



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

HELENA FAMILY YMCA YOUTH T-BALL



Parent/Coach Handbook

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HELENA FAMILY YMCA
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***Welcome Parents and Coaches to the Helena
Family YMCA***

YOUTH SPORTS PHILOSOPHY

The Youth T-Ball program at the Helena Family YMCA gives children ages 3 through 6 the opportunity to learn sports skills in a supervised recreational environment. We believe that participating in sports should be *FUN* and that every player should have an *EQUAL OPPORTUNITY* to play. The emphasis of our program is on the *DEVELOPMENT OF SKILLS and SPORTSMANSHIP*. We de-emphasize winning and ensure equal playing time for all players.

CARING, HONESTY, RESPECT, RESPONSIBILITY

The YMCA has made a national commitment to help young people learn the values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility, all necessary to hold us together as a community. We seek to incorporate these values in all that we do and to partner with families in teaching these essential values to our young people. By teaching these values during the practices of this youth sports program, we hope to give participating children the opportunity to become better teammates both on and off the field.

SEASON FAQ's:

Games: Games take place on Thursday evenings at Centennial Park between 4-8pm.

Practices: Practice day and time is selected during registration. Practices take place at Centennial Park for 60-minutes on Monday, Tuesday, or Wednesday evenings.

Equipment: Players bring their own mitts, with their name on them. Bring your favorite bat, if you have one – limited bats will be available on-site. Please wear your YMCA jersey (distributed by the first game) and athletic shorts or pants. Cleats not required. Please no metal cleats. Helmets will be provided for players when at-bat.

Game Schedules: A link to access your game schedule will be sent out in the pre-season email, typically 1-2 weeks before the season starts. Game schedules are accessed through YGametime.

- YGametime can always be accessed by going to helenaymca.org. Click "YGametime" from along the top. Then click "Sports and Programs" from along the top. Choose your division from the dropdown. Scroll down to see full schedules.

Snacks: Although not necessary, many kids "live" for the after-game snack! Help out your coach by volunteering to create a snack schedule for parents.

Weather: It is our policy to cancel games only in extreme weather conditions. We follow the Red Cross "30/30" Rule: if lightning and thunder happen within a count of 30, the game will be cancelled and players should seek shelter in a car. Games can only resume at least 30-minutes after the last instance of thunder or lightning.

Games will be cancelled due to smoke if the Air Quality is at "level red" or above. Coaches may choose to cancel games if the air quality is at "level orange" or if there is intense heat.

If games must be cancelled, the Coaches will be notified and a text blast will be sent out. ***You will only receive notice via text if you OPT IN to receive them. Visit YGametime to sign-up for ALERTS.***

Cancellations, substitutes, and make-up games: Please be mindful that our coaches are all volunteering their time! Sometimes illness or last-minute cancellations are inevitable. Coaches will reach out to their teams to find substitutes if they cannot make a practice or game. Please volunteer if you can!

If a game does end up being cancelled, we will try our best to schedule make-up games during regular practice times throughout the week.

YMCA COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES:

Coach a group of kids in a safe, positive, and inclusive environment. Remember that sports at the Y focus on fundamentals and sportsmanship – not competition! Every player gets equal playing time, regardless of ability.

Contact all the families on your roster when prompted after receiving your finalized practice details and game schedule. Introduce yourself, remind them of practice time, and ask now for any assistants or substitutes to cover you during the season if needed.

Distribute team jerseys, provided by the Y. This may involve swinging by the Y before a practice or game to pick up your team's jerseys.

Inform your team if you will miss a practice or game and ask other parents for substitutes. Please don't cancel practice unless it is an emergency. 99% of the time we've seen that a parent will be happy to cover you for one day.

Designate a team parent to assist with a snack schedule if you like.

Ask for support if needed! Sports Coordinators at the Y are there to help you with scheduling needs, roster concerns, and to provide extra equipment if desired. Players bring their own mitts to practice, and most will also bring their own bats. The Y will provide bases, the tee, helmets for batters, baseballs, and limited bats. The Y can also provide scrimmage vests, whistles, stopwatches, and cones BY REQUEST.

