

Edina Youth Softball Association Coaches Manuel

A. Our Philosophy:

We are a developmental league whose goals are to give our girls proper instruction, maximize their repetitions, build their confidence, success, and love for the game. We hope to build memories together with our daughters and friends. Winning is NOT the most important. We need to model proper sportsmanship in order for our daughters to imitate it.

B. Expectations:

Not every coach has the same background, nor the same style. Our Board is committed to sharing our knowledge across our league. If coaches feel more confident and do a better job of teaching, our entire league will improve. Our jerseys say Edina, not the team names. We want to remember that players, parents, and coaches will feel better about the softball experience if we work together. Ask Board members for advice, tips, help at any time.

In this way, we want every team to be consistent through out the league.

C. Coaching Tips:

Talk to the girls, teach and practice.

Don't just talk, show them what they need to do. Train yourself to be specific.

Demand that they learn the skills correctly, stop and correct at every opportunity.

Praise and encourage them.

Be energetic.

Be patient.

Learn their names.

Remind them week after week the fundamentals that they have learned, catch phrases--crocodile, 1, 2, ready, leg kick, flip, hands ready, glove up, wait on the ball etc.

Be on time, communicate with your families, encourage them to be on the field with you, and practice with their kids at home.

Enjoy yourself!

D. Fundamentals

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|--------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Throwing | 2. Grounders | 3. Flip/Catching | 4. Pitching |
| 5. Hitting | 6. Base running | 7. Sportsmanship | |

I. Throwing

Grip: Most girls will use 3 fingers, little girls the whole hand. Grip the ball across the seams with the thumb under the ball.

Put them on a line, place their throwing hand foot on the line, turning their shoulders, pointing toward the target. Stretch the arm back and point the glove toward the target. This is the scarecrow position.

Next, lean back on the foot on the line, and snap the ball over the top. Remind them to keep elbow up to shoulder height (throwing arm in an L shape), then snap the wrist at the release point. Player must follow through to the opposite knee. The back foot drags toward the target.

Practice Drills: With little kids, have them throw to adults to save time and keep them safe.

- 1. Throw to coach's window, flip back to player.**
- 2. Back them up for a longer throw, encourage them to be accurate, throw hard and go quickly.**
- 3. Roll grounder, field and throw overhand.**
- 4. Toss popup, throw back to coach.**

5. Divide into two teams, contest for most balls in the window.

6. Outfield drill: Roll the ball past them, they chase, pick up ball with bare hand, turn, line up feet and shoulders, throw back.

7. Older girls: Relay drill

Teach crow hop: righthanders--right foot up, down, step with left and throw

4 girls or more in a line, 20-30 feet apart, ball at the end of the line. All girls turn their shoulders, throwing arm shoulder facing the girl with the ball, stretching the glove across the body, hit the cut off, catch, crow hop, hit the next target. When the ball reaches the end of the line, turn and throw it back along the same line.

Focus Points:

Drooping elbow: bring a volleyball and have them throw it overhand. They are forced to keep the elbow up or the ball will fall or go badly off target.

No wrist snap: Put the throwing elbow in the glove, cock the wrist and snap the ball. Ball should have backspin, not sidespin if done correctly.

Shot put: girls are pushing the ball. Go back to drill one--the scarecrow. Ball must start extended behind their back shoulder and snapped over the top.

II. Grounders

Start with teaching ready position. Glove always open, right step, left step, knees bent, hands apart. NOT glove to the ground. Girls can't defend a line drive fast enough. They should not be bent too far forward so that they can move laterally and back.

Coaches' verbal cue: 1, 2 ready.

Review the form--the crocodile, squat, glove in front, soft hands to stomach

Struggle for little girls to squat to the ground, this is the goal--perfect

form

- 1. Make a line across from coach, roll grounder, flip back to coach. Encourage form and speed.**
- 2. Roll ball to girls' right/left.**
- 3. Mix up the order that you roll the ball so that all must be ready.**
- 4. Teach the backhand--cross the body with the glove, placing it on the ground, next to right foot. Roll balls to their glove to gain confidence.**
- 5. Add 1st baseman, the other girls in a line. Roll ball, flip to 1st--hit the window. Switch 1st baseman every few throws.**
- 6. Throw a pop up, they flip to 1st for the double play.**
- 7. Remove the 1st baseman, field, cover the base.**
- 8. Have a runner move to the base, field, tag or cover base. Two bases: tag drill. Learning to tag correctly and effectively is very important in our league. Remind them to get to the middle of the baseline and to tag with both hands.**
- 9. Mix grounders, line drives, pop ups.**
- 10. Teach them how to play pepper with an Incrediball.**
- 11. Set up 2 bases and infield triangle--1st, 2nd, shortstop. Roll grounders and call out bases for throws. Switch positions.**
- 12. Coach at first, back the girls up for a longer throw, work on shortstop throw, throw grounder, field and overhand to first.**
- 13. Charge the ball! Roll soft grounders, make them turn to target, and throw.**

