



Coaching “Learn to Play” (U6-U8) Course 100



**Ayr Minor Softball
2016**



What is the Learn to Play Program?

- The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** is a revolutionary way of introducing the sport of Softball to children. Activities are included which foster the involvement of ALL players, including players with high and low skill levels. The child will experience excitement, enjoyment and success. Activities and lead-up games are patterned after informal playground games that promise an hour of **FUN** and **LOTS OF ACTION**. Participants will go home at the end of the day happy and tired, while improving their fitness level.
- The Learn to Play website is your source for all information regarding the Learn to Play Program. <https://www.softball.ca/english/programs/learn-to-play.html>
- This website contains resources for those already involved in the Learn to Play Program and for those who are seeking more information on the Program and its benefits.
- Participating softball associations and programs share information and best practices to help improve the experience for all.





Long Term Player Development (LTPD)

Softball Canada's programs are developed in accordance with their LTPD based on Canadian Sport for Life (CS4L) Long Term Athlete Development model. It is founded on the latest sport science research and best practices nationwide. This program is used as a model in many other countries.

- Stage 1: Active Start (0-6 years)
- Stage 2: FUNdamentals (F 6-8, M 6-9 years)

Note that the age groups start to differ between boys and girls. This is due to different physical and emotional development rates.

Always consider the development age of the child ahead of the chronological age. Ex. A mature 6 year old may be better suited to being with 7 and 8 year olds or vice versa.





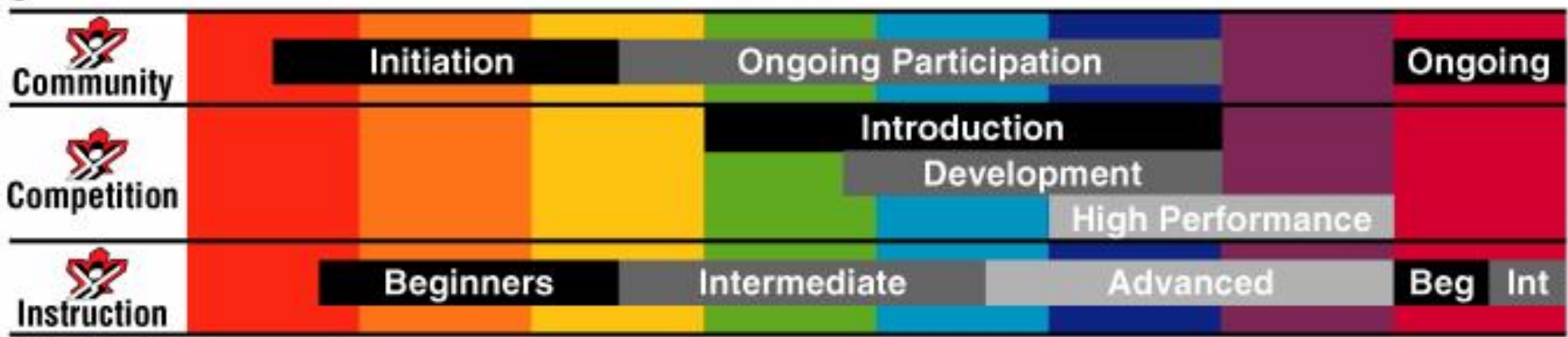
What does LTPD Mean for Softball



- During the first few years of softball an emphasis will be on the development of physical literacy. This includes all of the necessary movement skills as well as basic softball skills (catching, throwing, hitting, running).
- They will learn to control their own bodies in a more general way suitable to most sports.
- Some activities may seem unrelated to softball but are supporting the underlying skills development necessary to participate in the sport.
- Please ensure parents understand this and do not be convinced to deviate from the program objectives.



LTPD Progression





LTP Program Notes

- Your manual includes plenty of information about the program including tips for coaches, behaviour models, safety tips and more.
- Lesson plans are provided – please use them
- Feel free to modify activities to suit the level of participants but wholesale changes cannot happen
- Promote LTP philosophy to parents. Be enthusiastic and avoid the phrase “we just practice”. Your attitude and language about the program will have a major impact on the buy-in and involvement of parents
- If you have concerns about the program or activities please discuss with the convener. Your feedback is welcome and valuable to continuous improvement.





Why Do You Want Your Kids to Play Sports?

What are the main reasons we want our kids to play?