Know the rules at each level of play. The YMCA modifies rules to create a positive experience for the kids. As children grow and their skills get better, the rules grow with them. Check out the Coach's Corner on YGametime for a "rules cheat sheet."

Maintain good relationships with your players and their families by being positive, communicative, and promoting the YMCA values in your actions. You are a major role model for your team!

Parent Agreement

As a parent in the Helena Family YMCA's Youth Sports Program...

- 1.** I will remember that children participate to have fun and that the game is for youth, not adults.
- 2.** I will inform the coach of any physical disability or ailment that may affect the safety of my child or the safety of others.
- 3.** I will not engage in unsportsmanlike or disrespectful conduct with any official, coach, player, volunteer, Y staff member, or other parent.
- 4.** I will teach my child to play by the rules and to resolve conflicts without resorting to hostility or violence.
- 5.** I will teach my child to treat other players, coaches, officials, and spectators with respect regardless of race, creed, gender, or ability.
- 6.** I will praise my child for competing fairly and trying hard, and make my child feel like a winner every time. Remember, we don't keep score at the Y!
- 7.** I will respect the officials and their authority during games.
- 8.** I will demand a sports environment for my child that is free from drugs, tobacco, and alcohol and I will refrain from their use at all sports events.

Ages 3-4 and 5-6: T-Ball Rules

YMCA Youth Sports is unique, emphasizing skill-development, sportsmanship, and teamwork. We de-emphasize competition and instead focus on the fun and learning that sports can provide for players of all ages, backgrounds, and economic levels. The YMCA also promotes equal playing time for all its participants. **All players must play an equal amount of playing time in each game.**

EQUIPMENT:

- Players bring their own mitts. Limited bats will be available.
- Bases, balls, the Tee, and helmets for batters will be provided.
- Wear YMCA jersey, athletic shorts or sweats, socks, athletic shoes.
- Cleats are not required. Please no metal cleats.

BALL SIZE:

- RIF1SL: RIF Level 1 (ages 6 and under)
- Medium-firm Poly-core with synthetic cover
- Softest and safest

NUMBER OF PLAYERS:

- Team maximum: 16
- Fill 8 positions (no catcher)
 - Pitcher – must be rotated every inning!
 - The ball is not pitched, but a player should still field from the pitching position
 - Practice understanding the role and positioning of the pitcher
 - 1st Base
 - 2nd Base
 - Shortstop
 - 3rd Base
 - Outfield: right, center, and left
- Place extra players in the outfield so every child can play
- Rotate so every player can play in an 'official' position
- Players may also 'double up' on more challenging infield positions

Substitutions are unlimited, but please be mindful of the YMCA's equal play rule.

If a team has less than the minimum number of players, there are 3 options:

- The team forfeits the game
- The opposing team plays short to match (no outfield)
- The opposing team lends players to the short team

DURATION OF GAME:

- Ages 3-4 Division:
 - Minimum 2 innings, maximum 4 innings
 - Maximum 45-minute playing time

- Ages 5-6 Division:
 - Minimum 2 innings, maximum 4 innings
 - Maximum 60-minutes playing time
- Once the 45/60-minute limit is reached, the game will be called regardless of inning or batting order.
- Remember, there are no winners at the end of the game! We don't keep score.

START OF PLAY:

- Ensure all defensive players are in their appropriate field positions
- Home team is decided by coaches using a coin flip or rock, paper, scissors
- The offensive team coach places the ball on the tee located at the back of home plate – the ball is not pitched!

