



Grade 5-7 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 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, but we often field teams in spring and fall. We field teams in 8U, 10U, 12U, 14U, and combined 16-18U, based upon player and coach interest.

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 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.
- Do not question the umpire about her/his decisions directly or indirectly. If you must, quietly discuss your thoughts with your daughter's coach after the game.
- Please keep in mind that softball is sport and good performance on the field translates into winning. Winning takes on a life of its own and energizes a team and its players. We allow winning to happen, but recognize that development comes from losing as well. If winning becomes the sole purpose of your child's team, something is wrong. Let us know!
- Softball is a team sport and part of being a good teammate is attendance. Therefore, we expect players to attend at least 75% of the games and practices. If your daughter is considering another activity that also requires your attendance on one of your 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 team parents and fans.
- 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. This includes attendance, being a good teammate, effort and attitude.

- 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 Grade 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 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. Much of this can be handled automatically from the website.
- 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 if they are all sent out promptly.
 - Let them know the names of everyone on the team. The roster is also posted on the league website the same night you receive it. Parents will have to log in to view the roster and it is not visible to the public.
 - 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 play 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 Grade Level 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: miriam@NewtonGirlsSoftball.org.

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.
- Grades 5-7 teams practice for about 90 minutes per week. Many teams choose to hold a full team regular practice, plus a second pitching and catching practice for 30 minutes or so, on the same or another day. For the full team practice, make every effort to try and find a time that works for all or for most players. Get input from everyone on the team, and determine available fields before you lock in a schedule. This takes some effort but will be well worth it to have a full team present.
- You will be assigned a team field practice location, based on your field requests to the Commissioner. 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.
- Early season: Practices can begin when fields are playable and when the League President informs coaches that permits are in hand, usually second or third week in April. Try to schedule two to 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 the 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 the 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.

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 within one minute during a drill, you need to redesign your activity.
- Workarounds to avoid girls standing around:
 - Instead of scrimmages, you can do infield fielding practice to only 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 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, 12" softballs (Grade 5/7 uses ASA certified 12" 375/.44 game balls)
 - Batting helmets, all with face guards (all players must use an ASA approved batting helmet with face guard), infielders' face masks, catchers' equipment (full gear)
 - Bats: league supplies 4 aluminum bats plus two 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 throwing targets, tennis balls, additional batting tees, Sharpie pens to help girls mark equipment and clothing, sunblock, extra water or drinks to re-fill water bottles on very hot days, especially at games.

Girls' equipment

- Game uniforms (shirts, pants, 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. If a player wants to buy a visor, they are available on our [website](#).
- Gloves – players supply their own.
- Softball cleats are recommended for this age group, though not mandatory.
- Some girls supply their own bats, batting helmets, and/or 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 5/7 games are played on Sundays at 5:00 pm and Wednesdays at 5:45 pm. One game will be played Friday night at 7:00 pm at Albemarle Field "under the lights."
- Makeup games are held the following Saturday at 3:00 pm. Make up fields are assigned by the Commissioner.

Grade 5/7 rules overview

- Coaches are expected to study and understand all the rules. They are posted on the League website. Ask the Commissioner if you have any questions.
- Our rules are designed to embody the values of our league. Please respect them. At each grade level the rules become a bit more challenging and closer to regulation ASA FastPitch softball rules.
- At this level, the girls are learning more advanced softball skills as well as game strategy. The focus of games is on putting knowledge of softball skills learned in practice into action in play. Games are competitive, but the focus is still on developing mastery of softball skills and working as a team, rather than a focus on achieving a winning score. It is nice to win, but winning is not the most important goal.

Fielding

- Create a fielding roster before each game based on number of players expected. Make 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.
- Girls who are available for five innings must play a minimum of two innings in the infield, and a minimum of three innings overall.
- The coach should always balance the desire to win with the need for player skills development. Some girls will be more capable than others, and they should be encouraged to develop their skills through regular appearances in those positions. But it is not acceptable to always play the strongest girls at the most desirable or critical fielding locations in order to win games.
- Identify each girl's skills through the season (catching grounders, catching fly balls, making plays, reaction time, nimbleness, etc.) and place her in positions to develop current plus new skills. When fielding less-skilled players in new or more difficult positions, surround the player with girls with stronger skills to even out your defense.
- The coach may choose to post the fielding roster or keep it private. If you post it, use it as a tool to speed up the game, and have players look for their fielding assignments during the previous at-bat. Sometimes you want to move players around due to pitching changes or other factors. For this reason, many coaches only release the game roster one inning at a time. Make sure doing this does not slow down the game.

