



# Youth Softball Handbook



**Fall 2025 (updated 7/29/25)**

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Dear Coaches and Parents,

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all the parents and coaches involved with our youth baseball/softball program. Everyone is working hard to make this season fun and successful.

The goal of the Parks and Recreation Softball program is to provide quality instruction which promotes sportsmanship, teamwork, development, participation and FUN! Individually, to develop technical skills which will enhance the ability, desire and confidence of each player. It is the coach's responsibility to instill this concept into all participants and their parents.

If anyone associated with your team loses sight of these objectives, please remind them that this is about children playing a game. Our job, as parents and coaches, is to facilitate a fun learning experience, and to lead by example. Often, the way we react to things on and around the field teaches them more than the game itself.

Also, please remember to use the designated parking areas. If you have children that are not participating in our programs, for their safety, be sure to watch them. Remember to keep our facilities clean and beautiful for everyone to enjoy.

Sincerely,  
Apex Parks & Recreation

## **Apex Parks and Recreation Parental Code of Conduct**

- Exhibit socially acceptable behavior at practice sessions, games, and matches or refrain from attending these events.
- Ensure that your children have the proper equipment.
- Ensure that your children arrive and are picked up at the stated time.
- Applaud all good effort and good plays or remain silent.
- Allow the coaches to instruct without outside interference or influence.
- Support the coaches in what they want the players to learn.
- Treat the coaches and league leaders with dignity and respect.
- Ensure that your children receive ample positive encouragement regardless of the outcome of their events.
- Allow your children to play without negative pressure, verbal or physical.
- Ensure that your children do not intentionally injure other players.
- Help your children adhere to the written and unwritten rules of honesty, fair play and good sportsmanship.
- Assist in helping other players, the team, or the program when asked.
- When possible, provide your children with extra instructional opportunities.
- When possible, provide your children with opportunities to learn other sports so that they have a more balanced development.

## 1. League Management

National Federation of High Schools rules will apply except where stated in the Handbook.

## 2. Coaches & Assistants

- All coaches must complete an online background check.
- A coaching staff not to exceed four (4) (For games). The four coaches should consist of one (1) head coach and three (3) assistant coaches.
- All coaches will be evaluated after each season.
- All coaches must understand and agree to carry out the duties, responsibilities, policies, and philosophies as established by the Apex Parks and Recreation Department.
- Only the head coach and their assistants will be allowed to be in the dugout with the team during an official game. Upon notification by an umpire, or staff member, additional adults are to be removed from the dugout. Failure to adhere to this ruling will result in the ejection of the head coach. **One coach must remain in the dugout with the players at all times. If there aren't enough assistant coaches present at the game, the head coach must assign a parent the duty to monitor the dugout.** Excessive playing, roughhousing, etc. are not allowed in the dugout area. Absolutely no swinging of bats is allowed while in the dugout or fenced in area. Bats should only be handled while batting or in the on-deck circle.

## 3. Player Eligibility

- League age for the 2024 Fall Season is the player's age as of October 31<sup>st</sup> of 2024.

- Players returning to a team in the same age group must still register. However, these players will be excused from skills assessments. No player shall be eligible to participate in assessments, player selection, practices, or games until they have completed the registration process. Teams will incur a penalty of forfeiture of all games in which an ineligible player participates. Coaches may face disciplinary action if they allow an ineligible player to play. Players ages nine (9) and above that are new to the age group should attend player assessments to be eligible for selection in the draft. Players that do not attend for the entire assessment period will be randomly assigned to a team. No Special requests will be honored.
- Player assessments for ages nine (9) and above will be supervised by designated Parks and Recreation staff.
- Players ages eight (8) and under returning to the same age group will have the option to return to the same team from the previous season (fall to fall and spring to spring). Participants entering a new age group will be placed on a new team. No Special requests will be honored.

