

Coaching Youth Basketball - What Should You Teach?

- By [Joe Haefner](#)

Many youth basketball coaches don't know where to start or what to teach. Well, we hope to help you out in this area. Below, we provide some advice on what to teach youth basketball players. We break it down between 3 levels. As you perfect each level, you can advance to the next level to teach more skills & concepts.

All beginner players should start with Level 1 no matter the age. We put ages next to the level as a general guideline. Depending on the age and skill level, you'll progress through the levels at different rates. You may notice that you'll spend 4 years working on Level 1 with 7 to 10 year olds. At the same time, you may be able to progress to Level 2 after two weeks working with a group of 13 year olds who are playing basketball for the first time.

I would advise to go back and **start at Level 1 every year**. A lot of high school and college coaches start at Level 1 every year. They just progress through the levels more quickly than a youth team. It's a great way to ingrain the fundamentals into your players year in and year out.

We advise to take a couple of hours and write up a [master practice schedule](#) for the season, so you can progressively teach them the skills mentioned below. It may take a few years to teach all of these skills at one level and THAT'S OKAY! For youth players, we want to focus on the long-term development, not how many games they win when they're 11 years old. If you try to progress them too quickly, it will hurt them in the long-run. **You want to have a solid foundation first.** You shouldn't try to teach them every dribble move in one year or every option in the motion offense. The same way in which you couldn't teach a person calculus if they did not know how to do simple addition and subtraction.

Important Note: *Throughout this article, you'll find many links to other articles on the website to explain concepts that we advise to teach. My recommendation would be to read the entire article first, then go back and click on the links to read the other articles.*

You may also want to add this article to your "[Favorites](#)" or "[Bookmark](#)" it, because there may not be enough time to read all of the links in one sitting.

Level 1 (7 to 10 Year Olds)

Here's what to teach, ordered by priority:

1. [Lay ups](#) - You should practice lots of lay ups with both hands. Your goal should be to get all players to make lay ups with their left and right hands equally well!! Teach them to jump off the proper foot. They should jump off the left leg when shooting a right hand lay up. They should shoot off their right leg when shooting a left hand lay up. It will be difficult but work on it. You'll probably need to start really close to the basket, with no dribble, and take just one step to practice the footwork. Once you add the dribble, they should dribble with their left hand when shooting left hand lay ups. And vice versa.
2. Footwork - Teach them triple threat positioning, pivoting on their left and right foot without traveling, [jump stops](#), and to square to the basket as soon as they catch the ball in a triple threat position. You should spend a lot of time on footwork!
3. [Shooting form](#) - For this age group, we highly recommend using smaller balls and lower baskets. If that is not possible, allow the players to dip their elbows which will give them more strength. To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. [Ball handling](#) - You should teach your players to dribble with left and right hands equally. Basic dribble moves such as the speed dribble, crossover, protect-the-ball dribble, and [back-up dribble](#).
5. Athletic & movement skills - Teach them how to run, [jump and land](#), skip, stop, move laterally, squat, lunge and any other basic movements. If you don't know how to teach these movements, ask a professional or PE teacher to show you how. 99% of the time they would be more than willing to help, and they may even come and show the kids themselves.

[Should We Teach Basketball Skills To Players Under the Age of 10?](#) - Useful information for all levels of coaches, not just coaches who work with players under the age of 10.

6. [Basic passes](#) - Teach and practice the basic chest, bounce, and overhead passes.
7. Play plenty of 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 games to teach concepts ([no dribble keep away](#)). It gets the players more experience and allows them enough space to operate and use the new skills they have learned. Make sure to use plenty of [fun basketball drills & games](#).

For more on this, read [Could 3 on 3 Basketball Be the Best for Youth Players?](#)

8. Offense - Do NOT use any structured or patterned offenses. First, get them comfortable on the court. They will start to figure things out on their own. Your main concern should be to have them move & not stand still.

If you use a few basic cuts and maybe screens in your shooting drills at the beginning of practice, then your players will already know how to move in a motion offense. Then you don't have to waste time teaching offense. Just let them play.

Once players feel comfortable on the court, show them proper [spacing](#).

As they progress, you can start to introduce them to [motion offense](#) situations.

