



# Million Coaches Challenge Belief Statement



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Coaches can make or break the sports experience for kids, but many feel unprepared to meet the diverse and emergent needs of the young people they coach. To create a positive environment that helps kids get the most out of sport, coaches must be trained in youth development.

We are the organizations of the Million Coaches Challenge, committed to equipping a generation of coaches with the knowledge and tools to help young people thrive on and off the playing field.

**Here is what we know:**

- Coaches shape the youth sports experience.
- 38 million young people play sports. All of their coaches should be trained.
- The vast majority of coaches are not trained in key practices to develop and support youth, such as motivation and relationship building.

Our first step: train one million coaches in youth development. Funded by the Susan Crown Exchange, the organizations of the Million Coaches Challenge are creating evidence-based training programs for coaches across the United States.

## Coaches shape the youth sports experience.

As leaders of the sport setting, coaches shape the conditions that make or break it for kids.

Coaches influence how youth view [the sports environment](#) and feel about themselves. When asked what makes sports [fun](#), young people highlight coaches, especially coaches who encourage the team, provide clear and consistent communication, stay positive through mistakes, and are easy to talk to. Research demonstrates how, regardless of a young person's ability, truly [great coaches](#) go beyond the X's and O's and view participants' [personal growth and enjoyment as integral](#) to the process of winning, preparing for competition, motivating players, and developing skills. Simply, [quality coaching](#) is youth-centered, underpinned by a belief that *youth don't care how much you know, until they know how much you care*.

In addition to young people themselves, parents value coaches who are youth-centered. In a recent national survey, youth sports [parents](#) expressed tremendous trust in their child's coach. More so than national, state and community leaders, teachers, or peers, parents trust coaches to develop life skills, foster a sense of belonging, create safe environments to play, and help youth identify and cope with off-the-field stressors.

Unfortunately, gaps often exist between coaches' intentions and their behaviors. For instance, many coaches say that they are [motivated to develop youth](#) in their community, but problematic and [ineffective behaviors persist](#), such as using [exercise as punishment](#) and [yelling at kids](#) to build mental toughness.

**38 million young people play sports.  
All of their coaches should be trained.**

To ensure that youth sports are youth-centered, we need to cultivate a generation of coaches trained in youth development.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), physical activity has well-documented health benefits for youth that are linked to savings on long-term health care costs. Research also shows that there are basic features of sport that make it the ideal setting to help young people develop [the attributes for long-term success in school, work and life](#), such as [social skills, the ability to work with others, a positive self-concept, and the desire to serve their community](#).

[Through intentional coaching strategies](#), youth in sport can experience physical and psychological safety, build community with others, and develop supportive relationships. However, we cannot take quality youth coaching for granted. Because young people develop and mature at different rates, their coaches should be well-versed in evidence-based practices that align with their developmental needs.

**The vast majority of coaches are not trained in key practices to develop and support youth.**

Despite a growing understanding that quality coaching involves youth-centered practices, most coaches lack the know-how and very few have been trained on key issues, such as **motivation, relationship building, and mental health**.

According to the Sport and Fitness Industry Association, just 25.6% of current coaches received training in effective motivational techniques over the last 12 months. Similar results from the National Coach Survey, conducted by researchers at The Ohio State University, show that 70% of coaches expressed a desire for more training in relationship building, performance anxiety, leadership development, and team dynamics. Many coaches also lack preparation for supporting youth through personal or family matters. Less than half of coaches felt prepared to coach youth with a mental health concern, eating disorder, or disability. Additionally, 70% cite low confidence in their ability to help athletes navigate the pressures of social media, link to mental health resources, and refer athletes to support for basic unmet needs.

**We, the organizations of the MCC Challenge, believe that coaches who are well-versed in evidence-based youth development and skill-building practices are essential to creating quality sports experiences that support young people’s physical, mental, and emotional needs. Creating a positive environment through these practices leads to more youth enjoyment, learning, growth, and a desire to continue playing sports. We are committed to a system of accessible, evidence-based training for coaches in youth development practices that will raise the bar for the youth sports experience.**



## Organizations of the Million Coaches Challenge

The **Center for Healing and Justice through Sport (CHJS)** engages with sport at every level. From community centers and juvenile detention centers to major college athletic conferences, and professional leagues, the CHJS team puts a premium on teaching coaches to deliver healing-centered sport experiences while protecting, nurturing, and embracing athletes for every bit of who they are. Our interactive courses range from 2-hour introductions to a 100-hour advanced certification, offered in partnership with the world-renowned Neurosequential Network.

