


# YMCA OF NORTHWEST NORTH CAROLINA

## Youth Sports Character Building Playbook

# OUR PURPOSE

At the YMCA of Northwest North Carolina, we believe youth sports are about more than learning the fundamentals of a game. Sports provide an opportunity for young people to develop character, build relationships, grow in confidence, and learn values that will serve them throughout their lives.

Through our Words of the Week, we challenge athletes to put the YMCA's Core Values into action both on and off the field or court.

Our goal is to develop good athletes and, more importantly, good people.

# OUR CORE VALUES

**Everything we do at the YMCA is guided by our five Core Values:**



**CARING**: Showing kindness, compassion, and concern for others.



**HONESTY**: Being truthful, trustworthy, and doing what is right.



**RESPECT**: Treating others with dignity and valuing differences.



**RESPONSIBILITY**: Being accountable for our actions and commitments.



**FAITH**: Developing a belief in something greater than ourselves and allowing that belief to guide our actions.

**These values are for everyone and help create a welcoming environment for all families and athletes.**

# COACH EXPECTATIONS: CHARACTER MOMENTS

**Coaches are encouraged to spend approximately five minutes each week leading a brief "Character Moment" with their team.** Every game should begin with a short pregame discussion centered on the Word of the Week.

**Each Week Includes:**

- an opening statement
- a simple definition
- a short discussion or story
- examples related to sports and everyday life
- a team challenge

We also encourage coaches to reinforce the weekly word throughout practices and games by recognizing athletes who demonstrate these values.

The goal is consistency, not perfection. These conversations help reinforce positive behavior, teamwork, and leadership throughout the season.

# SEASON STRUCTURE: 8 WEEKS

| Week | Word of the Week | Theme |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Respect | Treating Others the Right Way |
| 2 | Sportsmanship | Honoring the Game |
| 3 | Positive Attitude | Bringing Positive Energy |
| 4 | Caring | Looking Out For Others |
| 5 | Responsibility | Owning Your Actions |
| 6 | Honesty | Doing the Right Thing |
| 7 | Faith | Believing, Trusting, and Persevering |
| 8 | Teamwork | Stronger Together |

# WEEK 0:
# CHARACTER STARTS HERE

## Theme: More Than Just a Game

**OPENING STATEMENT**

"Welcome to the YMCA! Before we get started with our season, we want to talk about something that is just as important as learning how to play the game: the kind of teammate and person we want to become. At the YMCA, we believe sports are about more than winning, scoring points, or learning new skills. They are an opportunity to build friendships, grow in confidence, learn important values, and encourage one another. Throughout this season, we'll focus on eight Words of the Week that will help us become better athletes, better teammates, and better people. These values aren't just for the field or court. They're lessons we can carry with us everywhere we go."

**DEFINITION**

Character is the way we think, act, and treat others, especially when things don't go our way. It is demonstrated through the choices we make, the effort we give, and the way we treat the people around us.

At the YMCA, we focus on eight important values that help guide our actions throughout the season:

**RESPECT:** Treating others with dignity and valuing differences.
**SPORTSMANSHIP:** Showing respect, fairness, and self-control while playing the game.
**POSITIVE ATTITUDE:** Choosing encouragement, optimism, and determination.
**CARING:** Showing kindness, compassion, and concern for others.
**RESPONSIBILITY:** Being accountable for our actions and commitments.
**HONESTY:** Being truthful, trustworthy, and doing what is right.
**FAITH:** Believing in something greater than ourselves and allowing that belief to guide our actions.
**TEAMWORK:** Working together, supporting one another, and recognizing that everyone has something important to contribute.

These eight values will be our foundation throughout the season. Each week, we'll focus on one value and find ways to put it into action both on and off the field or court.

**DISCUSSION**

- What do you think makes someone a great teammate?
- Is being a great athlete the same thing as being a great teammate? Why or why not?
- Which of these eight values do you think is most important when being part of a team?
- Can you think of a time when someone demonstrated one of these values toward you?
- How can we make sure everyone on our team feels welcomed, encouraged, and included?




## SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Showing respect by listening to coaches, teammates, and officials.
- Demonstrating sportsmanship by playing fairly and treating opponents kindly.
- Having a positive attitude when you make a mistake or face a challenge.
- Showing caring by encouraging a teammate who is struggling.
- Taking responsibility by arriving prepared and giving your best effort.
- Practicing honesty by admitting when you make a mistake.
- Demonstrating faith by believing in yourself, trusting others, and persevering through challenges.
- Showing teamwork by sharing opportunities, communicating, and celebrating everyone's contributions.

