

LAMOILLE AREA COACHING COLLABORATIVE

COACHES HANDBOOK

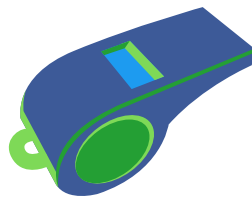


**Building Protective Factors for
Positive Youth Development**

2025

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**Visit the Coaches
Handbook webpage
for additional
resources!**



Our Story

The Lamoille Area Coaching Collaborative, a workgroup of Healthy Lamoille Valley, is designed to bring coaches together with the common goal of supporting youth and recreation throughout the Lamoille Valley, including Lamoille County and the Greater Hardwick Area.

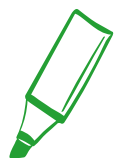
We know coaches hold a special place in young athletes' lives. And in rural communities, coaches need more connection and support to do their best. Youth sports are about so much more than just winning games - it's about building character, teamwork, and resilience. Each day on the field, court, or rink you make a difference by helping youth build resilience.

Sports teach us all valuable lessons, especially when we coach with intention, reflection and care. Together, we are stronger.

Your Story

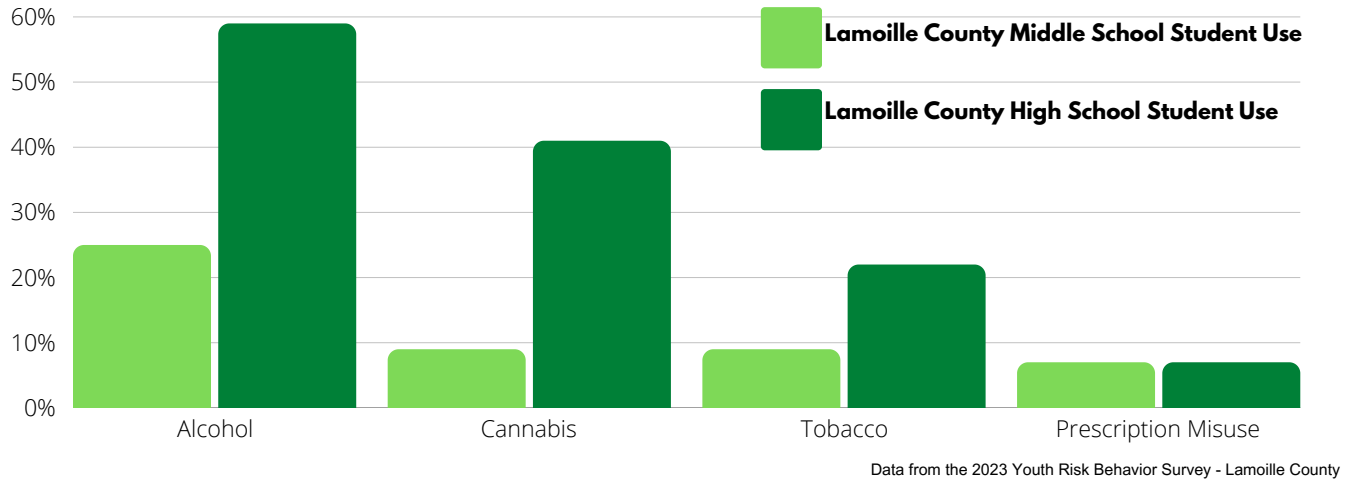


Write your story here! Why do you coach or support youth sports? What keeps you connected?