9. [Basic cuts](#) & how to get open - If time permits, you can introduce the basket cut and straight cut. I would suggest that you just work these cuts [into your shooting drills at the beginning of practice](#). This will save loads of time.
10. Defense - Teach the [basic stance](#), defensive slide, and basic off-ball principles. Don't worry about spending as much time on defense. As they get older, you'll gradually spend more time on defense. Focusing on it 5 to 10 minutes per practice would be more than sufficient.

Basic Off Ball Principles:

- Stay between man and the ball
- Always stop the ball if it is in front of you!

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

For anyone coaching this age group, we HIGHLY recommend the DVD [Coaching Youth Basketball the RIGHT Way](#) (By Bob Bigelow). You'll get lots of drills and learn exactly how to teach the most important fundamentals to kids "right way". We truly believe this DVD should be required viewing for ALL youth coaches.

Level 2 (10 to 12 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above. But remember, if your 10 to 12 year olds are inexperienced, you should start in Level 1. And at the beginning of each season, you should start at level 1 until those skills are perfected. Then you can progress into the more advanced stuff below.

1. Lay ups - jumping off one foot and jump-stop lay ups.
2. Teach [more cuts](#): back cut, curl cut, etc.
3. Continue to focus on [shooting form](#) and introduce some movement for [shooting drills](#) (shooting off the dribble and off the catch). To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. Ball handling & dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the inside-out dribble (fake crossover), hesitation move, and between-the-legs.
5. Passing - continue to teach [basic passes](#) and introduce some [advanced passes](#) (baseball pass and wrap around pass). Use other drill such as [machine gun passing](#) and [pass and switch](#).
6. Passing under pressure - you can use [pair passing](#) with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: [full court press breaker drill](#).
7. Teach [basic screens](#).
8. Footwork - introduce [jab steps](#) and ball fakes (pass fakes and [shot fakes](#)).
9. Rebounding - introduce [rebounding technique](#).
10. Basic [post moves](#), [drop step](#) and jump hook.
11. Spacing - introduce more [basic spacing concepts](#).
12. Offense - keep playing 2 on 2 and 3 on 3 to teach concepts. You can also start to introduce more [motion offense](#) situations and play some 5 on 5.
13. [Defense](#) - keep emphasizing and spend a little more time on the defensive stance, defensive slide, and off-ball principles mentioned in Level 1. If you feel that your players are ready, work on more [off-ball defense principles](#).

In our [Man to Man Defense System](#), we provide step-by-step how to build and teach your defense.

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

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Level 3 (12 to 14 Year Olds)

You should expand onto more advanced skills for everything mentioned above.

1. Lay ups - practice contested lay ups. Also, you could start to teach players, same-leg same-shooting hand lay ups. I know that is against conventional wisdom, but think about it for a second...Your player just blew by a defender or is on a fast break. Do you want them stutter-stepping to give the defense time to recover and contest the shot? So if that means jumping on your right-leg and shooting right-handed on the same side, so be it.
2. Continue to teach basic cuts and add [more cuts](#).
3. Continue to emphasize [shooting form](#) (move to big baskets and bigger balls). Practice shooting on the move off of the pass and the dribble. To learn more on shooting, we also have the [Breakthrough Basketball Shooting Guide](#).
4. Ball Handling & Dribbling - teach more dribble moves such as the spin move, behind-the-back. Incorporate some double-moves (crossover followed with a behind-the-back).
5. Passing - introduce some other [advanced passes](#) (dribble pass, behind-the-back pass, pick and roll pass).
6. Passing Under Pressure - You use [Pair Passing](#) with a defensive player in the middle running back and forth to pressure the passer. You can use this drill to practice breaking pressure: [Full Court Press Breaker Drill](#).
7. Teach [Basic Screens](#).
8. Footwork - continue to work on [jab steps](#), pivots, and ball fakes (pass fakes and [shot fakes](#)).
9. Rebounding - put more emphasis on [rebounding technique](#) and spend more time on rebounding drills.
10. [Post moves](#) - keep practicing post moves mentioned above while introducing a few more when the players are ready [drop step counter](#) and up-and-under move.
11. Spacing - advance to higher levels of [spacing drills](#).
12. Offense - introduce more [motion offense](#) situations. You should start to notice that your players are becoming much better at reading the defense.
13. [Defense](#) - Emphasize basics from previous levels and move on to rotations and situations.

In our [Man to Man Defense System](#), we go into great detail about rotations and situations.

For this age group, we are [against zone defenses](#) for development purposes.