GAME RULES:

- Standard baseball rules apply with age-appropriate modifications.
- Batters (wearing a helmet) may swing at the ball after the coach has placed it on the tee.
- Batters are allowed 5 attempts to hit the ball once placed on the tee.
- If a batter is not successful after 5 swings, they will be awarded 1st Base.
- Batters are not allowed to bunt.
- Offensive players cannot steal or lead off a base. Players can only leave their base once the ball is hit (or if they need to rotate once a player is awarded 1st Base).
- No Infield Fly Rule can be called or used.
- Defensive players cannot obstruct a base runner's path or fake a tag.
- No substitutes are allowed. All players should play the field.
- Batting orders are set at the beginning of the game. These can be changed between innings so everyone gets a chance to bat in the "clean-up" position.
- All players advance only one base on each hit ball.
- If a player is called "out," they remain on base and continue to play.
- The ENTIRE team has a turn at-bat each inning, with the final batter in the line-up hitting "clean-up" – basically a homerun.
- Score is not kept!
- All infielders must remain in the infield. They cannot move or be placed behind the designated pitcher's circle until the ball is struck.
- Balls must be hit in "fair ground" to be playable.
 - Anything in front of the 1st and 3rd Baselines, even if struck over the 1st or 3rd Base.
- Tee must be standing in a vertical position without slanting or leaning.
- If a hit ball hits home plate first then advances forward into fair play, it will be called a dead ball and must be re-teed and hit by the same player. This will count as a swing.

COACH POSITIONS:

- Defense
 - Can be stationed in the field of play, with a minimum of one coach present plus any assistant coaches/parent volunteers who want to help.
 - Coaches / assistants / parents cannot physically participate in play at any

time. They cannot touch a player while the ball is in play.

- If an offensive player is moved or physically influenced by a defensive coach, that player is called safe and awarded the advancing base.
- If a ball is struck and hits a coach while standing in fair ground, the batter is awarded 1st Base.
- Offense
 - Coaches stand behind the batter and offer instruction at Home Plate.
 - Coaches help tee the ball and adjust the tee accordingly.
 - Make sure the on-deck batter is in the on-deck circle and ready for their turn to hit.
 - Coaches / assistant coaches / parent volunteers may assist at the bases to help players who are running the bases.

UMPIRING GAMES:

- Games are umpired by coaches (or an assistant coach or volunteer parent).
- Coaches are in charge of overseeing all game activities and making sure each team abides by the rules of the game. Coach decisions are final.
- The philosophy of sports at the Y is to show leniency – allow the kids to learn during play, without harsh penalties or strict umpiring.
- Latitude should be extended regarding running the bases and hitting the ball off the tee.
- Umpiring should create a learning environment during the games. Coaches explain rules to players, gently correct mistakes and show what to do, and use fouls as learning opportunities rather than punishments.
- Occasionally, it may be useful to completely stop the game to explain a rule to both teams.
- Coach-Umpires are encouraged to give players of both teams tips on hitting, running, catching, throwing, and other basic skills.

REMINDERS:

- Please start games on time!
- View games as a showcase of learned skills for both teams, not as a competition
- Remember to implement the YMCA Core Values: Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility
- Families and coaches should plan to arrive 15 minutes early to find parking!

DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE COACHING

Remember, children develop and learn at their own individual pace. The developmental information below is a guide only. Use your judgment when it comes to getting through to your players. Every team will have children that overlap into both developmental levels.

Ages 3-4 Division

- Rules are not as important to this age group. Players may forget the rules from week to week. Think of the games as a skills demonstration.
- Remind them which direction they are supposed to run after hitting the ball or when advancing bases. Players may respond well to a parent or coach running alongside them or placing them in a certain spot.
- The first two weeks of play are usually chaotic. This is fine! Focus on skills like playing field positions correctly, catching, throwing, hitting, and advancing around the bases.
- Players should learn how to play with other kids while listening to their coach.

Ages 5-6 Division

- At this age they start to love rules. They like to know what is going on and what they are supposed to be doing.
- Explain some of the rules each week without overwhelming them. It's alright if kids don't know every rule of the game until the end of the season.
- Players should start understanding how to make their own choices within the game. Think of yourself as a facilitator, rather than a controller of each child's move.
- Remember to build team pride as the players form positive relationships with each other.