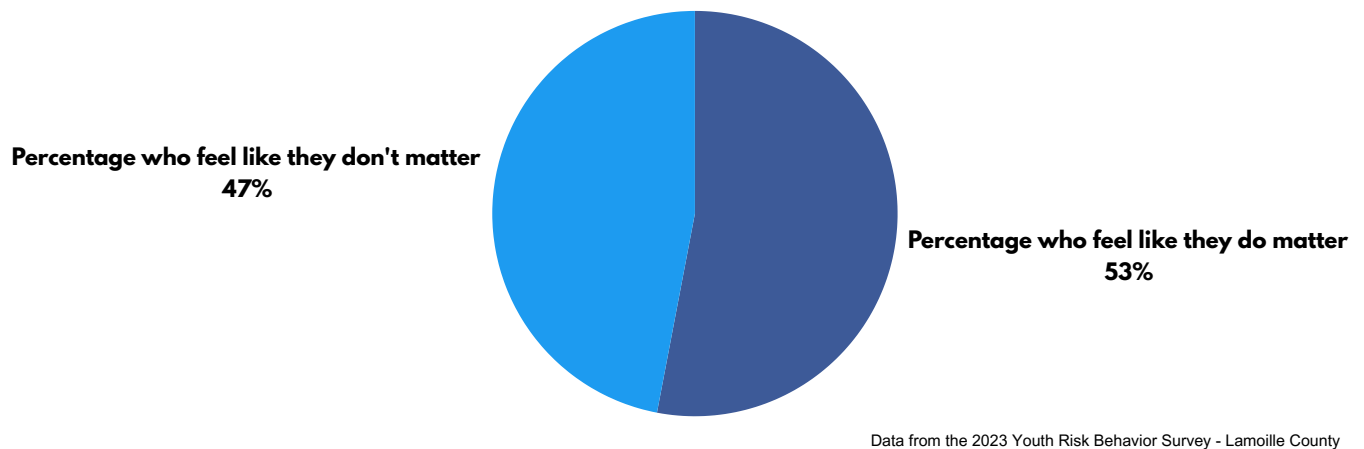


Our Why

1 - Youth Lifetime Substance Use Rates



2 - Highschoolers Feeling Like They Matter to Their Community

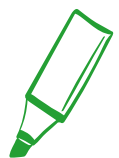


3 - The Importance of Coaching

When we put things in perspective we realize the importance of coaching and continued youth involvement in athletics.



How can your coaching be a positive force in a player's life?



How to Use This Handbook

This guide is for coaches, athletic directors, school staff, and community partners.

Why This Handbook Matters

We're not just teaching sports, we're building a culture of belonging, growth, and positive development. This handbook is more than just a coaching tool - it's part of a greater effort to ensure every young person, in every Lamoille Valley town, has a fair and full chance to grow, thrive, and belong.

This Handbook Exists To:

- center youth development in every team and program
- create consistency and shared expectations across communities
- equip coaches, ADs, counselors, and caregivers with practical tools to support youth
- improve communication and accountability between adults, athletes, and families

Who Should Use This Handbook?

Coaches

- Use as a daily guide and seasonal reflection tool.
- Apply its strategies in practices, games, and team meetings and gatherings.
- Reference it to navigate challenging situations with parents or players.

Athletic Directors & League Administrators

- Set expectations by sharing this handbook with all coaches and other partners.
- Use it as a training and on-boarding resource.
- Reinforce a consistent approach across programs and towns.

School & Community Counselors

- Connect with coaches to support the whole child emotionally, socially, and mentally.
- Use the content to identify alignment between school climate goals and team culture.
- Reference key sections when working with athletes.

Parents & Guardians (with support from coaches and ADs)

- Understand how to be a supportive sports parent.
- Know the shared expectations for player behavior, communication, and team values.
- Create a strong partnership with coaches and league leaders.
- Volunteer to help!



When to Use This Handbook and Online Resources

Preseason

- Have a goal for league leadership to sign off on team and league values and policies with a commitment to and accountability for priorities set in this handbook.
- Review expectations, values, and youth development goals.
- Host a training and share key sections with all coaches, assistant coaches, athletes and parents.

In Season

- Use as a reference when issues arise with behavior, parent conflicts, motivation, etc.
- If issues come up, return to your team goals: "This is what we agreed to as a team."
- Use our program "Huddle Up" or other youth development questions and activities to build team connection and communication.
- Keep this handbook available during practice or games.

Postseason

- Reflect on what went well and what could improve.
- Host a debrief or coaching roundtable using reflection tools in this handbook.
- Build toward stronger practices next season.
- Send us feedback to improve this handbook and online resources!

