

CAL RIPKEN, SR. FOUNDATION
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS
STARTING A BADGES FOR
BASEBALL PROGRAM



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This guide is aimed to assist youth development organizations with running a full-scale *Badges for Baseball* program using a team sport or activity and the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*. This information will help you develop a schedule, recruit volunteers and law enforcement representatives, and create a well-rounded *Badges for Baseball* program for your youth.

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PROGRAM SCHEDULE AND IMPLEMENTATION

What does it mean to run a full-scale *Badges for Baseball* program?

The *Badges for Baseball* program is made-up of the following components:

- Character education through 12 lessons found in the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*
- Regular interaction with mentors who are law enforcement, military, or public safety officials
- Group activity such as organized sports

In order to complete the *Badges for Baseball* program, youth must receive all three-program components.

What type of facility do we need?

There is no “standard” facility needed to conduct *Badges for Baseball* – you do not need a baseball field, gym, or even a classroom. Be creative with the space you have! You can deliver the lessons wherever you have youth gathered – in the cafeteria, bleachers, anywhere that is conducive to your program. Use whatever setting is best for your youth and location setup. Some organizations thrive when youth have the lesson in a classroom-like setting then move to a different location to play games. Whereas other organizations work best teaching the lessons in the same environment where they play. Be sure to keep the lesson in mind as well as the youth when planning what space to use.

How do I build a schedule? What do program sessions look like?

Badges for Baseball is best run when organizations dedicate at least one day per week with one to two hour sessions. You can run the lesson and activity components together or run them as separate sessions. It works best for all parties involved (youth, parents, volunteers, staff, etc.) when you create a schedule and stick to it. Here are some things to consider when planning your schedule:

- What is your current capacity (staffing, space availability, volunteers, etc.) and what do you need for the lesson that week?
- Set a specific day and time to teach the *Badges for Baseball* lessons
 - Plan 30 minutes for discussion and activities
 - Decide on a location for the lesson
 - Teach one to two lessons per week
- Set a specific day and time to run the *Badges for Baseball* activity component
 - This can immediately follow the lesson, or be a separate session
 - Schedule activity as part of open gym or as structured playtime
 - Consider specifics when scheduling recreational or competitive activities

How often should we run the program? How long does it take?

The length of time it takes to complete *Badges for Baseball* depends on the schedule and structure of your organization. However, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- Mentoring relationships are more impactful when youth and mentors meet regularly, and the relationships are sustained over a longer period of time (e.g. at least a year).
- Research of character education programs shows that lessons are more effective when taught, reinforced, and taught again through weaving the principles into the fabric of the organization.

We strongly recommend you provide opportunities year-round for youth to connect with their *Badges for Baseball* mentors, participate in physical activity, and reinforce the 12 character education lessons.

How can we reinforce the lessons without sounding repetitive?

You can never teach leadership too often to youth. It can become difficult to not sound like a broken record when teaching similar lessons. The key is to vary the lessons when you do have repetitive elements. Here are some tips to vary the lessons:

- Use different sports with each lesson to show how the elements apply in a variety of situations.
- Apply the core character-education lessons to different aspects of life off the field using the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation's *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* curriculum series.
 - *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* includes curriculum covering various topics including bullying, financial literacy, resilience, fitness, and more. All curricula are available to download for free at www.ripkenfoundation.org/resource-portal.



What might a year-round program look like?

Organizations are most successful when the *Badges for Baseball* program is implemented with their youth on a consistent year-round basis. Here are a few tips for creating a yearly schedule for your organization:

- Pick a topic each month from the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*
- Begin with teaching the lessons, then continue the learning by using a *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* curriculum topic.

We suggest the pairings below of *Badges for Baseball* lessons and *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* curriculum. These are not hard and fast pairings, so feel free to use the curricula as you see fit.

BADGES FOR BASEBALL LESSON	HEALTHY CHOICES, HEALTHY CHILDREN EDITION
Sportsmanship	Adaptive Sports
Leadership	Civics & Leadership
Respect	Rise Above Bullying
Resilience	Resilience
Personal Responsibility	Financial Literacy
Developing Good Life Habits	Fitness
Choosing to be Healthy	Nutrition

In addition to the curriculum listed above, we offer the *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children Quickball Edition*. This introduces the game of Quickball as well as activities to enhance gameplay and keep youth engaged. Quickball is a great game to incorporate into the activity component of any lesson.

How many youth can we serve at a time?

This depends on your organization and the availability of staff, volunteers, supplies, youth, space, etc. A ratio of 2-3 adults per 25 to 30 youth is recommended. This creates an environment that is conducive to developing meaningful relationships between mentors and youth.

How do I engage 100 or more youth?

Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation funded recipients must serve at least 100 youth. The organizations we work with reach varying ranges of youth; some partners serve thousands of youth annually, whereas others are smaller, neighborhood-based organizations. No matter the size of your organization, we encourage you to use *Badges for Baseball* as an opportunity to recruit new youth. Work with your local school system to identify youth who might benefit from participating in a sports-based character education program.

You do not have to meet this 100-youth threshold within the same program iteration – you can run the program multiple times in a given funding period totaling 100 youth at the end. Your organizations capacity (staffing, volunteers, etc.) will ultimately determine what a *Badges for Baseball* program looks like, but here are some suggestions to consider when planning:

- Divide youth by age (10-11 year old, 12-13 year olds, 14 and up)
- Offer multiple sessions – afterschool in the spring, during camps in the summer, etc.
- Develop an intramural league for a season sport and split the youth into teams using a law enforcement volunteer as a coach



RECRUITING LAW ENFORCEMENT

We have one officer from the local police department who regularly volunteers. Is that enough? Who else should we recruit?

Having one committed law enforcement coach is a great start, but you do not want to rely on just one volunteer. This puts a lot of pressure on them as the sole connection to law enforcement. If you already have the connection with one person, ask them if they have colleagues who might be interested in helping with the program. Also, consider reaching out to other agencies that protect and serve in your community. This is not just limited to police organizations. Think about other police departments such as local universities, sheriff departments, the National Guard, local FBI or other federal agency affiliates, fire departments, the United States Marshals Service (a committed CRSF supporter), local military bases, etc.

For tips on how to establish relationships with law enforcement organizations, see our *How to Build a Successful Law Enforcement Partnership* publication found in the *Badges for Baseball* section of our resource portal located at www.ripenfoundation.org/resource-portal.

Our law enforcement partner is not able to participate regularly throughout the year. How can we keep them involved?

We recognize that committing to volunteering is a huge undertaking, and there are times where our law enforcement partners can't make it. Creating that caring relationship with law enforcement mentors is a crucial component of *Badges for Baseball*. If law enforcement mentors cannot make a weekly commitment, aim for at least monthly participation. One way to incorporate law enforcement is to have them assist with presenting the lesson aspect of the *Badges for Baseball* curriculum. You can also incorporate them into the *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* lessons that supplement the overarching *Badges for Baseball* lessons. Here are some suggestions to involve law enforcement into *Badges for Baseball* programming without requiring a weekly commitment:

- **Resilience** – Discuss how resilience plays a key part in their job
- **Bullying** – Discuss respect versus fear. How do they show respect to others and earn respect of the community
- **Civics & Leadership** – Discuss the importance of citizenship and being involved in the communities
- **Adaptive Sports** – Participate in games with youth of mixed abilities. Or, set-up a game for the youth with Wounded Warriors or a similar organization
- **Financial Literacy** – Discuss how being financially literate and responsible allows youth to set themselves up for success – both on and off the job
- **Fitness** – Discuss the physical requirements of joining a law enforcement agency and the importance of staying physically fit
- **Nutrition** – Teach the youth to make healthy snacks
- **Quickball** – Join the youth for a game of Quickball

RECRUITING COMMUNITY-BASED PARTNERS

Who is considered a community-based partner?

We encourage you to use *Badges for Baseball* as an opportunity to strengthen and develop ties within your community. Reach out to your local church groups, colleges, professional sports teams, as well as local high schools to garner their interest in volunteering in your *Badges for Baseball* program. It is important to recruit caring adult mentors from diverse backgrounds in order to better relate to the youth in your program. Additionally, community-based organizations serve as a great resource in your efforts to recruit youth for your program.

What strategies can I use to recruit community-based partners?

There are various strategies to recruit mentors (direct ask, presentations, social media, or other mass communications, asking current mentors to recruit); your recruitment methods should focus on how mentoring and volunteering in your *Badges for Baseball* program can benefit mentors (personally and professionally) while also building positive relationships with youth in the community.

I've recruited community-based partners for my program, but what other ways can I engage my local community?

In addition to volunteering in your *Badges for Baseball* program, community-based organizations can help provide support in various ways, such as donating healthy snacks, providing facilities, sponsoring field trips and transportation, as well as sending keynote speakers to your program. The possibilities are endless, and you are only limited by what you ask of your nearby partners.



USING SPORTS IN THE *BADGES FOR BASEBALL* PROGRAM

What is Quickball? How do we play?

Quickball is a fast-paced version of baseball. It can be played indoors or outdoors. It serves as a fun way to teach the fundamentals of baseball while involving everyone in the game. To see how to set-up a Quickball field and an overview of the game, see our Quickball training video found on www.ripkenfoundation.org/resource-portal.

Healthy Choices, Healthy Children: Quickball Edition is a condensed version of the curriculum designed to be used with Quickball games and can be great if you are working with children in shorter timeframes.