#### **4. Player Placement and Draft**

- Registered players ages eight (8) and under returning to the same age group will have the option to return to the same team from the previous season (fall to fall and spring to spring). Participants entering a new age group will be randomly placed on a team. No special requests will be honored.
- Registered players ages nine (9) and above who are new to the age group must attend player skills assessments to be eligible for selection in the draft.
- Registered players ages nine (9) and above returning to a team in the same age group will be excused from skills assessments.
- Player assessments are intended to provide coaches the opportunity to evaluate the abilities of registered players which, in turn, should promote

greater skill equity within each league. Player skills assessments for ages nine (9) and above will be supervised by designated Parks and Recreation staff.

- The draft and player placement shall take place following the conclusion of player skills assessments and will be supervised by the Recreation staff.

## **5. Draft Procedures**

To be organized and operated by APR&CR and the league coaches under the following guidelines:

Teams shall draft in reverse order of their finish in the previous season. Teams with no returning players shall be treated as a new team and will start at the top of the draft.

- New teams added to the league and teams with no returning players shall be placed at the top of the draft order. These teams will be ranked based on number and age of option players
  - Teams with the fewest option players will draft first.
  - Coin flip will determine draft order of new teams with same number of option players.
- All teams will be age balanced (as close as possible, dependent on the make-up of the league).
- Each team shall be permitted to keep returning players and daughters under the following conditions:
  - Options may be awarded to a coach and /or coach's child who has registered to participate. All options must be declared in writing prior to the draft. All options on the oldest age for the league will be protected through the second round. All options on the next oldest age will be protected through the third round. Sister options will be protected in the last round. A team is allowed two option players.

- Note: A team may not have more than two option players on its roster during a season. Any player designated an option player the previous year who returns to the same team will remain an option player.
- Based on the total number of players needed to equalize the number on each team, each coach will draft until he reaches this number and then withdraw from the draft.
  - Exception: When a team reaches 6 players on their roster, that team must hold until all other teams reach 6 players. Note: Any team that returns 6 or more players will receive a first round choice, and then have to hold until all other teams have the same number of players.
- If any teams are short players after the draft, players will be assigned to the team at the discretion of APR&CR. Appointments shall be made per draft order and waiting list policy.

If a player drops from a team prior to games beginning, APR&CR will attempt to replace that player from the established waiting list.

## **6. Team Composition**

- The Recreation Programs Manager or designated staff will determine the number of registrants the program can accommodate and develop the player selection based on the needs of all teams, including possible modifications of draft order depending on returning players and other factors.
- Players may be replaced in the event of sickness or injury. The Recreation Staff member may replace players that are withdrawn during the season with players from the waitlist.
- Parental consent to participate may be withdrawn at any time. Requests to withdraw must be submitted to the Parks and Recreation Department in writing.

## 7. Uniforms and Equipment

- Uniforms (game jersey) and socks are provided by APR&CR. Players are required to provide softball pants (coordinate with coach about color once practice starts) and a glove. Players are encouraged to provide their own batting helmet and bat.
- It is mandatory that the jersey provided by the Parks and Recreation Department be worn at all the games. Teams shall not, in any manner, alter the uniforms that are distributed.
- The Parks and Recreation Department will provide catcher's equipment and batting helmets for each team. Parents are encouraged to purchase their own bat for their child. For specific league bat specifications, check league specific rules.
- Any jewelry worn that poses harm or injury to a player or opponent should be removed.
- Tennis shoes or shoes with molded cleats may be worn. Metal spikes and metal toe plates are prohibited in all leagues.
- All batters, base runners, youth base coaches and batters in the on-deck circle must wear a batting helmet.
- Catchers must wear all protective equipment. This includes masks, helmet, shin guards, and chest protector.

## 8. Team Practice

- The Recreation Programmer or designated staff will determine the number of practices based on availability, number of teams, and weather. The Parks and Recreation Department will try to schedule two practices a week prior to the start of scheduled games. After the start of games, each team **may** be scheduled one practice per week.
- Due to limited field availability, practices can be scheduled any day of the week.
- Teams may not reserve field and/or batting cage time for more than one week at a time and may not do so before **8:00am on Thursday** of the week before they wish to practice.
- For practice and game days, the Parks and Recreation Department will have the final decision on field cancellations. The weather hotline can be reached at (919) 249-3348. Decisions will be made by 4:00pm on weekdays, 8:00am on Saturdays, and 12:00pm on Sundays.