## LIFE EXAMPLES

- Showing respect to classmates, teachers, family members, and others.
- Being a good sport when playing games with friends or siblings.
- Choosing to encourage someone instead of complaining or putting them down.
- Showing kindness to someone who feels left out.
- Taking responsibility for your schoolwork and helping at home.
- Telling the truth, even when it is difficult.
- Having faith and trusting God when things don't go as planned.
- Working together with others to accomplish something that you couldn't do alone.

## TEAM CHALLENGE

**Be the kind of teammate you would want to have!**

As we begin our season, challenge yourself to demonstrate all eight values. Look for opportunities to show respect, practice good sportsmanship, bring a positive attitude, care for others, take responsibility, be honest, demonstrate faith, and work together.

Remember, you don't have to be the best player on the team to be a great teammate. Every player has an opportunity to make a positive difference. Let's make this a season where we become better together, both on and off the field or court!

## BIBLE VERSE

"Even a child makes himself known by his acts, by whether his conduct is pure and upright." — Proverbs 20:11

# WEEK 1: RESPECT

## Theme: Treating Others the Right Way

### OPENING STATEMENT

"At the YMCA, we believe how we treat others is just as important as how we play the game. This week, we're focusing on Respect. Respect means valuing ourselves and others, even when we don't always agree or see things the same way"

### DEFINITION

Respect is thinking and acting in a positive way toward yourself and others. It means treating people the way you would want to be treated.

### DISCUSSION

- What does respect look like on a team?
- How do you want your teammates, coaches, and opponents to treat you?
- Is it possible to disagree with someone and still show respect?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Listening when coaches and teammates are speaking.
- Respecting referees and accepting their decisions.
- Treating opponents with kindness before and after games.
- Encouraging teammates instead of putting them down.
- Showing respect through words, body language, and actions, even when frustrated.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Treating classmates, teachers, and family members kindly.
- Listening when someone else is talking.
- Including others, even when they are different from you.
- Respecting other people's opinions and differences.
- Being respectful online and in public.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Show respect to every teammate, coach, referee, and opponent this week.
Make a conscious effort to use positive words and actions, even when things don't go your way.

### BIBLE VERSE

"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" — Matthew 7:12

# WEEK 2: SPORTSMANSHIP

## Theme: Honoring the Game

### OPENING STATEMENT

"Last week, we talked about Respect and how important it is to treat others the right way. This week, we're building on that by focusing on Sportsmanship. Sportsmanship is how we put respect into action when we play the game. It's about how we act when we win, when we lose, and when things don' go our way"

### DEFINITION

Sportsmanship means showing respect, fairness, and self-control while playing sports. It means honoring the game, your teammates, your opponents, officials, and yourself. Remember the ROOTS of sportsmanship:
R – Rules: Play by the rules and respect the game.
O – Opponents: Treat the other team with respect.
O – Officials: Respect referees and their decisions.
T – Teammates: Encourage and support the people on your team.
S – Self: Show self-control and represent yourself well.

### DISCUSSION

- What does good sportsmanship look like when your team wins?
- What about when your team loses?
- Why is it sometimes harder to show sportsmanship when things don't go your way?
- How can you show respect to an opponent who just made a great play?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Shaking hands or giving high-fives after a game.
- Congratulating opponents on a good play.
- Accepting an official's decision without arguing.
- Helping an opponent up after a fall.
- Winning without bragging and losing without making excuses.
- Playing fairly and following the rules.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Congratulating a friend when something good happens to them.
- Being happy for others when they succeed.
- Handling disagreements without arguing or becoming disrespectful.
- Following rules at school and in your community.
- Showing grace when things don't go your way.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Put the ROOTS of sportsmanship into action this week. Find at least one opportunity this upcoming game to demonstrate respect for the rules, opponents, officials, teammates, and yourself.

### BIBLE VERSE

"Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles" — Proverbs 24:17

# WEEK 3: POSITIVE ATTITUDE

## Theme: Bringing Positive Energy

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This week, we're focusing on Positive Attitude. Every player brings something to a team beyond their skills. The attitude you bring can encourage your teammates and make everyone better. Remember, positive attitudes are contagious, but negative attitudes can spread just as quickly."

### DEFINITION

A positive attitude means choosing to approach challenges with encouragement, optimism, and determination. It means focusing on what you can control and looking for ways to build others up rather than tear them down.