- To have FUN
- To improve skills
- To stay in shape
- To learn teamwork
- To make friends

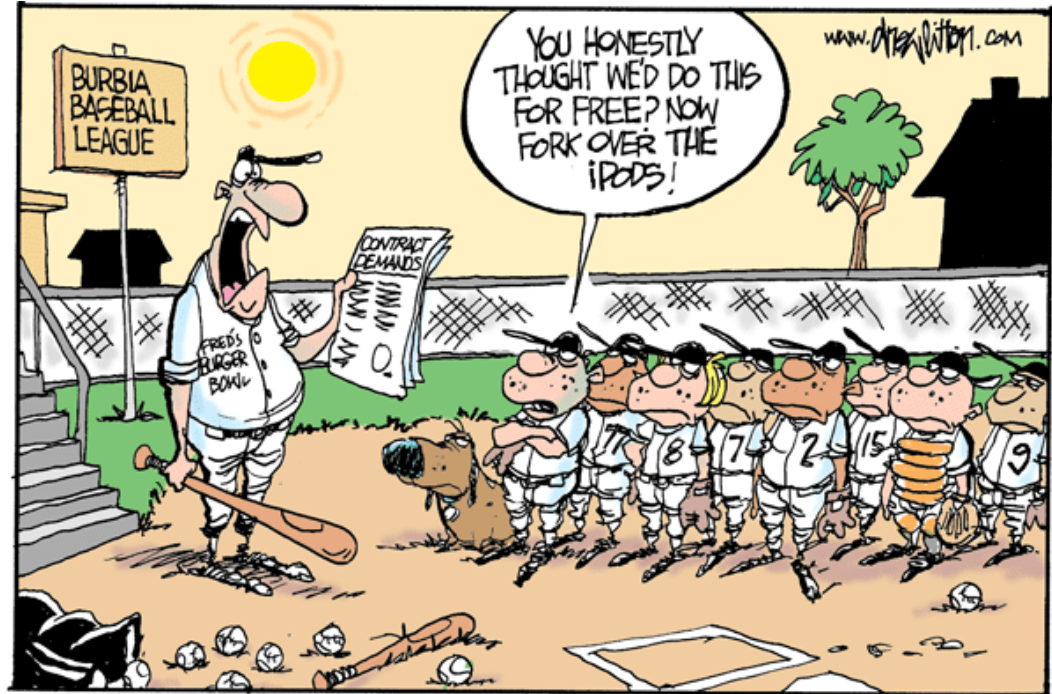




Why do Kids Play Sports?

Research shows that out of a possible 10 reasons for youth participation in sport the top four are:

- To have FUN
- To improve skills
- To stay in shape
- To do something I'm good at



“Challenge of competition” ranked 8th and “To win” ranked 10th. These results underline the idea that these things should NOT be the primary focus for young children.



Child Development

It is important for coaches to be aware of the developmental characteristics of children of different ages. Practices should be modified to suit those characteristics.

Program goals in LTP should include learning basic softball skills and developing a positive feeling toward the game.

Physical skills are the building blocks for all sports and can last the child a lifetime.





Characteristics of Children (3-5 years old)

Skill and maturity ranges could be extreme.

You might get this....



Or this....





Characteristics of Children (3-5 years old)

- Highly dependent on parents – so get them involved!
- Imitate – so show them the skills
- Need routine – stick to program structure
- Highly individualistic – connect to each kid
- Genders mix easily – don't segregate
- Short attention spans – keep things moving
- Nervous system develops quickly – repetitions!
- Coordination developing – don't be a stickler for perfect form
- Performance linked to touch – guide them through movements
- Walking/running are mastered skills by now – use them!





Growth and Development (3-5 years old)

Preferences

- Like activities that stimulate different senses – use sound, visuals, etc.
- Like simple games with easy rules
- Prefer individual activities

Avoid

- Highly structured or closely supervised activity
- Repetitive activities
- Exposure to extreme temperatures (get in the shade)
- Comparisons with other children (Johnny can do it...)
- Emphasizing result over effort

Suggestions

- Activities take the form of games
- Teaching and instruction are specific, simple and have a clear objective
- Create small groups for games with focus on movement
- Get parents involved with activities
- Children need praise regularly for their efforts





Characteristics of Children (6-7 years old)