All Grade Levels

- Make sure all team members are kept active as much as possible. Remember the Y's equal play rule – regardless of a player's ability.
- Avoid long lines with only one player going at a time during practices.
- Use assistant coaches or parents whenever possible to split up the team, allowing you to have more kids active at one time.

POTENTIAL WEEKLY PRACTICE SCHEDULE

WARM-UP (5 MINUTES)

- Explain the importance of warming up our bodies to prevent injury and get ready to play.
- Form your team in a circle or line and introduce stretching and conditioning exercises. As the season progresses, have players volunteer to lead these exercises.

SKILL FOCUS (25 Minutes)

- Explain the importance of focusing on skill development and how that will help them in the games.
- Focus each week on a different fundamental skill of T-Ball: hitting, catching, throwing.
- For the older division, start to introduce foundational rules, fouls, and penalties.
- Review previously taught skills each week.

TEAM TALK - VALUES (10 Minutes)

- Sit your team down in a circle and use this time as a physical break while introducing one of the core sportsmanship values of sports at the Y.
- Players can volunteer to come up with examples of each value (such as a time they showed respect or honesty).
- Review the previously taught value from the week before. Discuss where you saw players using that value during Saturday's game.
- Remember that each player brings something unique. It should be the goal to verbally praise and reward each team member for something positive they showed during the last game or practice.

SCRIMMAGE (20 Minutes)

- Use the end of each practice for a scrimmage, concentrating on skills they've been working on during the practice.
- The YMCA has scrimmage vests available on site by request. Please ask a Sports Coordinator to borrow vests, whistles, stopwatches, cones, or flags!

STRETCHING EXERCISES

Arm circles: Rotate arms forward and backward, in both big and small circles.

Jumping jacks: Self explanatory 😊

Trunk twister: Twist side-to-side from the abdomen, keeping the hips stationary.

Hip rotations: Standing with feet hip-width apart, hands on hips, circle the hips in a complete rotation (front, side, back, side). Do both clockwise and counter-clockwise.

Bent-knee sit-ups: Lying on back on the ground, bend knees to 90 degrees in the air. Hands behind head, sit up to touch the opposite knee with each elbow.

Push-ups: Can be done from toes or knees depending on player comfort and ability.

Windmill: With arms stretched out to the side, feet shoulder-width apart, bend over at the waist to touch the opposite foot before coming back to standing.

Superperson: Lying on stomach, arms extended overhead, raise one leg, lower, switch, repeat.

Alternate knee hug: Lie on the back, lift knee and hug it to chest. Switch leg.

Lunge stretch: Feet hip width apart, step one foot back about one leg-length from the front foot, bend both knees, then come back to standing.

Ankle and knee twists: Place the toe of one foot on the ground and rotate the ankle clockwise and counter-clockwise. Switch. Then stand with feet and knees together, hands on hips, bend knees to rotate side, front, side, then back to standing straight.

Quad stretch: Standing, lift one bent leg and reach behind the grab the ankle. Pull the ankle as close to the body as possible, hold for a stretch.

Calf raises: Standing with feet hip-width apart, slowly raise up onto toes, then back down.

AFTER STRETCHING: Consider 1-2 conditioning exercises (sprints, team jogs, or running drills).

SKILLS AND DRILLS

These drills and games are intended to develop the basic skills of T-Ball. The drills are arranged in order of difficulty with the easiest at the beginning.

Use individual and partner drills frequently. These give each player more of an opportunity to practice and handle the ball than they would in group drills. Group drills may leave players standing around and lead to a loss of focus.

Remember, drills don't have winners or losers! Try and provide one praise and one small correction (if needed) for each player. It's not necessary to rank players by who did best and worst. Positive reinforcement is key!

Introduce the READY POSITION for the start of drills. A good ready position means players are alert, focused, and ready to move in any direction. Players may respond well to a special code-word or call-and-response chant that means "get into ready position!"

THE BASICS

Glove-hand Coordination

Cut the bottom off a plastic gallon container. Turn the jug upside down with the handle in the player's glove-hand. Toss balls to the player and have them catch the balls with the jug.