III. Flip Toss/ Catching

The Flip Toss is the most valuable delivery of the ball for our infielders. It is easier, faster and more accurate than an overhand toss.

Teach the flip toss in this way: flip by taking a step with opposite foot, aim for the window of your target. Do not bring the arm back very far--this is not a full pitching motion! Throw a catchable ball! To save time, field the ball and flip while low to the ground. Do not stand up, then flip.

When catching, use these reminders:

Hands up and ready. Gloves open. Fingers up for a ball above their waist. Don't catch the ball in a bucket. Squeeze the ball with two hands.

Practice Option 1:

- 1. No glove, 4 corner flip. Without a glove, the girls will naturally catch with the fingers up and squeeze with two hands.**
- 2. With glove, fingers up, flip**
- 3. Switch directions**
- 4. Count the number of catches--15, 20, as many in a row without a drop.**
- 5. Add grounders.**
- 6. Teach the low, quick flip--field the grounder and flip without straightening up.**
- 7. Pop-up catch and flip**

Option 2:

Simulate the infield:

- 8. Set up a first base, roll the ball and make the player judge the distance to either flip or throw overhand.**

Option 3:

9. Put the girls in a line against the fence. No glove, flip a whiffle or tennis ball above their head, catch with two hands, fingers up, flip back to coach.

10. Same drill with the glove. Focus on catching in the glove, squeezing with throwing hand. Add a softball.

11. No glove, teach the backhand. Coach flips to player's backhand, squeeze with two hands.

12. Add the glove, same drill.

13. Add the cross over step to backhand for balls that are further from the body.

14. Last drill: mix the two throws--above their head or backhand--forcing them to react and remember their form.

15. Flip Game/Race:

Have the girls pair off and make two lines facing each other, about 10 feet apart.

Each pair has a ball. When they hear GO, they start to flip back and forth. For each successful flip and catch, they count a point. No point for a drop. First team to 10 calls out the team name.

IV. Pitching

We need to develop our pitchers as quickly as we can. This position is the key to a good game and league. It is not possible to let every girl pitch. Make kids practice and prove their effectiveness in practice before you allow them to pitch in a game. Remind parents to practice at home.

With 4-5 and 6-8 leagues, our distances are much further. Our best pitchers will need to pitch more.

Review the form: for righthander--right foot on the rubber, left foot back, hands together, eyes on the target, step, swing the arm through as straight as possible with the hand under the ball. Finish with the arm at shoulder height to prevent too much arc.

Focus on eliminating the mistakes: crossing feet, twisting hand/arm,

incorrect release point (a little in front of the hip), relax, eyes on target, proper arc.

1. Pitch to coach, throw the ball back to them to work on catching. The more trouble they have, move them closer to coach.
2. Player pitches, coach rolls grounders back, flip back to coach. Pitchers need to be able to field their position!
3. Pitch, coach tosses popup, flip to coach.
4. Add a coach/player as a visual eye for pitcher
5. To keep the girls active, let them throw two pitches per girl, then switch. Keep track of strikes thrown.

E. Hitting

Set up:

Grip: Top hand (power hand) should be loose to allow maximum wrist snap and bat control. Bottom hand is tighter. Line up the door knocking knuckles.

Stance: Comfort is the key. Batter must be close enough to the plate to touch the outside corner of the plate. Feet should be pointing toward the plate, knees bent, hands behind the back shoulder at the top of the strike zone, with balanced weight or more weight on the back foot.

Swing:

Start the swing with a leg kick with the front foot. Stride should be short (8-10 inches or none at all). Stride should be toward the pitcher. Back foot squishes the bug, spinning toward the pitcher. Hips will open, belly button finished toward the pitcher. Wrist snap should occur with the top hand rolling over the bottom hand. Snap should be level and quick. Arms should be at full extension after the ball is struck and swing around and past front shoulder.

