

Grade 1/2 Coaches Guide 2018

Welcome

Welcome to the Newton Girls Softball League! Our league depends on the dedication and effort of our volunteer coaches, who contribute many, many hours each season to the program. You are the most important and visible emissaries of Newton Girls Softball to the Newton community. Our goal is to provide you with the tools, training, and information you need to run well-planned practices, and well-played games by girls who are learning and enjoying the sport of softball. Thank you for the commitment you have made to our league, and good luck with your season!

League Values and Goals

Mission statement

Newton Girls Softball is an independent, non-profit organization committed to providing all girls with an experience that fosters positive self-esteem, team spirit, and individual growth through personal achievement and as a team member. Newton Girls Softball is committed to the development of athletic capability and sportsmanship by focusing on teaching the fundamentals of softball in an environment that supports all skill levels.

Spring recreational league

Registration is open to all girls in grades K-7 who live in Newton OR attend Newton Public Schools. The recreational program is committed to the development of athletic capability and sportsmanship by focusing on teaching the fundamentals of softball in an environment that supports all skill sets. We foster positive self-esteem, team spirit, and individual growth through personal achievement and as a team member.

Coaches should place a priority on teaching the game of softball – skills, rules and strategy. Our league makes considerable effort to create relatively balanced teams to promote fair competition. Our coaches should take practices and games seriously, but not at the expense of good sportsmanship or a fun and supportive learning environment. Our experience is that quality competition is more important to our girls than winning. Remember to have fun, and please invest the time you need to learn the game and to be able to teach your team how to improve their softball skills.

Panthers travel teams

In addition to the Recreation League, Newton Girls Softball sponsors Panthers Travel teams for girls ages 7-18. The Panthers travel teams are a step up in competition from the Recreational league. Our goal is to provide a competitive softball environment for players eager to improve their skills through hard work and effort. Players are selected via tryouts based upon ability, commitment, and attitude. Summer is the Panthers' primary season as competitive travel softball is a summer sport in our region. We aim to field teams in each of the following age groups: 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U, and combined 16-18U, based upon player and coach interest. When possible, we also field additional teams for the fall and spring seasons.

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League policies, rights and responsibilities (published on website)

Player's rights

- Develop your softball skills. Have fun! Winning is better than losing, but you can have just as much fun in a losing season as in a winning one. Remember that you are doing this to have fun. If you're not having fun, then speak with your parents and coach and try to identify how to change things up so you have fun.
- Be able to play different positions (if that is what you want to do). Your coach must position you in the field for a minimum of 3 of the 5 innings per game with at least two innings per game in the infield.
- Receive only positive comments from your coach, your teammates, and opposing teams' members and coaches.

Player's responsibilities

- Attend practices regularly.
- Be at games on time, or inform your coach in advance if you have a schedule conflict.
- Cheer on your team and say only positive things about your opponents and the umpire.

Guidelines for parents

- Be positive toward your daughter with respect to her performance, her teammates, and girls on other teams! Positive cheering only.
- Let the coach do the coaching.
- Softball is a team sport and part of being a good teammate is attendance. We understand that three events per week might be too much for some Grade 1 & 2 players during some weeks, so our expectation is for players to attend at least 60% of the games or practices. We certainly don't want the fact that more content is available to discourage any young players from registering. However, if your daughter is considering another activity that also requires her regular attendance on one of the game days, PLEASE be fair to her and others by selecting only one activity this spring.

Zero-tolerance rules

- The coaching staff is ultimately responsible for the behavior of the parents and fans of their team.
- Taunting of players by anyone will not be tolerated.
- Players, coaches and fans must treat the umpire with respect.
- Protests of an umpire's judgment calls including balls and strikes, arguing, baiting, yelling "nice pitch" before the umpire calls the pitch, etc. are all considered heckling.
- Umpires will report un-sportsmanlike heckling or conduct by players, coaches or spectators to the head coach of the offending team. If a warning goes unheeded, the offender will be ejected from the field. If the heckling or conduct persists, the game may be suspended by the umpire.

Team Leadership

As coach, you are the team leader. It is your job to keep things safe and to set an appropriate tone for your team that supports the league's values and goals.

Establish team ground rules and expectations

Work together as a team to create a set of ground rules everyone agrees to live by. Be clear about your own expectations for the team.