- Highly dependent on parents – so get them involved!
- Acknowledge coach as the leader – be a good one
- Need routine – stick to program structure
- Have little athletic or competitive background – remember this
- Fairly individualistic , sometimes shy – connect to each kid
- Genders mix easily – don't segregate unless necessary
- Learns best by observing then quickly doing – short demos
- May become fearful of the unknown – be reassuring
- Is curious and wants to know everything – establish guidelines for questions and experimentation
- Highly imaginative – you may learn something!
- Muscular and bone structures still not developed – no heavy lifting!
- Sweating mechanism not well developed – keep cool and watered





Growth and Development (6-7 years old)

Preferences

- Like individual activities with some group interaction – tag or relays are good examples
- Enjoy activities using imagination or imitating an adult – be a model

Avoid

- Activities requiring repeated impact or risk of collision
- Repetitive activities
- Exposure to extreme temperatures (get in the shade)
- Specialization in a position (catcher vs outfielder)
- Comparisons with other children (Johnny can do it...)
- Emphasizing result over effort
- Lengthy explanations
- Negative criticism

Suggestions

- Activities take the form of games
- Rules adapted to encourage interaction and participation
- Teaching and instruction are specific, simple and have one clear objective
- Create small groups for games with focus on movement
- Children need praise regularly for their **efforts**. Feedback limited to one point only.
- Incorporate water breaks or have water always available





Break Time





Establishing Positive Behaviour

As a coach YOU need to establish a list of positive behaviours for the players and parents

- Doing this will make for a much more efficient and fun season
- Clearly communicate your expectations and stick to them. Follow through on consequences if needed.

Examples:

- After explanations wait for “GO” signal. Maybe replace “GO” with “Play Ball!” or something else from time to time to encourage active listening
- Use “Freeze” to stop an activity
- Establish jobs for players in set-up and tear-down
- Cheering on teammates during drills and games should be encouraged. It is also part of the game of softball.
- Insist equipment is not thrown when putting away
- Instill safety awareness (look before swinging)





Organizational Signals



- Using hand signals can make practices run more efficiently. When used consistently players will quickly learn and follow.
- Explain these to players at the start of season and continue to use them throughout.
 - Form a line – spread arms to show you want players to line up side by side in front of you
 - Listening Circle – draw circle in air with finger to indicate players should circle around
 - Groups – use number of fingers to indicate how many players you want in each group
 - Files – arms straight in front to indicate you want single file lines in front of you.



Group Selection



When it is time to select groups avoid assigning captains to pick teams. This can cause hurt feelings and animosity among kids which is not helpful to meet our objectives.

Alternate methods include:

- Number players at the beginning of season so you can assign by number
- Have players pair up then put pairs together in groups
- From pairs put one partners on opposite lines then those lines become teams
- Line up shortest to tallest and group every second player
- Have players cross arms on chest, right arm on top is one group and left arm on top is other
- Pick checkers blindly out of hat, reds together and blacks together

Make sure the team knows it is NOT acceptable to say no to a teammate who wants to be their partner. Part of the experience of softball is meeting new people and learning to work together.



Safety Tips



Before the season

- Obtain medical information from parents for all players (some will be provided by AMSA but it is a good idea to follow up with parents)
- Ensure someone in the group is CPR certified and present. This could be a parent, coach or organizer
- Ensure you have emergency contact information for all participants

Before each session

- Have your emergency action plan ready for the facility (provided by AMSA)
- Check field to ensure it is safe and clear of hazards
- Ensure players have proper safety equipment (helmets)
- Encourage the use of softball/baseball shoes for traction. Sandals, flip flops or crocs are not appropriate footwear. At a minimum players and coaches should be wearing running shoes. Be a good example in this regard.
- Inspect all team equipment regularly (bats, tees, balls) to ensure safety.



Safety Tips



Warm-up

- Use a proper warm up and cool down with the team. Part of the training is teaching players the importance of warming up, stretching and strengthening their bodies. It is helpful if coaches participate in warmup activities

Playing

- Make sure players are using proper throwing and batting techniques to reduce the likelihood of injury
- Ensure player look around before swinging and never walk up behind someone holding a bat without letting them know

Additional Tips

- Player experiencing persistent pain or loss of motion should be removed from the activity. Parents should be notified of the issue
- Keep players hydrated before, during and after activity. Make a water bottle part of the expected equipment for each player.
- When out during the day ensure players are wearing sunscreen. This should be provided and applied by parents/guardians. SPF 30 sunscreen or higher recommended.



Safety Tips

Don't Swing It

...Until You're Up to the Plate!