### DISCUSSION

- How can your attitude affect the rest of your team?
- What should you do when you make a mistake?
- How can you encourage a teammate who is having a tough day?
- Can you have a positive attitude even when your team is losing?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Encouraging teammates after a mistake.
- Keeping a positive attitude when things aren't going your way.
- Giving your best effort, regardless of the score.
- Celebrating teammates' successes.
- Listening to coaches and being willing to learn.
- Responding to challenges with determination instead of complaining.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Looking for the good in difficult situations.
- Encouraging a friend who is struggling.
- Staying positive when schoolwork is challenging.
- Being willing to try something new.
- Choosing encouraging words instead of negative ones.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Be the positive energy your team needs this week! Encourage at least three teammates during this week's practice or game. When something goes wrong, focus on what you can do to make things better.

### BIBLE VERSE

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." — Philippians 4:13

# WEEK 4: CARING

## Theme: Looking Out for Others

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This week, we're focusing on Caring. Being part of a team means looking out for more than just yourself. A great teammate notices when someone needs encouragement, offers help when someone is struggling, and makes sure everyone feels like they belong."

### DEFINITION

Caring means showing kindness, compassion, and generosity toward others. It means thinking about the needs of others and looking for opportunities to help and encourage them.

### DISCUSSION

- What does caring look like on a team?
- How does it feel when someone encourages you?
- What can you do when you notice a teammate is being left out?
- Why is it important to care about people beyond just your closest friends?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Welcoming new teammates and helping them feel included.
- Helping a teammate up after they fall.
- Encouraging someone who is struggling to learn a new skill.
- Sharing equipment and taking turns.
- Celebrating everyone's contributions, not just the best players.
- Checking on a teammate who gets hurt or is having a difficult day.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Helping a classmate who is having trouble with an assignment.
- Standing up for someone who is being treated unfairly.
- Helping family members at home.
- Welcoming someone new at school.
- Sharing with others and looking for ways to serve your community.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Make sure no teammate feels left out this week. Find at least one way each practice or game to show kindness, encouragement, or support to someone else.

### BIBLE VERSE

"Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others." — Philippians 2:4

# WEEK 5: RESPONSIBILITY

## Theme: Owning Your Actions

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This week, we're focusing on Responsibility. Being part of a team means others are counting on you. Your teammates depend on you to be prepared, give your best effort, follow through on commitments, and take ownership of your actions."

### DEFINITION

Responsibility means being accountable for your actions, choices, and commitments. Responsible people do what they say they will do and understand that their decisions affect others.

### DISCUSSION

- What responsibilities do you have as a member of this team?
- How does one person's effort affect the entire team?
- What does it mean to take ownership when you make a mistake?
- Why is it important to follow through on your commitments?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Arriving on time and being ready to participate.
- Bringing the equipment you need.
- Listening to coaches and following directions.
- Giving your best effort throughout practice and games.
- Taking care of team equipment and helping clean up.
- Accepting your role and doing your part to help the team.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Completing schoolwork and assignments on time.
- Helping with responsibilities at home.
- Taking care of personal belongings.
- Keeping promises and commitments.
- Admitting when you have made a mistake and working to make things right.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Show your teammates they can count on you! Come prepared, follow through on your commitments, and take ownership of your actions throughout the week.

### BIBLE VERSE

"For each will have to bear his own load."— Galatians 6:5

# WEEK 6: HONESTY

## Theme: Doing the Right Thing

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This week, we're focusing on Honesty. Being a good teammate means being someone others can trust. Honesty isn't just about telling the truth when it's easy. It's about doing the right thing even when no one is watching or when telling the truth might be difficult."

### DEFINITION

Honesty means telling the truth, being trustworthy, and doing what is right even when it isn't easy. Honest people take responsibility for their choices and actions.

### DISCUSSION

- Why is honesty important on a team?
- What happens when teammates cannot trust one another?
- Is it always easy to tell the truth?
- What should you do if you make a mistake and nobody else notices?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Admitting when the ball touched you last.
- Playing by the rules instead of trying to cheat.
- Being truthful about what happened during a play.
- Owning up to mistakes instead of blaming teammates.
- Giving an honest effort during practices and games.
- Being trustworthy when coaches aren't watching.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Telling the truth to parents and teachers.
- Admitting when you have made a poor choice.
- Returning something that doesn't belong to you.
- Keeping your word and following through on promises.
- Being honest with friends, even when the truth is difficult.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Commit to being honest in every situation this week. If you make a mistake, own it. If you see something that isn't right, make the choice to do what is right.

### BIBLE VERSE

"Better is a poor person who walks in his integrity than one who is crooked in speech and is a fool." — Proverbs 19:1

# WEEK 7: FAITH

## Theme: Believing, Trusting, and Persevering

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This week, we're focusing on Faith. Faith reminds us that we don't have to have everything figured out to keep moving forward. Sometimes we have to believe, trust, and keep going even when we cannot see the outcome. Faith can help guide the choices we make and give us strength when things get difficult."