Example from a past team: *We will respect each other, be kind to one another, help each other out, and try our best at all times. We won't make fun of each other for mistakes. We will be on time and come to all games and practices except when we're sick or have a commitment we can't miss. Our parents will tell coaches ahead of time if we are going to be absent from a practice or a game. We will have fun!*

- Communicate ground rules to the parents – at parent meeting and by email.
- Communicate “zero tolerance rules” to parents. It is important to enforce them.
- Be consistent and enforce (kindly) the team's rules. Co-coaches need to act and speak consistently. You are the ultimate voice of authority for your team.
- Deal with problem behavior when it occurs – don't ignore it.
- Inform your Commissioner of any continuing problems. It's their job to help.

Create a fun, learning environment

- Raise the bar – challenge the girls to learn new skills, no matter their current capabilities. Stretch them to their full potential.
- Use skills and training sessions that keep girls active and learning.
- Ask the girls to always give their best effort.
- Make practices and games an enjoyable experience for the girls. Surprise them with new activities. Be spontaneous and flexible based on what the team needs that moment.
- Be prepared to adjust your teaching approach to different learning styles and capabilities. Some girls need information explained to them first; some want to watch and copy. It is important to find the best way to get through to each girl.

Provide motivation and a positive attitude

- Keep your remarks positive. *Praise publicly – criticize privately.*
- Commend strong effort and positive attitudes, especially in the face of adversity.
- Give the girls goals – daily, weekly, for the season. Show them where they are headed as a team and what they will learn during the season.
- Some girls are new to this sport, or sports in general. Help them gain confidence by giving them specific skills to practice and master. Notice when they achieve it! Success builds confidence.

Communication

Communicate regularly and predictably

- Email is the league's and the coaches' primary communication tool with families. Set expectations for parents to read and respond to emails quickly. You should do so also.
- Make sure a coach who is good at email is in charge of your team communication. Our new website makes it easy to email your team right from the team roster page.
- Send email reminders before practices and games – try to stick to a schedule.
- Publish the team's practices and games for the week, including arrival times, field locations, what to bring, etc.
- Ask for 24 hours' notice from parents if the player is not attending a practice or game.
- Weekly emails are a great way to recap highlights of previous games or practices.
- However, do not use email in place of one-on-one conversations with parents. Make time to connect with parents before and after practices and games. Let them know how things are going with their daughter, and what they might work on at home between practices.

Send a welcome email to the team

- Get in touch with your players within 48 hours of the roster meeting. If you send an email or leave a message, ask for a response, so you are sure they have heard from you. If you have not heard back within 24 hours and can't reach them directly, inform the commissioner right away.
- The league provides a welcome email template for you to use. You can do this in one large email, or chunk the information into a few emails as long as they are all sent out quickly.
 - Let them know the names of everyone on the team. The roster is also posted on the website the same night you receive it. Parents have to sign in to view the roster.
 - Gather additional emails and cell phone numbers.
 - Inform them of upcoming player clinics dates and times.
 - Distribute/provide links to the game schedule.
 - Let them know there will be a short parents meeting at the end of the first practice.
 - Stress that the league needs new volunteers and ask them to consider playing a role in the sustainability of Newton Girls Softball by looking at the Volunteering page: <https://leagueathletics.com/VolunteerRW/VolAlertCalendar.asp?n=86110&org=newtongirlssoftball.org> and signing up.

Communications with the league

Your League Commissioner is your first point of contact for any questions or concerns. Call or email your Commissioner when postponing a game. If you have any recurring or major player or parent issues, let the Commissioner know. Coach-only information is posted on the league website under "Coaches' Corner."

- The League Website www.NewtonGirlsSoftball.org contains game schedules, field locations, team contacts, player skills clinics, game rules, league policies and additional off-season training run by area professionals.
- Parents should be directed to the Grade Level coordinator for player registration and payment issues. Email: Caroline@NewtonGirlsSoftball.org.

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Managing Practices

General

- Practices should be fun, challenging, and provide the players lots of touches so they develop their skills. Practices are the most important part of the team experience.
- Grade 1/2 practices are held at least once per week, about 60-90 minutes long. Schedule the time and day of the week with input from everyone on the team. Try to find a time that works for all or most. This will take some effort but will be well worth it.
- You will be assigned a team field practice location, based on your field requests to the League President. You will be given a list of fields and times to choose from and a short window to make your choices. In case of identical requests, senior teams will be awarded the field. Therefore, coaches in the younger age groups should include in your mix requests for smaller, neighborhood fields as a safety backup. Many smaller fields are perfectly adequate as grades 1-4 practice fields.
- Early season: Practices can begin when fields are playable and when the League President informs coaches that permits are in hand. Pre-season practices may be difficult to hold depending on field conditions but if possible, try to schedule two-three practices with your team before the first game.
- Clay infields cannot be damaged by playing on when wet. Grass fields can be. Stay on the infields if the grass fields are closed or very wet.
- Don't let wet, cold or hot weather slow you down. Dress for the weather and PLAY!