Learning the Swing

Practice hitting from the tee into the backstop. Coaches should stand on the other side of the tee from the player and model proper stance and swing. Players mirror the coach.

Set the tee to the player's belly button and have them extend their arms fully. Explain "measure up" so the player is aiming to hit the ball with the fat part of the bat. Show how this hitting technique makes the ball go further.

Watching the Ball

Draw a large black dot on a ball, then place it on the tee. Have the batter concentrate on hitting the dot with the bat. A sticker could be placed on the fat part of the bat, so players match the sticker to the dot.

Focus on the player watching the dot until their swing is complete.

Learning to Catch

Start out without gloves. Roll grounders to the players, have them learn to squat/bend and catch the rolling ball with both hands.

Graduate to gloves, teaching players how to place their glove on the ground so the ball rolls inside.

Depending on player ability, graduate to catching balls from the air. Start with underhand catching (building on the jug exercise).

Learning the Positions

Place small orange cones where all positions are located (cones available at the Y by request). Do one walk-through with the players where they learn each position's name.

Pair players up into teams of 2 or 3. Have them jog around the diamond/field together. Randomly call out certain positions, and have players race to reach the correct position first. Working with a partner helps avoid any embarrassment if players run to the wrong place.

Learning to Throw

Show players how to form an L shape with their throwing arm, bending at the elbow. Hang a brightly colored jacket (or other object) from the backstop at about "adult nose" height. This will become the target. Alternatively, an assistant coach or parent could stand ready to catch, holding out a glove. Either way, the coach should be standing directly beside the players who are throwing.

Teach players how to throw by using a focal point. Their finger should be pointing at the target at the end of their throw once the ball leaves their hand.

Controlling Swarming

T-Ball is unique in that not all players are trying to run towards and interact with the ball (unlike basketball or soccer). Players must understand the importance of remaining in their position, and understanding when the ball is "theirs."

Draw large circles in the infield in the dirt and ask one player to stand in each of the circles to "guard their circle." Gently roll a ball out into the infield. If the ball crosses within a player's circle, they must run to try and catch it.

Depending on player ability, gradually make the circles farther apart from each other. Roll the ball purposefully between two circles. Teach players to "call the ball" – whoever leaves their circle first can catch the ball. Teach the other player to back off and remain in their own circle.

DRILLS AND GAMES

Catch the Coach

Place players in infield positions. The Coach starts to slowly jog from Home Plate to 1st Base (and so on). The coach shouts "tag me" and the players nearest try to tag the Coach out.

To increase difficulty: have players in the infield wearing their mitts. The Coach has a ball. While jogging, the coach tosses the ball to a nearby player. That player is "it" – they must catch the ball, then run to tag the coach.

Catch the Players

Start players running around the bases, about 5 seconds apart. From the pitcher's mound, the Coach then runs and tries to tag the players as they run the bases.

Teach players to stay on the appropriate path around the bases (1st to 2nd to 3rd) and not to run out into the field. This helps players memorize the path between the bases while being aware of where defenders are located.

Walk Like a Crab

Players start in a basic fielding Ready Position stance – crouched forward with glove open and down towards the ground. Gently roll a ball towards the player. Have the player walk forward 5 steps in their stance (knees bent, glove on the ground) in order to catch the ball.

Scoop!

Set players in two parallel lines facing each other, about 10 feet apart. Have players take a kneeling position (one knee on the ground). Players in one line practice rolling the ball to the player across from them, who catches it. The catching player then scoops up the ball from the ground, brings the glove to their chest, and touches the ball to prepare to roll it back.

Focus on balancing from the kneeling position, and the catching player scooping the ball up quickly from the ground to be ready to throw.

Track Meet

For a conditioning drill, have two players start at Home Plate. One player runs to 3rd Base, the other runs to 1st Base. Players continue running in opposite directions around the bases. The first player to return to home plate "wins."

