



Youth coaches often fall into the trap of trying to teach too much at once. Baseball and softball are simple games. In general, the teams that throw, catch, and hit the best are the ones that are the most successful. It should never be about the wins and losses. If the experience is enjoyable for the kids and they learn something, as coaches we should feel very good about it. Chapter 4 from the Babe Ruth League Coaching Education and Certification Program offered by ASEP deals with setting reasonable expectations. It is imperative that you set goals for your teams and that you celebrate all of the successes – small or large. You can set general goals that cut across all age levels, and you can set age-specific goals.

#### CHAPTER 4 - SETTING REASONABLE EXPECTATIONS

##### Goals for all ages:

All coaches should strive to accomplish some fundamental goals. As a coach, continually ask yourself these questions to help determine whether you are on the right track:

- **Are the Kids Having Fun?** Baseball and softball are games and should be fun. Kids are not hard to read. If they are having fun, keep doing what you are doing. If they appear lethargic, sluggish, bored or unhappy, take a look at what you are doing and make some adjustments. Kids of all ages have limited attention spans. Keep them in small groups. Keep them active. Provide them with a variety of activities. Turn drills into contests. Create a rotation in which every player gets to play every position. (At the youngest levels, this is important so that players can develop all of the fundamental skills they need to play the game. As kids get older, it is to their benefit to be able to play several positions.) Enjoy yourself!
- **Are the Kids Improving?** One of the most rewarding things about coaching is getting to see the players improve. The skills you emphasize should not be too difficult to master. Kids have an innate desire to learn and improve. When they are successful and their successes are celebrated, the thirst to learn more increases.
- **Are the Kids Learning?** It is important to make sure that your players are learning something in addition to having fun. Learning and fun go hand in hand. By keeping the kids active and being creative we can make sure they learn while having fun. When coaching, especially when dealing with skills that build upon one another, it is important to review and make sure the players have grasped the initial lessons before you introduce something more complex.

##### Age-Specific Goals:

Some kids mature physically much faster than others. Motor skill development varies as well. As such, you need to take a look at age-specific goal setting.

### Goals for the 4-to-6 Age Group:

- **Learning the basics** – the right direction to run when the ball is hit; runners must touch the bases; how to record outs (catch the ball in the air, throw to first, or tag the runners); running past first base; scoring a run; three outs constitute an inning.
- **Throwing mechanics** – turn the body so that the front shoulder points toward the target; keep the elbow above the shoulder; step toward the target with the non-throwing foot and release the ball.
- **Tracking** – follow the ball with the eyes to the glove, whether on the ground or in the air (use softer balls); use two hands to catch and field; try to catch the ball out in front of the body.
- **Hitting** – how to hold and swing the bat; batting safety (when not to swing bats, wearing batting helmets); hitting off a tee; hitting softly tossed pitches.
- **Learning positional play** – if the ball is hit to your buddy, let him or her field it.

### Goals for 7-to-9 Age Group:

- **Learning the basics** – force outs; tagging up; base running (when you don't have to run; not running into or past teammates on the base paths); balls and strikes.
- **Throwing Mechanics** – introduce the four-seam grip; point the front shoulder, step, and throw; introduce the concept of generating momentum toward the target and following the throw.
- **Catching and fielding** – thrown and hit balls; fingers up versus fingers down; see the glove and ball; use two hands; forehands and backhands; introduce the underhand flip; first-base fundamentals; crossover and drop steps.
- **Hitting** – choosing the right bat; proper grip; hitting pitched balls; introduce drill work (Tee Work, Soft Toss, Short Toss).
- **Learning positional play** – learn the positions and the areas each player should cover; cover the base when the ball is not hit to you; basics of cutoffs and relays.

### Goals for 10-to-12 Age Group:

- **Learning the basics** – infield fly rule; balks.
- **Base running** – leads; steals; extra-base hits.
- **Pitching and throwing mechanics** – wind-up versus stretch; four-seam grip; shuffle, throw, follow; pitcher covering first.
- **Hitting** – repetitions; drill work (Tee Work, Soft Toss, Short Toss, Stickball, Lob Toss, One-Arm Drill); bunting.
- **Learning team fundamentals** – cutoffs and relays; basic bunt defenses; basic first-and-third situations; underhand flip and double plays; defending the steal; infield and outfield communication and priorities.

### Goals for 13-to-14 Age Group:

- **Learning mechanics and pitching** – emphasis on generating momentum toward the target and following the throw (larger field); breaking balls; change-ups; pitching mechanics and using the body effectively (longer distance); pickoff mechanics; flatwork (drills); introduction to long toss.
- **Hitting** – introduce situational hitting (inside-out swing, hitting behind runners, hit and run, productive outs); sacrifice bunting versus bunting for a hit; understanding the count.
- **Base running** – first-and-third situations; steal breaks; delayed steals; reading situations and reacting to them.
- **Fielding** – generating momentum back toward the target on throws when necessary; crossover and drop steps; backhands and when to use them; double-play depth; pitcher covering first; infield communication.

- **Team fundamentals** – pickoff plays; full bunt defenses; full first-and-third defenses; pop-up and fly ball priorities; double plays and under-hand flips.

### Goals for 15+ Age Group:

- **Throwing mechanics and pitching** – long toss; flatwork (drills); continue mastering breaking and off-speed pitches; throwing for accuracy; generating momentum toward the target and following the throw; pickoff mechanics.
- **Hitting** – mental aspects (hitter's count versus pitcher's count); two-strike hitting; aggressive versus defensive swings; situational hitting; productive outs; advanced game situations and defenses.
- **Base running** – one-way leads; going on the first move; reacting to batted balls; tag-up situations; third-base rules; no-out, one-out and two-out rules.
- **Fielding** – understanding and adapting to playing conditions (grass versus dirt, sun, bad fields); Fence Drill (outfield); crossover and drop steps; do-or-die plays at the plate; preventing runners from taking extra bases; communicating between pitchers.
- **Learning team fundamentals** – cutoffs and relays (introduce the trailer concept); advanced pickoff plays (daylight play; plays put on by fielders) and when to use them; double plays; advanced game situations and defenses.

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