First practice

- Spend time with girls learning names, finding out about each other, and agreeing on team ground rules. You may want to set up a social meeting before the first practice.
- Establish your team's safety rules and make sure everyone understands them. They will need to be reviewed regularly as situations come up at practices and games.
- Pre-arrange a mandatory 10 minute parents' meeting at end of the first practice, before pickup. Review the team's ground rules, coach expectations for the season, and near-term logistics. Answer questions. Please let parents know that any adult (anyone aged 18 or older) wishing to assist the coaches during the season must have a CORI check conducted. It is a Massachusetts state requirement and Newton Girls Softball policy that the CORI background check must be completed prior to the start of any practices and/or games. Additional information about this is available on the website.
- It is common to work primarily with Lite-Flite balls and no gloves for the first couple of practices, so girls learn to catch properly without fear of injury. It's also recommended to work with Lite-Flites at the tees.

Stations

- Teach smaller groups by using multiple stations – 10 or 15 minutes, then rotate. Teach parent helpers to run the drills.
- It's ok to have whole group training but only if everyone is actively involved. Examples: throwing progressions, or a throwing relay.

- Girls should be touching the ball all the time during practice. If they have not touched the ball or done another skill within one-two minutes, you need to redesign your activity.
- Workarounds to avoid girls standing around:
 - Instead of scrimmages, you can do infield fielding practice to two or three girls with one or two runners. Switch positions regularly.
 - Treat batting practice as a station, using tee's and soft toss. Have the rest of the team working at other stations.

Practice equipment

- Your equipment bag is labeled with your team number. It also contains a list of items contained inside. You are responsible for returning the list with the equipment at the end of the season. Don't lose the list!
- For practices, you will need:
 - Batting tees (2 is better than 1, so bring your own if you can)
 - Balls: Lite-flites, Softies, 11" softballs (Grade 1/2 game balls are 11" Worth Tufflites)
 - Batting helmets, 3 infielders' face masks, catchers' mask only for Grade 1/2.
 - Bats: league supplies multiple aluminum bats plus a few whiffle bats. Make sure girls are using the proper size if they bring their own.
 - Practice bases, bring game base for 1st base.
 - Bring first aid kit, plus bring cold ice pack or bag of frozen veggies
 - Other items that are helpful: orange cones, hula hoops and water balloons as targets, tennis balls, more whiffle balls, playground balls, additional batting tees, Sharpie pens to help girls mark equipment and clothing. Sunblock. Extra water or drinks on very hot days, especially at games.

Girls' equipment

- Game uniforms (shirts, pants, visors, socks) are supplied by the league. You will be notified when available and will distribute to your own team. Full uniforms should be worn to all games.
- Gloves – players supply their own. If purchased with league registration, they can pick up at the April Players' Clinics.
- Tie shoes – a must! Cleats are better than sneakers, though not mandatory. Can use soccer cleats if don't have baseball or softball cleats.
- Some girls supply their own bats and batting helmets and possibly face masks. This is fine, but check for appropriate size/fit. Helmets should have a nice snug fit.
- Water bottles. Encourage reusable containers. (Coach is responsible for team trash.)

Managing Games

Schedule

- Grade 1/2 Games are held on Sundays at 1:00 pm and Tuesdays at 5:45 pm.
- Makeup games are held the following Saturday @ 1:00 pm. Make-up fields are assigned by the commissioner.

Grade 1/2 rules overview

- Rules are designed to support the values of Newton Girls Softball. At each grade level the rules become a bit more challenging and closer to regulation ASA FastPitch softball rules.
- Our rules are designed to embody the values of our league. Please respect them.
- Grade 1/2 plays as many innings as they can in the time allotted by the rules. This is usually 3 or 4 innings, but can be more if the game moves along quickly.
- No score is officially kept. There are no umpires. Coaches work together to make the fielding calls.
- Outs are recognized, but there is no limit on outs per inning.
- A continuous batting order is used – every girl on the team hits every inning.
- Coaches pitch to their own team at bat. They also catch for their own team batters. Girls remain at bat until they hit a fair ball. There are no strikeouts and no walks.
- Six or seven girls may play the infield each inning, contingent on roster size, with three in the outfield. Optionally, the coach may take the outfielders outside hitting range for practice work to keep them busy.
- No bunts or steals. Leading after the ball leaves the pitcher's hand is allowed.
- Please study the rules. Ask the commissioner to clarify any questions you have.