Final Tips

- Add to your personal, school or league coaching toolkit.
- Use a hard copy and mark it up. Make this handbook a living tool. Check out our online resources.
- It's not about being perfect - it's about progress, reflection, and shared growth.
- Return to the handbook often. Let your use of it grow with you as your team and players evolve.



Equity in Youth Sports

What Is Equity?

Equity means recognizing that not every athlete has the same starting point and adjusting our systems and support so everyone can succeed. Remember, equality = everyone gets the same thing while equity = everyone gets what they need to succeed.

What Is Health Equity?

Health equity means that all people, regardless of age, race, zip code, gender identity, income, or ability, have the opportunity to be mentally and physically healthy.

In sports, this shows up in:

- Access: Does every kid have gear, transportation, and a welcoming place on the team?
- Belonging: Do all athletes feel seen, safe, and valued?
- Support: Do coaches understand that stress, trauma, racism, or poverty impact performance and behavior?

Why This Matters for You

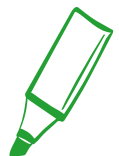
You help shape culture and conditions. Equity isn't a checklist - it's a mindset and a commitment. As a coach you can adjust your coaching to meet different needs while holding shared values, building relationships, and learning about your players' lives. Athletic directors and league coordinators can ensure policies such as fees, playing time, and discipline are fair, inclusive, and consistently applied. You can also offer translation, transportation, or waivers where needed.

School or community counselors can bridge gaps between school, family, and the field, as well as help identify unseen needs such as mental health or food insecurity. Parents or guardians can model respect, communicate constructively, and reinforce team values by asking "What does my child need to feel they belong?"



Reflect and Ask

- Who feels like they belong on our teams, and who doesn't?
- How do our policies or habits unintentionally leave some kids behind?
- What can I do to remove barriers, especially for youth facing racism, poverty, or stigma?



Building a Culture of Respect in Youth Sports

We want every game, competition, tournament and youth sports event in the Lamoille Valley to reflect the best of what sports can be: inclusive, respectful, and youth-centered.

This **Standard Pregame Sportsmanship & Inclusion Statement** is a simple but powerful way to set that tone. Lamoille Valley schools are already using a version of this statement which we have adapted for expanded use in all Lamoille Valley Youth Sports.

Use this statement to:

- Set clear expectations for behavior from the start.
- Reinforce values of sportsmanship, safety, and belonging.
- Promote consistency across teams, age groups, and communities in our region.
- Support coaches, referees, volunteers, parents/caregivers, spectators, and athletes in maintaining a positive environment.

Standard Pregame Sportsmanship & Inclusion Statement

(Adapted from the Vermont Principals' Association | vpaonline.org)

Good [morning/afternoon/evening], everyone, and welcome to today's game! We're so glad to have you here as we support our teams - [Home Team Name] and our guests from [Away Team Name].

Before we begin, we'd like to take a moment to remind everyone, players, coaches, families, and fans, why we're here:

- Youth sports are about more than just winning. They're about learning, growing, and supporting each other through teamwork, respect, and good sportsmanship.
- Please remember to be kind with your words, show encouragement to all players, and treat referees, coaches, and fellow fans with respect.
- Every young person and adult deserves to feel safe and welcome here, no matter their race, gender, background, identity, ability, or beliefs.
- This is a place for healthy competition, for learning, for fun, and for community.
- Negative behavior from the field or the stands, such as name-calling, taunting, or inappropriate language, can lead to warnings, removal from the game, or even cancellation of play.

Let's set a great example for our youth athletes by keeping the focus on fairness, effort, and kindness. Thank you for being here and helping us make this a positive and respectful experience for everyone, including as a substance free space.



Know Your League, Policies, and Contacts

Know Your League Rules & Policies

Knowing your league rules and policies will help you be a stronger coach for your players. It will also give you the support you need to make difficult decisions. Policies are a safety net for you, not a burden.

Know Your School, Town, and League-Specific Protocols

- Concussion and injury protocols
- Weather policies
- Mandated reporter
- Late pickups
- Parent or spectator under the influence
- Substance-free park and school policies
- Restorative Polices



Are there other league protocols that are important for you, your players, or parents to know?