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, on-deck and going up to bat.
- The batting order can be the same or be adjusted from game to game by the coach. Consider player development, the pace of the game and team morale when designing the roster. It often works well to create mixed groups of weaker and stronger hitters throughout the batting roster, as opposed to best hitters just at the top of the lineup.
- Girls should learn to identify strikes and balls, and learn to swing at the strikes. They will see a variety of speeds and ball placement in this division.

- Girls at-bat should be prepared to turn away or jump out of the batter's box to avoid being hit by a pitch. If they are hit by a pitch, they may take a base or continue their at-bat. It is common to choose to continue their at-bat, but it is their choice what to do. Make sure to teach girls to not throw bats. They will receive warnings/outs in games.

Pitching and Catching

- Pitchers must demonstrate their capability to pitch safely and effectively in practices before entering a game (>50% strikes, and handle pitching to live batters.)
- Pitchers do not need to be able to do full windmill pitches to be effective at this age. Girls who have not taken several weeks of pitching clinics should be encouraged to pitch "bowling" style. Pitchers who are taking clinics should be encouraged to pitch windmill style.
- Pitchers may only pitch a maximum of three innings per game. Pitchers may be re-inserted in the game at any time. Coaches may choose to use designated relief pitchers.
- Full details about allowances for hit batters, walks allowed per inning, etc. are detailed in the Rules. Please study them.
- Catchers should demonstrate their capability to catch effectively and safely before playing in a game. A good catcher will keep a game moving along well so they are an important fielding choice. Catchers should be taught how to squat behind the plate in a safe position away from the batters' swings, and how to provide a good target for the pitcher. The catcher needs to be prepared to jump up and retrieve any balls they miss or drop, catch foul tips for outs, throw to third on steals, and to throw the ball quickly back to the pitcher.

Game equipment

- Bring equipment bags, batting helmets, catcher's equipment, umpire's mask, infielders' face masks, game bases, measuring tape, first aid kit, ice pack, practice balls, game ball (if home team).
- Some larger 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 by the Commissioner.
- 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/text through our League Athletics website to the parents immediately.

When to cancel

- Cancel for: heavy rain, lightning, unplayable fields. Clay fields can be played in rain.
- 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 30-45 minutes before game time. Home team sets up the field. Run warm-ups with the team 20-30 minutes before game time. This creates a game ritual and helps girls shift their focus from other activities that day and their families, to the game and to their team.
- Meet with the opposing coach 10 minutes before game time to exchange batting rosters. Use this time to share info about how the season is going, what your game pitchers are like, or how aggressive you plan to be on base running. A friendly start gets the game off on the right foot.
- 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.
- Both teams should designate their own scorekeeper for the game. Keep track of outs and runs for both teams. Compare scores with the opposing team during inning change-ups. Do not worry about tracking strikes or balls for every at bat. Report your game score to the Commissioner immediately following every game.
- 1st and 3rd base coaches are needed and can be a team coach or a parent. The base coaches have the unique opportunity to teach players valuable base running skills, such as how to take strong aggressive leads and implications of running on fly balls.

Team, 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. Only parents acting as coaches should speak to the girls on base. Coaches need to educate parents on this point. It is important for girls to know to listen to their coach's direction during games.
- Players must only cheer positively. Do not allow any negative cheers, and avoid cheers that mention the other team.
- 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 are responsible for enforcing 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.
- Catchers must wear full protective gear when playing the position. Make sure it is adjusted properly to protect the player.
- Beginning in 2017, for safety during the games, the league is strongly recommending that girls playing in the position of pitcher, 1st, and 3rd base wear an infielder's face mask. Face masks are provided as team equipment although some girls may choose to supply their own.
- All players must stand or sit behind the bench fence when a player is in the batter's box.
- Only one on-deck batter at a time may take practice swings in the on-deck circle. Establish a safety perimeter that is clearly marked. The bench coach should manage who is on-deck and swinging to keep it safe.
- Girls should always make eye contact before throwing a ball to another player.
- During the game, coaches should make sure players are alert and are in safe positions to field balls.

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.
- 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 girls home without written parental permission. Do not drive girls home alone – have another girl in the car too.
- 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!

- During the season, earlier is better, take a team picture. If you're able to, create a certificate for each girl.
- Hold a party at a player's house, playing field or ice cream parlor. Hand out certificates 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 Director. Include information about players who were regularly absent. Provide any additional feedback you have about the season to the league.
- Encourage parents to complete the online coach survey sent to them from the league. This information is gathered anonymously. We are happy to share feedback with you.

Return equipment

- Fill out original checklist with equipment returns. 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 site](#) lists recommended books, videos and websites.
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!