Batting

- Create a batting order for the game and post it on the player's fence before game. (Plastic sleeves and paper clips work well.)
- Review the batting order with the bench/safety coach before the game. The bench/safety coach manages girls on the bench and going up to bat.
- It's common to follow one batting order for the season. However, coaches should change the lead-off and last hitter by inning or by game.
- It's common to reverse the batting order by inning (1 & 3 top down, 2 & 4 bottom up)
- With a very small number of players at a game, if agreed to by both coaches, it is acceptable to run through the batting order twice per inning.
- You may need to make adjustments to the batting order during the season with slow or powerful hitters to improve the pace of the game.
- In the uncommon situation where a girl cannot make contact with a ball after 7 or 8 pitches, it is acceptable to have the girl hit off a tee, to keep the game moving, and to avoid potential embarrassment. Grade 1/2 is not a T-ball league however, and tee's are not expected to be needed after the first couple of games.
- Coaches should throw waist-high pitches, with reasonably velocity. Young players have a difficult time hitting slow, loopy pitches and high pitches. Girls should swing at every pitch they can reach, since they cannot strike out.
- Make sure to teach girls to not throw bats. They will receive warnings/outs in games.
- There is no "on deck" batter in Grade 1/2. Only the batter with a helmet on and in the batter's box may swing a bat.

Fielding

- Create a fielding roster before each game based on number of players expected. If you display an outline of the field, it can help the girls visualize where the positions are. Make

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sure parents notify you in advance (at least 24 hours ideally) about absences so you do not have to make last minute roster changes at the field.

- The coach may choose to post the fielding roster or keep it private; in Grade 1/2 it is common practice to post the roster so the girls can look for their fielding assignments during the previous at-bat. This is a good way to help move the game along.
- The coach should balance playing time for all players at all the fielding positions within a game and across a season, regardless of capability. All players should learn to play every position. However, use good judgement and your awareness of individual abilities when assigning girls to positions with safety as your primary goal. This can be a factor especially early in the season.
- Teams should be encouraged to make as many outs in an inning as possible. Outs are not recorded, but it is a critical developmental skill to work as a team to make outs.
- Games are played regardless the number of players attending. Teams have the option to re-distribute players across two teams if necessary.
- In Grade 1/2 games, generally 6 girls play infield (1st, 2nd, SS, 3rd, Pitcher's Helper Left and Right) and 3 play outfield (RF, CF, LF). With different size rosters the coach may increase the number of infield players up to 7 or outfield players up to 4. For safety reasons, girls do not play Catcher.
- The coach may choose to only field an infield, and work with the outfielders away from game action.
- Coaches who are pitching always need to make sure that Pitcher's Helpers are a safe distance from the hitter, and warn them in advance of strong hitters, to avoid injuries.

Game equipment

- Bring equipment bags, batting helmets, umpire's mask (can be worn by coach catcher), infielders' face masks, batting tee, game bases, measuring tape, first aid kit, ice pack or preferably frozen veggies, practice balls, game ball (if home team).
- Some fields have storage lockers with game bases inside. They are locked, and the password code is distributed each year to the coaches.

Inclement weather procedure

- Stay in touch with the opposing team coach earlier in the day. Exchange emails and phone numbers. Postponing a game must be a mutual decision by both coaches. Postponed games are automatically rescheduled to the following Saturday. Your team will be assigned a field location – it probably will not be the same as the original game.
- Watch the radar on weather.com etc. The home team coach is responsible for checking the actual field conditions and communicating it to the opposing coach.
- Make decisions to cancel at minimum one hour in advance of game, sooner if at all possible. Notify the team and commissioner. Send an email and text through League Athletics to the parents immediately.

When to cancel

- Cancel for: heavy rain, lightning, or an unplayable field. Clay fields can be played on in rain unless the surface becomes too slick or muddy for safety.
- Do not cancel for: low or high temperature, light rain or puddles or shortage of players.

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- If a safety issue develops during a game in process, stop playing. Keep girls hydrated and cool in extreme heat, and dressed warmly in cold weather.

Field Maintenance

- It is important to take care of our softball fields, especially following rain on game days. Some do's and don'ts with water on the field:
 - Do scoop out standing water with a cup. Do not scoop out the dirt with the water.
 - Do not push puddles around the field. Do not dig a path to divert water.
 - Do use a small amount (up to several 16oz cups) of Speedy Dry when necessary. Give it time to work before adding more.
- After all practices and games, gently groom the mound and batter's box with a rake.
- Contact the Field Commissioner for questions or supplies.