Focus on errors: hands, feet setup, swing plane--no uppercut or chopping wood, full swing, swing hard, swing at strikes, thumbs curled around bat,

door knocking knuckles aligned, leg kick.

Before kids swing, have them show a practice swing and remind the fundamentals.

Use the hitting arm and a tee as often as possible.

1. Soft toss with bat mixing in tennis balls. To do soft toss correctly, coach should be no more than 3-4 feet away from player, on a knee, tossing a ball with little arc, aiming at the front hip of the player. The ball should not hit the player, it should drop before touching her foot.

2. Soft toss with wooden dowel and whiffle/tennis balls. The point of this is to train the girls to focus on their target. If they can hit with a skinny bat, smaller balls, they will be more confident with their regular bat and 11" ball.

3. Drop pitch/ Joe Mauer Drill. Coach stands and drops the ball into the hitting zone. Player will learn to track the ball and time her swing.

4. Teach check swing--leg kick, stride, stop the bat and hands at a pitch that is out of the zone. This will help them to be more aggressive.

5. Challenge them to hit away from pitcher--balls hit to them make out-put markers up on fence to the right/left as targets.

6. Tee--simulate the game--eyes on back of the ball, do not hit the tee, no bunts, hit it hard, focus on targets.

7. Give points for hits (1 for fair ball, 2 for a "shot," 3 if you make the pitcher dance.)

8. Soft toss out of the wheelhouse. To teach them to hit pitches around the zone, deliberately toss balls in different spots to force them to change their swing, make adjustments.

9. Drop the bat: to teach them to hit and leave the bat versus throwing it. Do this slowly at first, hit, place bat behind her, take a step toward first.

VI. Base running

Teach the rules: we can run past first base, but not 2nd and 3rd.

Put a coach 15 feet past 1st base. Start the kids at home. Sprint to first, hit the base, continue to the coach and give a high 5.

Running from 1st to 2nd, 2nd to 3rd: stick the base!

Teach the banana to round the base. Draw the arc in the sand and have players run from home to 2nd, 2nd to home.

Baserunners should have left foot back on the base, knees bent, right foot forward. Feet set up this way allow the player to see the pitcher and hitter more easily. When the ball gets to the hitting zone, player should bounce two hard strides off the base, then read the ball. Ball in the air-- wait and see it drop. Ball on the ground, run. Ball caught, get back to the base.

Baserunning Game:

Make a line at 1st base and another at 2nd base. Two coaches at home plate, one with a bat, the other softtossing. As soon as the ball is hit, players sprint for the next base, avoiding the ball, trying to beat the other girl to her base.

Add pop ups, line drives, with a retreat to the base. Even if the ball is not struck, teach them to anticipate and bounce off the bag.

Team Building: Play Hotbox

Set up two bases, have coaches man the bases to start, then have players do it. The rest of the players must be at a base. When the ball is thrown, players try to steal a base. If they get tagged, they are out. They learn to fake, to read the ball, to avoid the tag.

VII. Outfield Play

In grades 6-8, outfield play is crucial as balls are constantly hit hard. Younger players can learn to be great additions to team defense by learning to back up correctly.

Remind outfielders to be in ready position, to call the ball, to back each

other up, to throw the ball IMMEDIATELY once they gather it.

Drills:

Hard Hit Balls: Put the defense in the field, coach throws line drives, popups rapid fire to all positions, trying to simulate difficult balls. Keep going until they catch 10.

Hits to the outfield: Put the 4 outfielders in position, remind how to backup, return ball to infield ASAP.

Next step: Add a SS, 2B, Pitcher and the rest of the girls as runners. Coach throws a ball in the gap, over the head of the outfield, runner continues until the ball is controlled within the infield.

5 ball drill: Coach stands 20-30 feet from the player
Make her run hard to her right and catch a ball that you toss in that direction. She catches and sets the ball down. She runs in the opposite direction to catch your next ball, sets it down. Go back and forth for 2 more throws, then throw a shallow ball to make her charge or a ball over her head to make her retreat.

Insist that they catch with TWO hands, even on the backhand.

The girls waiting pick up the balls and the next player is up.

Variation: Divide the girls into two teams and separate them. Toss pop ups or throw line drives to them. They must call for the ball. Add the rule that no player can catch two in a row. 1st team to catch 5 wins.