Know Your League or School Contacts



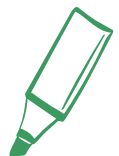
Sometimes knowing who to ask will help you better serve your players. Write in your contacts below:

Coordinator or Athletic Director:

School Counselor or Student Assistance Coordinator:

During Business Hours:

After Hours:



Accountability & Citizenship

Youth sports are about more than skills or winning. They are a training ground for life. As coaches, administrators, parents, and mentors, we have a shared responsibility to build a culture of accountability and character, both on and off the field.

How are we shaping not just athletes, but citizens - people who show up with pride, empathy, and responsibility in their school and community?

Key Questions:

- Are we modeling the behavior we want to see?
- Are players learning how to take responsibility, bounce back from mistakes, and treat others with respect?
- Do families, coaches, and players all understand the same expectations and follow through on them?

What Accountability Looks Like:

- Clear Expectations: Values are posted, repeated, and lived, not just mentioned once
- Consistent Follow-through: Coaches model the same behavior they ask of players
- Shared Responsibility: Coaches, players, parents, and others all sign on with a shared code of conduct
- Celebrating Growth: celebrate how players lead, show respect, and build team culture

What Citizenship Means in Youth Sports:

- Respectful Communication: listening, encouraging, and resolving conflict with integrity
- School Pride & Team Identity: representing their school and town with care
- Empathy & Belonging: supporting teammates from different backgrounds, abilities or experiences
- Leadership On and Off the Court & Field: taking responsibility, helping others, and showing up
- Community Awareness: seeing themselves as part of something bigger



Coaches as Protective Factors

Coaches Matter More than You Think

It All Starts with the Coach. Coaches set the tone for everything. Coaches aren't just instructors, coaches are protective factors. You are anchors, mentors, and lifelines. You help young people feel safe, seen, and supported.

Protective factors are conditions that buffer young people from the negative consequences of exposure to risks. Protective factors reduce the impact of risk or change the way a person responds to risk. That's what we mean when we say you're a protective factor.

Conversely, risk factors are characteristics at the biological, psychological, family, community, system, or cultural level that are associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes, including substance misuse.



Think About it!

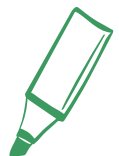
- What is your role in building protective factors for youth participating in sports?
- What do your players hear from you the most? Is it about winning or growing?
- Can sports ever be a risk factor? Why or why not?
- How can you ensure your efforts don't promote risk factors, directly or indirectly?

Write 3 things you can do to build protective factors for your players:

1.

2.

3.



A Closer Look at Risk and Protective Factors

When we know the risk and protective factors for youth, we can work together to support our players and families.

Examples of Protective Factors for Youth and Young Adults

- Supportive adults who view youth as collaborators, elevating their participation and voice
- Role models of resilience and self-worth
- Involvement in substance-free activities
- Clear and positive future goals
- Friends who disapprove of substance use
- Clear expectations and consistent limits
- A supportive network of family and friends
- Healthy and positive coping strategies
- A home environment where adult-use substances are monitored and secured

Examples of Risk Factors for Youth and Young Adults

- Belief that most peers use substances
- Perception that substance use is cool or socially desirable
- Early initiation of substance use
- Low perception of harm related to substance use
- Unclear expectations and inconsistent limits
- Consequences that are rarely or inconsistently enforced
- Lack of commitment or sense of belonging at school
- Limited involvement from parents and other supportive adults
- Family or community norms that promote or normalize substance use
- Easy access to substances at home or in the community



As Coaches We Model:

Caring Relationships and a Sense of Safety and Belonging

Take your coaching to a new level. Circle the tips you want to make a priority this season:

Pay Attention to Youth Behavior

Notice when they're absent, discouraged, making progress, or in need of support.

Connect with Each Team Member

Connect in a positive way that respects their cultural background, and engage their parents or caregivers.

Be Creative

Offer ways for athletes to connect across age groups and roles.

Observe Interactions

Observe how athletes interact beyond practices and games, addressing harmful language or behavior when it arises.

Encourage Team Bonding

Encourage team bonding outside of scheduled activities and create spaces where all athletes feel they belong and can lead.