Read more: <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/teach-youth.html#ixzz2j532qXZS>

Sample Youth Practice Schedule (Ages 7 to 10)

Here is a sample structure of a practice schedule for a youth team. It may not be exactly what you would do every practice. For example, some days you may spend more work on athletic skill work and spend 15 minutes at the beginning of practice to do so. Some days, you may play games to teach skills half of the practice (which I highly recommend).

Here is a template of the basic structure of every practice:

1. Dynamic Warm Up & Athletic Development Work - 10 to 15 minutes

This is probably the #1 thing missing from most youth practices. It helps prevent injury, improves performance, and improves athletic ability. What good is a basketball player who is injured or is not athletic enough to utilize the basketball skills developed? The better the player moves, the better the player performs. Why not spend time on it?

There are a lot of players who have tremendous SKILLS, but lacked the ATHLETIC ability to make it to the next level.

However, with this age group, they are NOT mentally capable to take much technical instruction, so it is great to incorporate games to get the players warmed up.

2. Teaching Skills and Using Fun Drills to Improve Skills - 25 to 30 minutes

The #1 reason kids quit sports is because it's not fun anymore. Youth coaches' primary focus should be to teach skills and make it an enjoyable experience! This isn't high school, college, or even PRO basketball, so don't treat your practices like it.

Try the skill-fun drill technique. This means that you teach a skill, then follow up that skill with a fun game or drill to work on the skill. It helps break up the monotony of practice.

3. Games to Practice Offense and Defense (Plenty of 2 on 2 & 3 on 3 work to teach skills)- 20 to 25 minutes

You'll notice in the sample practice that I did not include any 5 on 5 games. If it were up to me, I would only have kids under the age of 10 play 3 on 3 tournaments. It gets them more touches and gives them enough space to utilize skills.

If you are in a 5 on 5 league, you can incorporate some 5 on 5 time. Although, I would not recommend to do it every practice. Skill work is much more important at this age level.

4. Cool Down - 5 minutes

AVOID STATIC (held) stretching & YOGA with kids under the age of 10. At this age, the child's nervous system has not developed to the extent that they can properly use static stretching. As a result, this will decrease safety and effectiveness of the stretch. Yoga can also negatively affect a child's movement patterns and coordination. Yoga is not bad for everybody. It's just bad for this AGE GROUP. Instead, use dynamic flexibility and full range of motion exercises.

Sample Practice Schedule

Dynamic Warm Up & Athletic Work - 10 minutes

- Dribble Tag - You could also alternate days with regular tag.
- Races From Different Positions - This is great to improve athletic ability and it's a fun way to for the kids to work on first step quickness. On your command whether it's a verbal or a visual cue, the kids race to a spot (3-point line, free throw line).

You can alternate starting positions between standing, on your belly, on your back, facing the opposite direction, or anything else you can think of.
- Coach Says - This is a fun game to get the players to practice movements. Coach says a particular movement. Then, the child does what you say. It's kind of like Simon Says. Coach says "Do a push up."

You can do this with many different types of movements & directions, such as skips, backward skips, lateral skips, push ups, partner pulls, crawls, lunge, squat, jump, hop, bound, lateral shuffle, and lateral crossover.

Teaching Skills & Fun Drills - 25 minutes

- [Jump Stop Drill](#) - 5 minutes [Fast](#) - 5 minutes [Form Shooting](#) - 5 minutes Lay Ups - 5 minutes [Pivot 21 - Lay Ups](#) - 5 minutes

Fun Games to Practice Offense and Defense - 20 minutes

[No Dribble Keep Away](#) - 10 minutes [Defensive Challenge](#) - 10 minutes

Cool down - 5 minutes

Some teams do this after practice. You could do some dynamic flexibility exercises. Avoid static stretching & yoga under the age of 10 for development purposes. Reasons are mentioned at the beginning of the article.

Read more: <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/samplepractice1.html#ixzz2j53gb0QI>

Sample Youth Practice Schedule (Ages 11 to 14)

Here is a sample structure of a practice schedule for a youth team. Of course, this is just a sample and things would be different every day, but this is a basic structure of how a practice may look.

1. Dynamic Warm Up & Athletic Work - 10 to 15 minutes

This is probably the #1 thing missing from most youth practices. It helps prevent injury, improves performance, and improve athletic ability. What good is a basketball player who is injured or is not athletic enough to utilize the basketball skills developed? The better the player moves, the better the player performs. Why not spend time on it?