VIII. Sportsmanship: Reminders about how we play the game

We play hard, we play fairly, we listen to our coaches, we respect the umpires, our teammates and opponents.

We play to have fun, to become better players, we cheer each other on, we are fair, we are part of a team, we take turns, we help each other.

As coaches, we are the model of this code of behavior!

We are here to share in a great experience with our daughters and her teammates.

We do not coach in order put winning ahead of building a positive experience for our girls.

No one should or will remember how many games are won in youth softball. What we all will remember is the friendships formed, the confidence and enthusiasm are girls will gain, and the memories we are building with them.

Regardless of the different uniforms and team names, all of these girls are EDINA softball players. At each scrimmage or game, EDINA girls always win. Let's set an example as a community for how we expect our players and parents to behave.

Skills Progression for Edina Youth Softball

Set goals for each of your players. Talk to them about these goals and praise their progress.

Basic Skills:

Catching: Player can catch some balls thrown at her with correct glove position, except for the backhand.

Throwing: Player can usually complete an accurate flip toss with proper arc. She can throw overhand but often struggles with the mechanics and direction.

Hitting: Player can repeat a proper stance and stride. She can begin to judge good pitches to hit with proper timing.

Fielding: Player can field grounders with proper mechanics when ball is hit directly to her or to her glove side.

Baserunning: Player listens to coach and runs alertly around the bases.

She understands the different rules between 1st base and the others.

Aggressiveness: Player is not timid, will take full swings, will attack a ground ball, run hard, pays attention to the game, wants to improve.

Pitching: Player is willing to practice, can repeat the footwork and arm movement, is capable of defending her position and throwing pitches near the zone. She can throw strikes from 30 feet, but will struggle from 35 feet.

Advanced skills:

Catching: Player can catch most balls thrown at her with correct glove position. She can use the backhand and occasionally scoop balls off the ground.

Throwing: Player completes an accurate flip toss with proper arc. She can throw overhand with proper mechanics and good distance.

Hitting: Player can repeat a proper stance and stride. She judges good pitches to hit with proper timing. She hits the ball into the outfield.

Fielding: Player can field grounders with proper mechanics when ball is hit to her or to her glove side and occasionally to her backhand. She can move left or right and will charge a ball to make a play.

Baserunning: Player listens to coach and runs alertly around the bases. She runs aggressively and can read the play and make decisions. She is willing to slide.

Aggressiveness: Player is not timid, will take full swings, will attack a ground ball, will hustle after balls, run hard, pays attention to the game, wants to improve.

Pitching: Player is willing to practice, can repeat the footwork and arm movement, is capable of defending her position and throwing pitches near the zone. She can throw a high percentage of strikes from 45 feet (grades 4/5) or 50 feet (grades 6-8).

Knowledge of the game: Player understands backing up teammates, can anticipate defensive adjustments, will change hitting or pitching due to the game situation.

Game Reminders: Speed up play!!!

- 1. With another coach or parent, have your pitcher warm up on the side line before pitching the next inning. Once on the field, give her two pitches to warm-up, and begin play.**
- 2. When you start your at bat, remind the next player of her job as catcher for the next inning. Help her get her equipment on quickly to speed up play.**
- 3. Remind players to be in the ready position (one, two, ready) with each pitch.**
- 4. Encourage girls to swing at pitched balls! Keep track as a team.**
- 5. Remind your players what to do before the ball is put in play.**
- 6. Set goals for them (i.e. let's see if we can get a 1,2,3 inning/ make an out at 2nd/ back up/ cheer for each other). Keep reminding them with encouraging chatter.**
- 7. Give the girls a chance to play a variety of positions, to hit in different places in the order.**
- 8. Remember that we are planting seeds of skills and confidence for each one of them. No one will ever remember how many games were won or lost.**
- 9. Stop play when ball is back in the infield. If not the baserunning and the overthrows will never end. One base for balls thrown off the playing field. Stop and teach whenever possible.**

Equipment Reminders:

- 1. Bats must be all aluminum. No composite bats are allowed. Any bat over \$60 is most likely a composite bat. To keep our girls safe, families must know this rule.**
- 2. Helmets need a chin strap.**
- 3. Catchers need to wear full equipment, stay safely behind the batter.**
- 4. Cleats--softball, baseball, or softball--are encouraged. No metal spikes.**

Developed by Tom Halloran, EYSA 2010