Foster Relationships

Foster strong and healthy relationships between adults and youth, among peers, and across coaches.

Build Bridges

Build bridges between players, families, schools, and the broader community.

Provide Support

Teach teamwork and model peer support.

Seek Feedback

Seek feedback regularly from athletes, families, and fellow coaches.

Help Parents and Caregivers

Help parents and caregivers become strong protective influences in their athletes' lives.



As Coaches We Model:

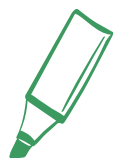
Healthy and Safe Team Culture: setting norms, spaces, league culture and policies

As you focus on building protective factors this year, check off the areas from the list below where you can make improvements.

- ☐ Set clear intentions and expectations.
- ☐ Foster a positive team culture.
- ☐ Model expected behavior.
- ☐ Enforce a code of conduct.
- ☐ Be consistent in enforcement.
- ☐ Use restorative practices when needed.
- ☐ Follow school and league policies.
- ☐ Respect officials and encourage athletes to do the same.
- ☐ Ensure parent compliance with team guidelines.
- ☐ Choose team captains based on youth who will support and embody a healthy environment and team culture.



What is your coaching philosophy?



As Coaches We Model:

Healthy Boundaries, Decision Making, and Expectations

Coaches as Role Models

Coaches are role models in the community - on and off the court, field, mountain, and rink. When coaches model respect and sportsmanship, players follow and parents do too. But if coaches lose their cool or show disrespect, it quickly trickles down to players and then parents. This is why your leadership matters so much. When coaches lead with respect, fairness, and positive energy, everyone benefits: the team, the community, and the game itself.

Create Positive Social Norms

Have expectations for youth and parents/caregivers in how to act and treat each other, coaches, and referees with respect.

Communicate Your Expectations

Share healthy expectations of success. Think about competitive outcome vs. long term participation. Find the balance of contribution, feeling valued, and competition.

Encourage All Year Activity

Communicate the importance of being active outside of your season. Encourage youth to play different sports and be active in other ways! Help them make these connections.

Understand Personal Motivation

Understand that kids are there for different reasons and motivations, and have different skills (athletic, social, emotional, leadership). Build foundation and confidence in your players in why and what they are doing.

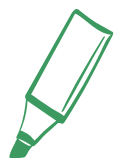
Promote Healthy Choices Both On and Off the Field

Encourage athletes to think about what they put in their bodies, including food, drink and substances, both during and after the sports season.



What is a healthy expectation of success this season?

How can you continuously communicate this with your players?



Understanding Youth Development:

Physical Development

Physical developmental milestones and coaching considerations are based on age and positive behavior techniques. Identify the physical considerations below that are most important for your team:

- Help educate them about hydration, nutrition, sleep, energy drinks, and substance misuse. How athletes take care of their bodies matter.
- Prevent overuse injuries from training load, recovery, warmup, and cool down.
- Modify or adapt rules to allow for participation. Take into account physical fitness, skill levels, and age.
- Plan practices. Keep youth active and engaged. Have fun!

Social Development

Select the social developmental considerations that are most important for your team to prioritize:

- Ensure equal opportunities for all athletes and emphasize their importance to the team.
- Encourage self-awareness and role development through various team positions and leadership roles.
- Promote positive social relationships, fair play, and sportsmanship, on and off the field.
- Use supportive language and active play to foster body awareness, self-expression, and positive social development.
- Use inclusive language to improve insecurity around gender, sexuality and equity.

Emotional Development

Circle the emotional development considerations that might be especially important for your team:

- Make efforts to ensure every young athlete has a successful experience by addressing individual differences within sports activities.
- Create sport settings that reinforce personal worth through positive contributions.
- Plan activities that meet the diverse needs of young athletes.
- Reward positive emotional responses with praise and encouragement.
- Recognize that sports can contribute to the overall development of young athletes.
- Design sport experiences to build confidence, as a positive self-concept is closely tied to body control.

Adapted from Humphrey, J.H. (2003). *Child Development Through Sports*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.



