, and enjoyable experience for all participants and families.

- **Before the Season**

Before the season begins, coaches should complete the following:

- Attend the coaches' meeting.
- Complete the free fingerprint background check through the City of Evanston. Fingerprinting must be completed every two years. Please note that fingerprinting completed through your employer or District 65 does not satisfy this requirement.
- Complete volunteer waiver
- Email your school's Principal to select a practice day and time for the season. City staff will have already submitted permit requests for facility space at the school, and the Principal will approve the available practice days and times.
- Review the team roster provided by City staff.
- Review your coaching assignment provided by City staff.
- Pick up your equipment bag.
- Read the Coach Handbook.
- Review the league rulebook.
- Review the practice materials provided.

Preseason

As you prepare for the first practices, complete the following:

- Send a welcome email to all families introducing yourself and sharing important season information, including practice days, times, and any other relevant details.
- Hold a team meeting during the first practice to introduce yourself, establish team expectations, and verify emergency contact information.
- Conduct your first practices.
- Distribute team jerseys.
- Email your school if any additional equipment is needed.
- Review the game schedule with your team and explain game day expectations and procedures.

During the Season

Throughout the season, coaches are expected to:

- Plan engaging and organized practices.
- Communicate professionally with families and Parks & Recreation staff.
- Promote sportsmanship and positive team culture.
- Maintain a safe physical and emotional environment for all participants.
- Use positive instruction and encouragement rather than criticism or humiliation.
- Never use profanity, intimidation, or physical punishment.
- Follow all City of Evanston Parks & Recreation policies and procedures.
- Respect officials and support their decisions.
- Report all safety concerns, injuries, and incidents promptly.
- Arrive prepared and be punctual for every practice and game.

Game Days

On game days, coaches should:

- Arrive 20–30 minutes before the scheduled game time.
- Conduct a team warm-up prior to the start of the game.
- Review playing time expectations and player rotations before the game begins.
- Manage playing time throughout the game in accordance with league guidelines.
- Encourage and positively support all participants.
- Clean up the team area before leaving the facility.

End of the Season

As the season concludes, coaches should:

- Recognize each player's accomplishments and distribute participation certificates.
- Return all City-issued equipment.
- Complete the season evaluation.
- Celebrate a successful season, you did it, great job!

Coach Code of Conduct

- Maintain a safe physical and emotional environment.
- Use positive instruction rather than criticism or humiliation.
- Never use profanity, intimidation, or physical punishment.
- Follow all City of Evanston Parks & Recreation policies.
- Respect officials and support their decisions.
- Communicate professionally with families and staff.
- Report safety concerns, injuries, and incidents promptly.
- Be punctual and prepared for every practice and game.

Volunteer coaching is a privilege, not a right. The City of Evanston reserves the right to remove, suspend, or otherwise restrict a volunteer coach from their coaching responsibilities at any time, with or without cause, and at the City's sole discretion.

Guardian & Spectator Expectations

Guardians and spectators are partners in creating a positive recreation experience.

- Encourage all participants.
- Allow coaches to coach and officials to officiate.
- Avoid negative comments toward players, coaches, or officials.
- Address concerns privately after games or practices.
- Model respectful behavior for players.

Child Safety & Abuse Prevention

Protecting participants is every coach's highest responsibility. Coaches must complete all required background checks and required City training before participating

.Maintain open visibility whenever possible; avoid one-on-one isolated situations.

- Use appropriate physical contact only (high-fives, fist bumps, side hugs when appropriate).
- Never transport participants in your personal vehicle unless specifically authorized by City policy.
- Never communicate privately with minors outside approved communication methods.
- Report suspected abuse, neglect, or inappropriate conduct immediately according to City procedures.
- Never ignore or investigate suspected abuse independently.

Missing or Unattended Children

If a participant cannot be located, immediately notify Parks & Recreation staff, organize a supervised search without leaving other participants unattended, contact the parent or guardian, and call 911 when appropriate. Coaches remain responsible for supervising participants until they have been released to an authorized adult.

Emergency Action Plan

Every coach is responsible for understanding emergency procedures before the first practice or game. Prior to each activity, identify the facility address, emergency vehicle access point, nearest phone, first aid kit, AED location if available, and the designated City of Evanston Parks & Recreation contact.