**CoachUp! Washington** is a strategic partnership between the Washington Interscholastic Activities Association (WIAA) and the University of Washington's Center for Leadership in Athletics (UWCLA) aimed at providing online coach development courses to all school-based coaches across Washington state. The first two foundational courses focus on creating physically and emotionally safe environments and centering the social, emotional, and physical needs of adolescent athletes.

**Girls on the Run** annually equips about 20,000 new coaches across its network of 175 local councils through the National Coach Training. Drawing on research and insights from the field, the blended online and in-person training prepares coaches to deliver the evidence-based Girls on the Run curriculum, use trauma sensitive strategies, establish safe environments with an awareness of sexual abuse prevention best practices, build relationships, create a positive, inclusive environment where ALL youth can be themselves, and cultivate a mastery climate.

**Laureus USA** is training thousands of youth sport coaches in sports-based youth development, positive youth development, and social-emotional learning approaches. Coaches being trained are located throughout the US, including in our key Sport for Good Cities (Atlanta, Chicago, New Orleans, and New York City) and our training partnerships focus on non-profit organizations, professional league and team networks, and other local sport and youth agencies.

Focused on ensuring children have a positive, well-rounded experience on and off the field, the [Little League® Diamond Leader Training Program](#) is a free educational resource that provides coaches with an understanding of the impact that mental, social, and emotional well-being has in youth sports through detailed information, interactive scenarios, and a variety of additional resources. Through this course, which navigates Little League volunteers through real-life scenarios that are being faced in local leagues all around the world each year, coaches will have a better understanding of the impact they have on their players, both on and off the field.

**OSU LiFESports** and the **Ohio High School Athletic Association** introduce [Coach Beyond...](#), a series of ten education sessions designed to ensure coaches and athletic

directors are ready to “coach beyond...” the X’s and O’s and teach life and leadership skills through sport. We offer in-person and online trainings, free webinars, and community events on important topics such as supporting student-athlete mental health, fostering a positive team environment, managing stress and pressure, and improving mental strategies for athletic performance.

**Positive Coaching Alliance’s** Double-Goal Coach workshop explores why and how to pursue both winning and the more important goal of teaching life lessons through sports. Each coach leaves the workshop knowing how to focus on communication between coaches and athletes, coach for mastery of sport and honor the game. The training is open to coaches of all sports, across all levels from 4–5-year-olds up through high school and competitive club sports and is available via self-paced online courses as well as live interactive workshops via Zoom or in-person.

**USA Fencing, USA Weightlifting, and USA Triathlon** have developed coach training modules focused on Effectively Coaching Generation Z, Creating A Culture of Belonging, and Elevating Your Coaching IQ. Additionally, these courses will be offered to all NGBs (at no cost) to incorporate into their Coaching Education programs.

The **United States Olympic and Paralympic Committee’s (USOPC)** Connection Based Coaching is an online course created to help coaches of all levels better connect with their athletes. Through the story-telling lens of Team USA athletes, coaches and professionals, the interactive course modules guide participants to a greater self-awareness in social and emotional skills they use in their coaching techniques.

The **U.S. Soccer Foundation** builds coaches’ capacity to create lasting, positive connections with youth, by teaching coaches how to also serve as mentors. With an emphasis on serving under-resourced communities, the Foundation training serves coaches of all youth sports and is delivered in-person, virtual-live, and through an asynchronous, online training.

**Project Play**, the signature initiative of the Aspen Institute’s Sports & Society Program, develops, applies, and shares knowledge that builds healthy communities through sports. As articulated in its 8 Plays, Project Play is also committed to *Train All Coaches*. Project Play is facilitating learning opportunities across the organizations of the Million Coaches Challenge in partnership with **American Institutes for Research** and **Collaborative Communications**.

The **Susan Crown Exchange** is a nationally-focused foundation whose mission is to prepare youth to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Through its Youth Sports program, SCE supports nonprofits that unlock coaches’ potential to build core social and emotional skills in young people. Alongside its partner organizations, SCE is committed to building momentum for a youth-centered culture for youth sports.