Coaches' roles at games

- Coaches should arrive 25-30 minutes before game time. Home team sets up the field.
- Run warm-ups with the team 20 minutes before game time. Creating a pre-game ritual helps girls shift their focus from other activities and their families, to the game and their team.
- A Bench/Safety coach is needed at every game. This can be an assistant coach or other adult who has completed a CORI check prior to the game. Additional information about this is available on the website.
- Coaches pitch and catch for their team when at bat. Parents are also allowed to catch.
- 1st and 3rd base coaches are helpful and can be a team coach or a parent.
- Make time to meet briefly with the opposing coach before the game. It's an opportunity to share info about how the season is going, share specifics about "big hitters" on your team so they are prepared. And it just gets the game off on the right foot.

Spectator and coach behavior

- Our league only allows positive cheering.
- Coaches should provide guidance and education during the game, but should refrain from significant loud sidelines coaching to players. Use bench time to talk to players.
- Parents should refrain from coaching their girls from the sidelines. Coaches need to educate parents on this point. It is important for girls to know to listen to their coach's direction during games.
- If coaches have a disagreement with each other, it must be kept friendly, polite and out of earshot of any players and parents. Please set an excellent example for the players.
- Coaches must enforce the league's zero-tolerance rules.

Safety

Safety is #1. As the coach, you are responsible for your team's safety. Teach your players safety rules starting at the first practice.

Safety during play

- “Put on helmet first, then pick up a bat.” Girls need to wear batting helmets whenever they are practicing with bats, including practicing at batting tees. All girls around them should wear helmets.
- Teach girls not to walk behind someone swinging a bat – they can’t be seen. Ask and wait for batter’s permission to cross in front.
- Grade 1/2 players do NOT play catcher during games. All parents and coaches playing catcher behind a hitter are strongly encouraged to wear facemasks while catching.
- All players must stand or sit behind the bench fence when a player is in the batter’s box.
- Beginning in 2013, for safety during games, there is no practice of “on-deck” hitters. Girls will stay seated on the bench until called for their at-bat by the Bench Coach.
- Girls should always make eye contact before throwing a ball to another player.
- During the game, coaches in the field should make sure players are alert and are in safe positions to field balls – especially the Pitcher’s Helpers.
- Beginning in 2017, for safety during the games, the league is strongly recommending that girls playing in the position of the two Pitcher’s Helpers and 1st base wear an infielder’s facemask. Face masks are provided as team equipment although some girls may choose to supply their own.

Weather safety

- Heat – in extreme temperatures, make sure players do not get overheated. Keep players hydrated and take frequent breaks in the shade. Wear sunblock.
- Cold - make sure girls are dressed appropriately for the weather – wear rain jackets, fleece jackets.
- Lightning – be vigilant and make decisions quickly. Take cover in cars, not under trees. Games must be suspended for 15 minutes at the first sight of lightning.
- Always bring ice packs and first aid kit to practices and games.
- Identify parent doctors and nurses who can help in an emergency.

Other safety issues

- Keep siblings, friends and families away from the team bench. Make sure they sit safely away from warm-up areas and the bases.
- Dogs should not be at practices or games. If they are, they must be leashed and away from the girls.
- Never leave girls unattended during practices or games.
- Do not leave the field if a child has not been picked up. Do not take a girl from the field or drive her home without written parental permission. Do not drive players alone in a car.
- No jewelry may be worn during practices or games, including watches, rings, necklaces, or earrings (except small studs, which are allowed).

Season Wrap-Up

Celebrate your season!

- Hold a party at a player's house, playing field or ice cream parlor. Hand out certificates and league gift, and publicly acknowledge each of the girls individually for their progress and for their contributions to the team.

Provide feedback to league

- Provide player evaluations directly to the League President. Include information about players regularly absent. Provide any additional feedback you have about the season to the league.
- Encourage parents to complete the anonymous, online coach survey sent to them from the league. We are happy to share their feedback with you.

Return equipment

- Fill out original checklist of equipment being returned. Note any damaged, missing or extra equipment. Clean off equipment and bags, and drop off at designated location.

Other Sources of Information

Training/Clinics

Newton Girls Softball Library – we have books and videos to lend on skills and drills. Newton Girls Softball [Coaches' Corner](#) page lists recommended books, videos and websites as well as links to Player Clinic Drills and Softball Skills Handouts. Scroll to the very bottom of the webpage.

ASA – ACE Coaching Certification and training videos (www.asasoftball.com)

West Suburban YMCA Clinics (www.westsuburbanymca.org)

Planet FastPitch (www.planetfastpitch.com)

Extra Innings (www.extrainnings-watertown.com)

Recommended stores/online sites to buy equipment:

Extra Innings, Modell's, Dick's Sporting Goods, www.softballsales.com, Amazon

Thank you!