### DEFINITION

Faith means believing and trusting in something greater than ourselves. It means having confidence in what we hope for, even when we cannot see it, and allowing our beliefs to guide how we live and treat others.

### DISCUSSION

- What does having faith mean to you?
- How can faith help you when something is difficult?
- Have you ever had to keep believing in yourself when something didn't come easily?
- How can we show our faith through the way we treat others?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Believing in yourself and your teammates when facing a difficult challenge.
- Continuing to work hard even when improvement takes time.
- Trusting your coaches and teammates.
- Encouraging others when they feel discouraged.
- Persevering after a tough loss or setback.
- Showing gratitude for the opportunity to play and grow.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Trusting God when life doesn't go as planned.
- Having hope during difficult circumstances.
- Being patient when things take time.
- Staying committed to doing what is right, even when it is difficult.
- Showing kindness, grace, and gratitude to others.
- Putting your beliefs into action through the way you live.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

When something gets difficult this week, don't give up! Encourage yourself and your teammates to keep believing, trusting, and giving your best effort. Look for opportunities to put your faith into action through your words and choices.

### BIBLE VERSE

"Now faith is assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." — Hebrews 11:1

# WEEK 8: TEAMWORK

## Theme: Stronger Together

### OPENING STATEMENT

"This is our final week, and we're focusing on Teamwork. Every person on this team has something important to contribute. We may have different strengths, abilities, and roles, but we are all working toward the same goal. A great team understands that we are stronger when we work together."

### DEFINITION

Teamwork means working together, supporting one another, and using our individual strengths to accomplish something greater than we could achieve alone. It means putting the team before yourself and recognizing that every person matters.

### DISCUSSION

- What makes a team successful?
- Why is every player important, regardless of their skill level or role?
- How can you help a teammate who is struggling?
- What is one thing you have learned about being a good teammate this season?
- How can we continue to demonstrate teamwork away from the field or court?

### SPORTS EXAMPLES

- Passing the ball and sharing opportunities with teammates.
- Communicating and encouraging one another.
- Trusting teammates to do their jobs.
- Celebrating team accomplishments instead of individual achievements.
- Supporting teammates whether they are playing or cheering from the sideline.
- Working together through challenges and setbacks.

### LIFE EXAMPLES

- Working together on school projects.
- Helping family members accomplish shared responsibilities.
- Including others in activities and friendships.
- Listening to different ideas and working toward solutions.
- Serving others and contributing to your community.



### TEAM CHALLENGE

Finish the season stronger together! Find ways to encourage, support, and celebrate every teammate. Remember that being a great teammate is something you can carry with you long after the season ends.

### BIBLE VERSE

"For the body is not one member, but many." — 1 Corinthians 12:14

# OPTIONAL: END-OF-SEASON RECOGNITION

**At the conclusion of the season, coaches are encouraged to recognize athletes who consistently demonstrate the YMCA Core Values and the Words of the Week.**

Possible recognition categories include:

- **RESPECT: The Remarkable Respect Award**
- **SPORTSMANSHIP: The Stellar Sportsmanship Award**
- **POSITIVE ATTITUDE: The Power of Positivity Award**
- **CARING: The Compassionate Champion Award**
- **RESPONSIBILITY: The Reliable Responsibility Award**
- **HONESTY: The Honorable Heart Award**
- **FAITH: The Faithful Flame Award**
- **TEAMWORK: The Terrific Teamwork Award**

These awards celebrate character, effort, leadership, and the positive impact athletes have on those around them, not just their performance on the field or court.

Coaches may recognize one or more athletes in each category, depending on the size of the team and the examples of character demonstrated throughout the season.

# THANK YOU TO OUR VOLUNTEER COACHES!

**Thank you for volunteering your time, energy, and talents to support YMCA youth sports.**

Your leadership, encouragement, and commitment help create a positive and welcoming experience for every athlete and family we serve.

The impact you make reaches far beyond the field or court. Through your example and the conversations you have with your athletes, you are helping young people develop confidence, build relationships, and learn values that will guide them throughout their lives.

Thank you for helping us develop the next generation of MVPs and for making our YMCA community stronger.

**TOGETHER, WE'RE NOT JUST BUILDING BETTER ATHLETES. WE'RE PREPARING YOUNG PEOPLE FOR LIFE.**




**Our Mission:** "Helping all people reach their God-given potential in spirit, mind and body."