Can we run the program with sports and/or activities other than baseball?

Yes! An essential component of *Badges for Baseball* is group activity. Just because the program is called *Badges for Baseball* does not mean that is the only activity you can do with youth. Sports, especially team sports, offer many teachable moments and provide concrete examples of teamwork, leadership, and other character traits taught through the *Badges for Baseball* lessons.

Working with one sport allows youth to hone their skills. However, the lessons are not tied to a single sport, nor are they required to be tied to a traditional team sport. The life lessons translate to any sport. We have had groups use the curriculum year-round by pairing it with soccer or football in the fall, basketball in the winter, and baseball/softball in the spring. This approach has proven successful in keeping youth engaged in a variety of activities and giving them an opportunity to build relationships with their mentors all year long.

All youth have different interests, so make sure to use activities that work with your participants. Many organizations do run *Badges for Baseball* using baseball or Quickball, but that is not a requirement. Some groups use STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math), archery, bicycling, and a variety of other group activities to keep their youth engaged and learning. The lessons in the curriculum apply to a much broader realm than just the baseball diamond, so apply them to the activity that works best for your program.

We want to start a team, but do not have any coaches who feel comfortable taking the lead. What should we do?

Remember that the purpose of playing baseball (or any team sport) in this program is for youth and law enforcement mentors to have fun, get to know each other, and stay active. For a first time team, you need a few committed adult coaches, but do not necessarily need strong knowledge of the sport.

While having law enforcement or public safety officers involved as mentors is an essential component of the *Badges for Baseball* program, we encourage you to engage other mentors or coaches in your program. Reach out to a local college/university or minor league team to ask for their support. Perhaps they can provide a few volunteers for two hours a week. (Remember to conduct background screening and provide training for all your volunteers!) Most NCAA teams are required to volunteer for a certain number of hours per year, and perhaps they may invite the youth to play at their facility or to visit the college – another great activity to teach the kids about options for their future.

OTHER QUESTIONS

What do I do with youth who participated in the program last year/season?

Completing the lessons and activities in the *Badges for Baseball* and *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* curricula is a great start, but does not have to mean the child can no longer participate in *Badges for Baseball*. Here are a few suggestions for how to continue to engage former *Badges for Baseball* youth:

- Ask them to develop additional topics or ways to reinforce the lessons
- Have older youth who have completed the program serve as peer mentors for the younger participants
- Encourage youth to help recruit new participants, invite their friends from school or the neighborhood
- Continue to build your program, and as they develop more skills, register teams in local leagues or help a child sign up for their school team
- Schedule community service days
- Ask how they want to help by coming up with a project or another way they can put the character traits into practice

My 10 to 12 year olds love the program, but I am having a hard time getting the 13 to 14 year olds to participate in the *Badges for Baseball* lessons/activities?

It may be more difficult to engage older youth in the written activities. Often they may not want another “school-type lesson” as part of their afterschool or summer programming. The same may be true for those who are reading below grade-level and feel overwhelmed by another reading/writing activity outside of school. Here are some tips to help keep them engaged:

Emphasize Discussion

Use the discussion questions provided in the book to have teens develop activities that help reinforce the lesson. Instead of using the activities in the books, relate the key points in each lesson to other activities they participate in during their everyday life.

Vary How Participation Looks

Ensure active participation from every member of the group by providing different ways to participate. Some youth speak up more when in a group discussion setting, whereas others do better one-on-one. Give participants the chance to suggest related topics (e.g. current events at school or in the community) or develop more questions. Allowing youth to submit topics and questions anonymously is a great way to help them feel comfortable asking and talking about sensitive topics such as, peer pressure and bullying.

Develop New Activities

Help teens understand their influence on younger participants and guide them on how to positively impact those around them. While the lessons on leadership, personal responsibility, and choosing your teammates may naturally lend themselves to such discussions, there are always opportunities to encourage positive leadership. Once your older participants have discussed the lesson, have them develop an activity for some of the younger groups, and consider allowing a few of the teens to facilitate the activity (with adult supervision, of course).

We provide each resource as simply that, a resource, a guidebook for getting the program started. The most important goal is to keep youth interested, engaged, and talking. If the activities or workbooks are hindering that goal, be creative, or contact the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation and we can help you develop another approach.

Can I offer incentives to mentors?

Absolutely! The most important incentive for the mentors should be the relationships formed with the youth. However, tangible incentives are a nice way to express your appreciation to your mentors. Here are a few suggestions for how to recognize the mentors that participate with your *Badges for Baseball* program:

- Purchase coaches uniforms that match the youth
- Have the youth make thank you cards or banners
- Ask for gift card donations from local businesses
- Host a thank you “banquet” for the mentors where the youth serve the food