- Remain calm and immediately assess the scene for hazards.
- Protect participants from additional danger before providing assistance.
- Call 911 for life-threatening emergencies or whenever serious injury is suspected.
- Assign another adult to meet emergency responders.
- Notify Parks & Recreation staff as soon as practical.

Responding to Injuries

Player safety always takes priority over continuing an activity.

- Stop play immediately when a participant is injured.
- Determine whether emergency medical services are required.
- Do not move an injured participant unless immediate danger exists.
- Notify parents or guardians as soon as possible.

- When in doubt, seek medical evaluation before allowing a participant to return.

Concussion Awareness

Any athlete suspected of sustaining a concussion must be removed from participation immediately.

- When in doubt, sit them out.
- No same-day return to play after suspected concussion.
- Require written medical clearance before returning when required by league or City policy.
- Watch headaches, dizziness, confusion, nausea, balance problems, sensitivity to light, or unusual behavior.

Heat Illness & Hydration

- Schedule frequent water breaks, especially during hot or humid conditions.
- Encourage athletes to arrive well hydrated.
- Modify or shorten activities during excessive heat.
- Watch for heat exhaustion and heat stroke symptoms including dizziness, heavy sweating, confusion, weakness, or collapse.
- Call 911 immediately for suspected heat stroke.

Weather Procedures

- Monitor weather forecasts before outdoor activities.
- Suspend outdoor play immediately when lightning is observed or thunder is heard nearby.
- Wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning or thunder before resuming activities.
- Move participants to an appropriate indoor shelter during severe weather or tornado warnings.

Facility Responsibilities

- Inspect fields, courts, goals, nets, and surrounding areas before every session.
- Remove or report hazards immediately.
- Arrive and leave according to scheduled reservation times.
- Leave facilities cleaner than you found them.
- Report maintenance concerns promptly to Parks & Recreation staff.

Equipment Management

- Inspect equipment before every use.
- Remove damaged equipment from service immediately.
- Ensure protective equipment fits participants properly.
- Return all City-issued equipment at season's end in good condition.

Coach Safety Checklist

- ☐ Emergency contacts accessible
- ☐ Weather checked
- ☐ Playing surface inspected
- ☐ Equipment inspected
- ☐ Water available
- ☐ Attendance recorded
- ☐ Parents know pickup procedures

Meet Your Team & Parent Orientation

The first meeting establishes expectations and builds trust between coaches, families, and participants. Coaches should communicate consistently throughout the season.

- Introduce coaching staff and volunteers.
- Review the season schedule, locations, and communication methods.
- Verify emergency contacts and medical considerations.
- Explain attendance expectations and weather procedures.
- Discuss playing-time philosophy and sportsmanship expectations.
- Invite parents to volunteer with team support activities.

Suggested Parent Meeting Agenda

1. Welcome and coach introductions
2. Program philosophy and goals
3. Season calendar
4. Safety procedures and emergency contacts
5. Code of Conduct review

6. Volunteer opportunities

7. Questions and answers

Coach Communication Best Practices

Frequent, proactive communication prevents many common issues.

- Send a welcome email before the first practice.
- Notify families promptly of schedule changes.
- Respond professionally and respectfully.
- Discuss concerns privately rather than immediately after games.
- Use approved communication platforms for all team messaging.

Planning Effective Practices

Every practice should maximize activity, minimize waiting, and provide opportunities for every participant to learn. Plan each session before arriving.

- Begin with attendance and introductions.
- Warm up with movement-based activities.
- Review previously learned skills.
- Teach one new skill at a time.
- Provide small-group practice.
- Use game-like activities to reinforce learning.
- Finish with a cool down, review, and announcements.

Sample 60-Minute Practice

Time	Activity
5 min	Welcome, attendance, dynamic warm-up
10 min	Movement and coordination games
15 min	Skill review
15 min	Teach one new skill with partner drills
10 min	Small-sided game or scrimmage
5 min	Cool down, team discussion, reminders

Skill Progression

Introduce skills from simple to complex while allowing participants to experience success.