Intellectual Development

Circle the intellectual development considerations that might be especially important for your team:

- Take into account differences in neurodiversity, intelligence, and physical skill when planning sport activities.
- Recognize that poor performance may stem from challenges in athlete-coach communication.
- Use sport experiences to provide challenging, problem-solving opportunities.
- Design sport activities with enough variation to maximize learning opportunities.

Adapted from Humphrey, J.H. (2003). *Child Development Through Sports*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

Stressors and Teens

Adolescents experience heightened emotional responses due to hormonal changes in brain chemistry, which can alter mood and decision-making. This period in life also brings stress from relationships, school, family and social concerns. How can you, as a coach help mitigate some of these stressors for your athletes? Stressors for teens include:

- peer rejection and bullying
- feeling like they do not fit in on their team or with their peers
- feelings of loneliness
- athletic expectation from self, friends, parent, or coach
- personal, peer or family substance use
- mental health
- social pressures around relationships and substances
- family issues at home
- academic challenges

Adapted from harbormentalhealth.com/2020/08/02/social-and-emotional-development-in-adolescents



Parent and Athlete Communication Support

When coaches and parents are aligned, athletes thrive. Help keep families informed, involved, and focused on shared goals - without sideline stress.

Set Expectations Early

- Review team values and expectations at the start of the season.
- Share how playing time decisions are made (effort, attitude, teamwork, readiness).
- Use the handbook as a shared tool to create consistency and keep things clear.

Playing Time - A Common Concern

Help parents understand:

- Playing time isn't always equal, but every player matters.
- Growth and contribution look different for every athlete.
- Share with parents that you are coaching people, not just minutes.
- Encourage parents to ask their kids how practice went before asking about minutes.

When Conflict Happens

- Stay grounded in the values and expectations set at the beginning.
- Use shared language such as, "This is what we agreed to as a program."
- Bring in your AD or another coach if needed. Don't go at it alone.

Coach Networks Equal Stronger Programs

- Talk to other coaches. Learn what's working across teams.
- Build consistency across towns so athletes and families hear the same message no matter where they go.

The Digital Generation

Support athletes by talking about the importance of self-care, open communication, and responsible social media use. Topics to discuss include:

- Screen time should not be all the time. Set boundaries and designated times for social media use.
- Model good technology behavior as a parent and as a coach. Do not use your phone during meals or practices. Do not use your phone during family activities.
- Encourage Privacy. Emphasize the importance of privacy on the web. Discuss what is and is not appropriate to post, and share that nothing posted is really "private".
- Don't make screens the reward or the consequence!

Adapted from www.thementalhealthcoalition.org/teens-online-safety



Huddle Up

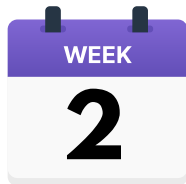
Meaningful Connection with Athletes

A Healthy Lamoille Valley Program

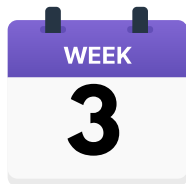
A 6 topic outline supporting skills for life during and after the season



Focus on team bonding activities on and off the field and court, and discuss ways to connect and socialize together, including after wins and losses.



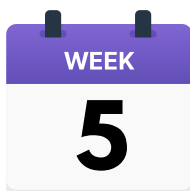
Review and explain the Code of Conduct, and create a team contract emphasizing healthy choices, avoiding substances, and understanding the risks of peer pressure, especially in the locker room, at school, when socializing, and at parties.



Discuss physical self-care, healthy nutrition, balancing exercise and rest, and the dangers of substances including alcohol, drugs, and performance enhancers.



Address mental health, the link between substance use and mental health challenges, and the importance of seeking professional help for treatment.



Focus on connecting athletes to community and school resources. Explore ways they can positively impact the community including by initiating or joining school-wide or town projects.



Assess whether the team acts as a risk or protective factor for its members and discuss how team dynamics influence individual behavior and choices.

Huddle Up Program Details

Week 1: Ask your team

- How can we come together as a team?
- How do we want to socialize outside of practices or games?
- How do we want to connect after wins and losses?