Bounce to the Bucket

Place a large bucket, container, cooler, etc. on a base. Instruct outfielders to try to throw and bounce the ball into the open container. Players should build up stamina to be able to throw longer distances from the outfield, while aiming for a specific base in the infield.

Catch

Many variations can be used depending on player ability. Start players in pairs playing catch with each other. Focus on the transition between catching and then throwing the ball.

Introduce the "Crow Hop" – have players take a short step and hop in the direction of the intended throw before throwing.

Place players in a circle. One player calls a teammates name, steps forward, and throws that teammate the ball. Continue passing the ball around the circle. To increase difficulty, 2 balls can be used at once. Focus on players aiming their body towards the

intended recipient.

Catching Flies

Hit or throw fly balls to fielders. Practice being able to catch balls that are coming “from above.” Focus on players learning to track the ball with their eyes while running.

Can eventually be combined with other drills to create game-like scenarios. Outfielders catch the fly ball, take a few running steps, then throw the ball to an appropriate infielder.

The Amazing Race

Divide players into 3 teams. Have the 3 teams stretched into lines, with players positioned about 10-15 feet apart stretching from Home Plate to the outfield. Outfielders start with the ball, and throw it to the next player up in their line. Lines race to get the ball successfully to Home Plate first.

To increase difficulty, increase the distance between players. Eventually, lines should only consist of 3 players: an outfielder, the infielder, and a player back at Home Plate.

Block It!

Coach gently hits the ball directly to a fielder. The fielder’s goal is to stop the ball from getting past them – by any means necessary. Players can block the ball with their knees, legs, feet, or glove. Players can also block by catching.

Weekly Team Talks

Team Talk Week 1: Introductions

Spend some time getting to know each other. Make sure that each child has a chance to talk. The coach's role is to ask questions and let each player share an answer. Cover topics like names, favorite sports, hobbies, etc.

This is a good time to introduce some basic terms (players can volunteer to provide or demonstrate definitions): bases and baseball positions, catching, hitting, throwing.

Team Talk Week 2: What makes a good athlete?

Introduce Players to the 4 YMCA Character Values: Caring, Honesty, Respect, Responsibility. Explain how a good athlete isn't just a person who is fast or good at the game, but also a person who shows these values on and off the field. Each value will be explored more in depth in the following weeks.

If time allows, make sure players remember each other's names. A team chant or cheer could be developed to create team pride and bonding among the players.

Team Talk Week 3: Caring

Tell the players that one way of showing that you care is by doing kind things for people. Provide an example by using something you saw a player do on the field (helping another player who fell, cheering for teammates, handshakes with the opposing team, etc).

Ask the players to think of how they could show caring and kindness to members of their family (helping siblings, cleaning their room, washing dishes, etc.)

Encourage each player to do one kind thing for a member of their family over the next week.

Team Talk Week 4: Honesty

Ask the players what caring things they did for their families last week as a follow up on last week's discussion.

Explain what honesty means in sports. What does it mean to play fairly? What does cheating mean? Why is that important in sports? Explore how honesty makes the game more fun for both teams.

Team Talk Week 5: Respect

Discuss the idea of cooperation/teamwork versus competition. Point out that the other team makes the game possible. Remember, we don't keep score in YMCA sports. How does this make respect even more important?

Ask the players to brainstorm ways to show respect to the other team (making positive comments to other players, shaking hands at the end of the game, etc). Explain how you will cheer for the other team in this Saturday's game. Create a cheer your team can do to show support for the other team during the game.

Team Talk Week 6: Responsibility

In YMCA sports, every player gets equal playing time. This means that players are responsible for passing the ball, supporting teammates, and helping their teammates learn during practices.

One of the biggest responsibilities of a soccer player is sportsmanship. How can players show good responsibility during the game? When they win? When they've lost? What does it mean for a player to show good responsibility by listening to their coach?

If time allows, discuss how each player can have a specific responsibility during their final game of the season. Examples include: leading cheers, handing players water, leading stretches, taking care of the game ball, leading the handshake after the game, passing out snacks.