- Demonstrate the skill.
- Allow practice without pressure.
- Add movement or time constraints.
- Introduce passive defenders or obstacles.
- Progress to game-speed situations.
- Reinforce learning through small-sided games.

Teaching New Skills

- Keep explanations brief.
- Demonstrate visually whenever possible.
- Allow players to learn by doing.
- Provide specific, positive feedback.
- Correct one or two items at a time.
- Celebrate effort and improvement.

Games-Based Coaching

Children learn best when instruction is connected to play. Small-sided games create more touches, decisions, and opportunities for every participant than long lines or lectures.

- Modify games to match age and ability.
- Ask guiding questions instead of giving every answer.
- Encourage problem solving.
- Rotate positions so players develop well-rounded skills.

Providing Feedback

- Praise effort before outcome.
- Use the 'positive-correction-positive' approach.
- Recognize improvement as often as success.
- Address the entire team respectfully.
- Never embarrass a participant.

Practice Checklist

- ☐ Practice plan prepared
- ☐ Equipment organized
- ☐ Water available

- ☐ Attendance recorded
- ☐ Warm-up completed
- ☐ Every child actively participating
- ☐ New skill introduced
- ☐ Fun game included
- ☐ Cool down completed
- ☐ Parents updated before departure

Game Day Responsibilities

Game days should reinforce the skills, confidence, and sportsmanship developed during practices. Coaches should create an environment where participants feel supported regardless of the outcome.

Before the Game

- Arrive 20–30 minutes early.
- Inspect the playing area and equipment.
- Welcome players and families.
- Review lineups and playing-time plans.
- Conduct a dynamic warm-up.
- Provide a brief, positive pregame message emphasizing teamwork, effort, and fun.

During the Game

- Encourage players from the sidelines using positive instruction.
- Provide equal encouragement to all participants.
- Respect officials and model good sportsmanship.
- Rotate players in accordance with league rules.
- Address injuries immediately.
- Keep non-participating players engaged and supervised.

After the Game

- Thank officials, volunteers, and the opposing team.
- Recognize effort before discussing performance.
- Share one or two teaching points.
- Remind families of the next practice or game.
- Ensure the facility is left clean.

Playing Time Philosophy

City of Evanston recreational sports prioritize participation, development, and enjoyment over competitive success.

- Provide meaningful opportunities for all participants whenever league rules allow.
- Rotate positions to encourage overall development and ensure equal playing time
- Avoid permanently assigning young athletes to one position.

Coach Troubleshooting Guide

Discipline: Address behavior immediately, calmly, and respectfully. Explain expectations and consequences without embarrassment.

Player Conflicts: Separate participants, listen to each perspective, reinforce respect, and redirect to team goals.

Dominant Players: Challenge skilled athletes to involve teammates and demonstrate leadership.

Late Arrivals: Welcome players into activities safely while communicating attendance expectations with families.

Parent Concerns: Listen privately, acknowledge concerns, explain decisions respectfully, and involve Parks & Recreation staff if needed.

Unsportsmanlike Conduct: Address inappropriate behavior immediately and reinforce the Code of Conduct.

Working with Parents

- Communicate consistently throughout the season.
- Address concerns away from participants.
- Remain calm during disagreements.
- Assume positive intent.
- Refer unresolved concerns to Parks & Recreation staff.
- Thank parents for supporting their children and volunteering.

Communication with Parks & Recreation Staff

- Report injuries and incidents promptly.
- Communicate weather cancellations.
- Report facility hazards.
- Notify staff of participant concerns requiring follow-up.
- Ask for assistance whenever safety or policy questions arise.

Volunteer Training Expectations

- Attend preseason coach orientation.
- Review the Coach Handbook before the season.
- Review the rulebook before the season.
- Review the practice plans before the season.

End-of-Season Responsibilities

- Return all City-issued equipment.
- Recognize volunteers and participants.
- Provide program feedback to Parks & Recreation.
- Leave facilities and storage areas organized.

Thank You

Thank you for volunteering with City of Evanston Parks & Recreation. Your leadership helps children develop confidence, friendships, healthy habits, and a lifelong love of recreation.