(Photos from North Scott, Iowa, Little League)



Don't let this happen to you, or to a teammate.

REMEMBER!

Don't pick up your bat until you leave the dugout, to approach the plate.

RULE 1.06, Notes

"1. The on-deck position is not permitted in Tee Ball, Minor League or Little League (Majors) Division. 2. Only the first batter of each half-inning will be allowed outside the dugout between the half-innings in Tee Ball, Minor League or Little League (Majors) Division."



Equipment Required

- Equipment is provided by AMSA for the LTP and Trimite sections. Bags will be available either to each team or each station as required by the co-ordinator.
- If you have a better idea for equipment feel free to discuss with the co-ordinator. Anything used should be safe for all participants and spectators.





Volunteers

Parent participation is vital to the success of the LTP program and also the ongoing success of AMSA. Their involvement will help the children develop and build a sense of community among all participants.

Encourage parents to get involved! This means not only at the park but at home by playing catch or encouraging players to be active and use the skills they are learning.

can do to help out!

AMSA will provide a parent volunteer form to help get the process started.

There are many tasks that almost any parent





Break Time





Now it's time to get DIRTY!

Let's talk about how the sessions will work and the best ways for you as a coach to manage the situation and ensure a positive experience for all.

Keys to coaching success:

- ✓ Be positive
- ✓ Be enthusiastic
- ✓ Have FUN!





Level 1 (U6)

- Weekly plans will be set up by the LTP Co-ordinator for you to use. Feel free to make adjustments based on the level of the players but it is important that you keep the focus on the skills for each drill.
- Sessions will be set up with multiple groups each performing drills.



Level 1 (U6) Coach Responsibilities

Your responsibilities include:

- ✓ Review upcoming lesson plan prior to the session
- ✓ Be comfortable with how to set up and run each activity (visualize)
- ✓ Review the skills to be taught
- ✓ Consult Softball Skills section of the manual to review how to teach each skill
- ✓ Practice skills yourself at home if needed
- ✓ Ensure necessary equipment is listed on plan
- ✓ Arrive early to ensure field is safe and discuss help required with volunteers



Level 1 (U6) Season

- The season is approximately 12 weeks long
- Each session will be 1 hour in length maximum
- There will be no more than 12 players per team, normally targeted at 8-10 depending on registration and facility usage
- You should have a minimum of 4 volunteer helpers per session, ideally 1 helper per 2 players
- Your team will be assigned a location within the park for the session. You will have the opportunity to use both the outfields and infields throughout the season



Level 1 (U6) Lesson Plans

- Each lesson plan will focus on a few basic skills
- Each lesson ends with a lead-up game which simulates aspects of the game of softball
- The coach has flexibility in adjusting the lesson plans to ensure the most FUN and ACTIVITY for players
- The gradual lead-up to a full game will help ensure that all players are ready to fully participate when it is time to PLAY BALL! It is a process, don't try to rush it.



Level 2 (U8)

- Weekly practice plans will be set up by the Trimite Co-ordinator for you to use. Feel free to make adjustments based on the level of the players but it is important that you keep the focus on the skills for each drill.
- You will have an assigned area of the park for practices.



Level 2 (U8) Coach Responsibilities

Your responsibilities include:

- ✓ Review upcoming lesson plan prior to the session
- ✓ Be comfortable with how to set up and run each activity (visualize)
- ✓ Review the skills to be taught
- ✓ Consult Softball Skills section of the manual to review how to teach each skill
- ✓ Practice skills yourself at home if needed
- ✓ Ensure necessary equipment is listed on plan
- ✓ Arrive early to ensure field is safe and discuss help required with volunteers



Level 2 (U8) Season

- The season is approximately 12 weeks long
- Each session will be 90 minutes in length maximum
- There will be no more than 12 players per team, normally targeted at 8-10 depending on registration and facility usage
- You should have a minimum of 4 volunteer helpers per session, ideally 1 helper per 2 players



Level 2 (U8) Lesson Plans

- Each lesson plan will focus on a few basic skills
- Each lesson ends with a lead-up game which simulates aspects of the game of softball
- The coach has flexibility in adjusting the lesson plans to ensure the most FUN and ACTIVITY for players
- The gradual lead-up to a full game will help ensure that all players are ready to fully participate when it is time to PLAY BALL! It is a process, don't try to rush it.