Week 2: Create or present a Code of Conduct

- How can we use the Code of Conduct to help guide decision-making and healthy choices?
- Topics to address:
 - Refusal skills
 - Decision making (prom, parties, gatherings)
 - Current events
 - Local Youth Risk Behavior Survey data

Week 3: Discuss factors of a Healthy Lifestyle

- How can we as a team support a healthy culture?
- Nutrition and balanced diets
- Tailored nutrition support for male, female, and non-binary athletes
- Understanding self-care
- Avoiding substances
- Effects of energy drinks
- How substances affect the brain and performance

Week 4: Mental Health

- How do your athletes like to be supported?
- Discuss how substances can impact physical and mental health and how sports do, as well!
- Discuss your role as a trusted adult, and your access to resources.
- Be a role model.

Week 5: Community

- Ask: "How do you feel connected to your community outside of sports?"
- How do you see your role in supporting others in your community?
- Identify community projects or organizations that are important to your athletes.
- Explore different volunteer opportunities and ways to get involved.
- Encourage participation in at least one town or community event/project during the season.
- Have athletes discuss potential projects with you, teachers, athletic directors, and other school administrators.

Week 6: Risk and Protective Factors

- Survey the team on their level of safety (physical and emotional) when at practice or games.
- Discuss social relationships and climate on the team. How can it be improved?
- Ask your athletic director or league administrator to check in with students on their comfort level with you as a coach.

Post-Season: Why It Matters for Everyone

Whether you're a coach, league administrator, athletic director, school or community support, or working with youth of any age - post-season care is key.

What to do:

- Reflect on your own about different aspects of the season.
- Check in with players after the season ends. Find out how they're doing emotionally and socially.
- Keep connections alive. Encourage team get-togethers, group chats, or casual check-ins to maintain a sense of belonging.
- Reflect together. Help players think about what they learned, what challenged them, and what they're proud of.
- Celebrate effort and growth, not just wins. Every player's journey matters.
- Support transitions. Some kids struggle when the season ends - offer extra support or resources if needed.
- Make it part of your routine to team up with families and communities to keep kids supported year-round.
- Get together with other coaches!

Taking these simple steps helps players feel valued, builds resilience, and strengthens your whole program. Don't let post-season be the end of the care.



Questions for your AD or Administrator

Team Participation & Playing Time

- What school or program policies impact playing time? Consider academic eligibility, attendance, and conduct (both in and out of school).
- Be transparent with athletes and families about how playing time is earned. Communicate expectations early and revisit them as needed.

Parental Custody & Permissions

- If custody arrangements affect who can pick up a student or attend events, how will this be communicated to you?
- How will you be informed of any specific parental permissions or restrictions related to participation, travel, or medical care?
- Who is your point of contact when custody or family dynamics create uncertainty?

Health & Safety Protocols

- Are you authorized to distribute any first aid items or over-the-counter pain relief? If so, what's permitted and what's off-limits? What is the process of documentation?
- How and when are allergies or medical alerts disclosed to you? Where should this info be kept during practices and games?

Travel & Supervision

- What's the bus policy for phones, music, or food? Are there expectations for team behavior during transit?
- What is the oversight requirement for away games? Are assistant coaches or chaperones required? Are background checks needed?
- Are you allowed to transport athletes in your personal vehicle under any circumstances? Most districts do not allow this, be sure to check your policy.

Your Role in Building Culture

- Beyond rules, what are your team's shared norms? Consider co-creating basic travel expectations, locker room guidelines, and sideline behavior with your athletes.
- Is there a written protocol you wish existed that could improve safety, inclusion, or clarity? If so, speak up - your lived experience matters.

A Special Thank You!

Thank you to the leaders of the Lamoille Area Coaches Collaborative, local athletic directors, school SAPs, and the many dedicated area coaches who contributed their time, input, and experience to this project!



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**Visit the
Coaches Handbook
webpage for additional
resources!**



**[healthylamoillevalley.org/
coaches-handbook](https://healthylamoillevalley.org/coaches-handbook)**



A Program of the Lamoille Family Center

**healthylamoillevalley.org
lamoillefamilycenter.org**