There are a lot of players who have tremendous SKILLS, but lacked the ATHLETIC ability to make it to the next level.

Because it is the game of basketball, I do try to include a basketball in the warm up as much as possible. I am going to present two different dynamic warm ups. If you are fortunate enough to have enough basketballs for everybody, we have a **basketball-related** warm up. For those of you who do not have very many basketballs, we include a warm up that does not require a basketball.

2. Teaching Skills and Using Fun Drills to Improve Skills - 30 to 45 minutes

The #1 reason kids quit sports is because it's not fun anymore. Youth coaches primary focus should be to teach skills and make it an enjoyable experience! This isn't high school, college, or even PRO basketball, so don't treat your practices like it.

Try the skill-fun drill technique. This means that you teach a skill, then follow up that skill with a fun game or drill to work on the skill. It helps break up the monotony of practice.

3. Drills & Games to Practice Offense and Defense - 15 to 25 minutes

4. End of Game Drill - 10 to 20 minutes

5. Cool down with Light Stretching - 5 minutes

Sample Practice Schedule

Dynamic Warm Up & Athletic Work - 15 minutes

Warmup #1 - With Basketball:

Stationary Ball Handling:

- Around the World - 30 sec
- Figure 8 - 30 sec
- Behind-the-back dribble - 30 sec
- Two Ball Dribble Crossover - 30 sec
- Two Ball Front-to-Back Dribble - 30 sec

Full Court Ball handling: (Incorporate Lay Ups if you want)

- 1/2 Speed Dribble
- Backpedal - 1/2 Speed Dribble
- Protect-the-Ball Dribble going backwards & forwards - Switch Hands at Half Court
- Crab Walk - Figure 8 while walking. Walk down the court forwards. Come back walking backwards.
- 3/4 Speed Dribble
- 3/4 Speed Crossover Dribble
- Full Speed Dribble
- Full Speed Crossover Dribble
- Full Speed Behind-the-Back Dribble
- Full Speed Inside Out Dribble
- Partner Passing - Shuffle and Pass - Chest, Bounce, & Overhead.

Warm up #2 - Without Basketball

- Jog.
- Backpedal.
- Carioca.
- Defensive Shuffle - 50% to 75%
- Walking Lunge with Hamstring Stretch
- Side Hops.
- Skipping with Arm Swings.
- Butt Kicks
- Crab Walk
- High Knees
- Bear Crawl
- Squatting Form - 10 Reps
- Jumping and Landing
- 180 & 360 Degree Hops
- Diagonal One Leg Bounds - with 1 second Pause
- Tennis Ball Drops - Start on Belly - Get Up & Sprint

Warm up and Athletic Skill work without ball:

- Full Speed Defensive Shuffle without Ball - 15 to 25 feet - twice each direction
- Butt Kicks - Up the court
- High Knees - Down the court
- Lunge Technique - 2 sets of 10 reps
- Squat Jumps - 2 sets of 10 reps

Teaching Skills and Using Fun Drills to Improve Skills - 40 minutes

- [Two Ball Dribbling Drills](#) - 5 minutes
- [Form Shooting](#) - 5 minutes
- [Two Ball Shooting](#) - 5 minutes
- Knock Out and Water Break - 5 minutes
- Teaching Motion Situations ([Motion Drills](#) - 2 on 2 & 3 on 3 work) - 10 minutes
- [Wing - 1 on 1](#) - 4 minutes
- [Defense Reaction & Conditioning Drill](#) - 2 minutes
- Free Throws & Quick Water Break - 4 minutes

Drills & Games to Practice Offense and Defense - 25 minutes

- [No Dribble Keep Away](#) - 5 Minutes
- 4 on 3 - [Overload Drill](#) - 5 Minutes
- 4 on 4 - 5 minutes (Emphasize rules and teaching skills - after pass to wing, you must screen away. Similar to Situations Drill below.)
- 5 on 4 - [Overload Drill](#) - 5 minutes
- [Situations Drill](#) - 5 minutes

End of Game Drill - 10 minutes

Use the [end of game drill](#) to end practice in a fun fashion. It also gets players accustomed to end of game situations.

Cool down with Light Stretching - 5 minutes

Some teams do this after practice.

Read more: <http://www.breakthroughbasketball.com/coaching/samplepractice2.html#ixzz2j54d4CFb>