Level 2 (U8) Scrimmage

- Each session will conclude with a 45 minute scrimmage game of coach pitch



Level 1 (U6) Sample Practice

Let's run through a sample practice session for U6 and see how it will progress.



Level 2 (U8) Sample Practice

Let's run through a sample practice session for U8 and see how it will progress.



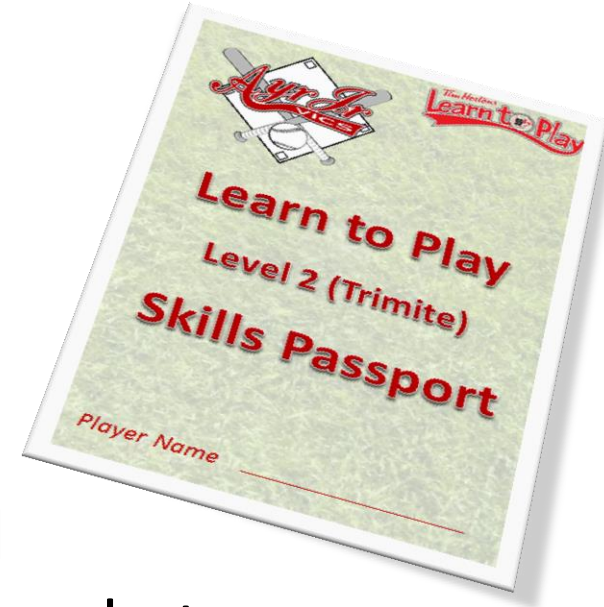
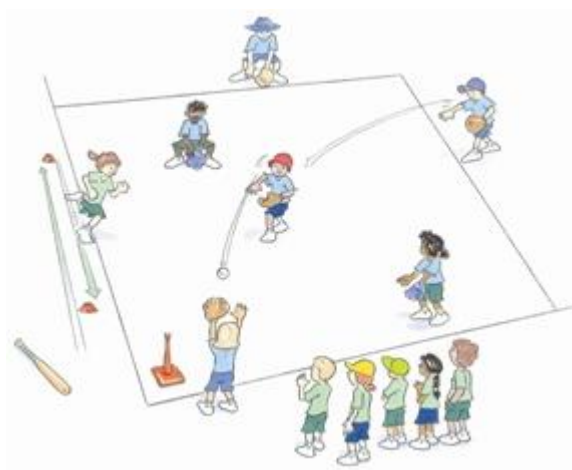
Level 3 (U10)

AMSA currently separates U10 from the LTP program and integrates these players into the 'Learning to Train' segment of the softball development streams. This may change in the future due to further refinement of the LTP program.





Basic Skills



- Your manual contains a checklist of skill development. Use this as a guide to see what your players should be achieving during the season.
- AMSA is looking to introduce a new program this year called a Skills Passport. Each player will be provided a booklet and the coach (or a volunteer helper) will stamp the passport when players achieve certain skills. We ask that you give this program a try and let us know how it is going.



Teaching Skills

Drills throughout the season will cover these basic softball skills.

1. Receiving
2. Throwing
3. Fielding
4. Hitting
5. Baserunning
6. Sliding (not taught in Level 1 – U6)
7. Relays
8. Pitching





End of Season

At the end of the season AMSA is planning to set up a “Fun Day” where the players will have the opportunity to do fun activities that showcase their new talents. Your help in running this event will be very important.





Understanding Intellectual Disabilities

- Your LTP manual has a section Appendix B which covers some of the more common learning disabilities and offers ideas on how to work with those players including: Down Syndrome, Autism, Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Developmental Delays
- Even if you do not have players with these conditions it is recommended that you read through this section as you might pick up some helpful coaching tips/techniques.
- AMSA will provide a list of any players who may require special attention based on information provided at registration.





LTP Pitching Activities

- Pitching is the most critical skill in the game of softball so it is important that all players be given the opportunity to learn the skill. The number of dedicated pitchers at higher ages is often the determining factor on whether a program survives.
- Pitching is only done as an introduction in LTP Levels 1 and 2. Activities should always encourage a progression from the release point and moving backwards up the chain once skills are attained.
- Appendix C of the manual covers pitching activities





Conclusion

Once again ***THANK YOU!*** for volunteering to help make a difference in the lives of our young players. The influence of a coach can be a very positive influence for young children and encourage further participation by the rest of the community.

Remember, if it's not ***FUN*** then it is time to make changes. Don't be afraid to seek help from other coaches, parents or the association.