## 9. Tournaments

- There will be no end of season tournaments for Instructional League.
- If the schedule permits, in the leagues for ages nine (9) and above there will be a single elimination end of season tournament. Seeding for these tournaments will be determined by the regular season standings. Tie breakers are broken by head to head record, then coin flip. There will be no time limit during championship games.

## 10. Code of Conduct and Penalties

- Apex Parks & Recreation Department has a zero tolerance for unsportsmanlike conduct or behavior by an individual (players, coaches, officials, spectators, or parents) at any town function or event and said behavior will be subject to partial or permanent suspension.
- Unsportsmanlike conduct is defined as but not limited to the following: harassment of officials or participants, use of profane language or gestures, and public threat or physical violence.
- The length of any suspension will be determined by the Athletic Programs staff.
- No player, coach or spectator shall refuse to abide by an official's decision.
- No player, coach or spectator shall be guilty of objectionable demonstration of dissent at an official's decision.
- No player or coach, other than the Head Coach, should discuss with an official in any manner the decision reached by an official.
- No player or coach shall be guilty of using unnecessary rough tactics in the play of the game against an opposing player.
- No player, coach or spectator shall be guilty of personal verbal abuse upon any official for any reason.
- No player, coach or spectator shall be guilty of physical attack as an aggressor upon any players, official or spectator.
- No alcoholic beverages are allowed on any Town of Apex property. Anyone violating this rule is subject to arrest and expulsion from the League.
- No player, coach or spectator shall use profanity. Offending players/coaches may be subject to ejection, possible suspension/expulsion from the league.

- If ejected, a player or coach must vacate the premises. Failure to abide by this will result in forfeiture of the game.
- Any player, coach or spectator ejected by an official or a supervisor will be removed from the facility and suspended for one (1) or more of the team's subsequent games. The duration of any suspension will be determined by Apex Parks and Recreation staff. Anyone who has been ejected from a game must leave the playing site immediately.
- Suspensions may apply to regular season games and/or tournament play and may, at the discretion of Apex Parks and Recreation, be carried over to future seasons.

### **TOWN OF APEX BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT**

As part of organizing, supervising and administering various programs and activities, it is expected that those involved will exhibit the appropriate behavior to make the experience as beneficial and enjoyable as possible. Whenever possible, APRCR prefers to use behavior tools such as praise and positive reinforcement as effective methods of behavior management. We believe that when participants receive positive and understanding interactions, they can develop good self-concept, problem-solving abilities, and self-discipline. Our programs will create an environment that encourages positive choices through understanding participant's basic needs and explaining program expectations. In the event praise and positive reinforcement do not accomplish the desired outcomes, or in the event the behavior is such that more definitive action is needed, APRCR reserves the right to immediately disallow further participation in the program/activity when APRCR deems it to be in the best interest of the program and other participants.

### **BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT TOOLS**

To encourage and support positive behavior in all programs and activities offered by the Apex Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department, the following techniques will be used:

1. Monitoring of the program environment;
2. Providing participants a positive program environment;
3. When required, redirection of the undesired behavior;
4. Encouragement of the participant to change their behavior by providing clear examples of how the behavior needs to change.

## **TOWN OF APEX BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT PROCEDURES**

The Town of Apex Parks, Recreation and Cultural Resources Department supports and practices the following procedures for behavior problems:

1. Participant(s) will be given a quiet/reprimand/verbal warning with clear instruction as to how behavior needs to change. Staff will document the discussion via a Behavior Action Plan.
2. If inappropriate behavior persists, after a verbal warning, the parent/guardian will be contacted by the Recreation Program Supervisor/Specialist in charge of the program and a first written Behavior Incident report will be given to the parent/guardian outlining the incident and the action taken by staff.
3. If inappropriate behavior persists, a second Behavior Incident Report may be presented to the parent/guardian and/or the Recreation Program Supervisor/Specialist in charge of the program (or their designee in their absence) may contact the parent/guardian and request that the participant be picked up from the program. Depending on the circumstances, the Recreation Program Supervisor may also determine that a suspension from the program is necessary while the behavior incidents reports are being reviewed. (No refunds or prorated fees will be given for the day the participant is asked to leave or is suspended).
4. If the behavior problem persists, a third Behavior Incident Report will be completed and the participant will be asked to leave the program. In such circumstances, the department may deny future registration for this or other programs. (No refunds will be given).
5. *For severe offenses, such as but not limited to: fighting/hitting, theft, vandalism, bullying in a program, possession of weapons or drugs, severe verbal threats, sexual misconduct, leaving the program/building without proper dismissal, or any other safety related behavior, the participant will be immediately suspended and/or dismissed from the program and a police report will be filed with the Apex Police Department.*

### **11. Protests**

- The only legal protests are protests involving the use of an ineligible player or violations of the mandatory play rule or league rules.
- Protests based on an umpire's judgment will not be permitted.

## 12. Playing Rules

All Baseball and Softball games will be governed by the official rules of the National Federation of State High School Athletic Associations, with the following exceptions.

- **Game Start Times:** The clock will start for the first game of the day/night when the home team takes the field.
- All game schedules are final. Coaches are not allowed to reschedule league games or schedule games/scrimmages against teams outside of our league. The Parks & Recreation department may reschedule games for reasons that affect the whole league such as weather cancelations and school make up days. Coaches are allowed to switch practice times with another coach.
- A game ending in a tie will play until a winner is reached only if time allows. If time expires and an inning finishes in a tie, the game will be recorded as a tie.
- International tie breaker rule will only be enacted when teams are still tied after 6 complete innings and time has not expired. The last batted out of the previous inning will begin each extra inning as a runner on 2nd base.
- Game time will be indicated on the league schedule. There is no grace-period for any youth softball game. Game time is forfeit time, unless the start of the game is delayed because of an umpire or scorekeeper absence.
- 7 players are needed to start the game. If a team is unable to field seven (7) players at any time during the game, the game will be declared a forfeit.
- In the event of a forfeit, a practice game may be played between the two teams. All innings pitched will count toward pitching limits, and code of conduct violations will be enforced.

- If both assigned umpires are absent, the game will be postponed and rescheduled at the discretion of the Recreation Programmer or designated staff. If only one (1) assigned umpire is present, they will work the game alone.

A game will be considered official if it at least half of the allotted time is played for that specific league (ex. 40 minutes of an 80-minute game).

- If a game is called due to weather in the middle of the inning but has reached enough time to be considered an official game, the final score will revert back to the score at the end of the previous completed full inning. The only exception is if the home team is ahead and is at bat when the game is called. In this case, the home team will win, regardless of the score at the end of the last completed inning.
- A game called due to weather prior to becoming an official game will be replayed from beginning as a new game (schedule permitting).
- Tournament games will play until a winner is reached.

## **BATTING ORDER AND SUBSTITUTION**

- All levels of play will use a continuous batting order. The batting order will consist of all players present to play the game.
- Players arriving after the line-up has been submitted will be added to the end of the batting order.
- If a player must leave the game for any reason, the coach must notify the umpires and the opposing coach. The player's position in the batting order will be skipped with no penalty.
- When using the continuous batting order, all players may enter to play defense an unlimited number of times. In the Instructional League, all players present will play defense each inning. Extra players will play in the outfield. In the Farm

League, 10 players will play defense. The Major and Junior Leagues will play with 9 players on defense.

- In the event of an injury, the injured player may be replaced in the field by a player from the dugout. When replaced at bat (if not walked), the next batter assumes his count.
- If a player is injured and leaves the game while at bat, running the bases or playing defense he/she may return as long as they do not miss their next at bat. If he/she does not return by their next at bat they will not be allowed to return to the game and no out will be assessed for the missing player.
- If the injured player is a runner he/she may be replaced by the player who scored the team's last out. If a player is at bat and is unable to finish the at bat due to injury the next batter in the batting order would take over his/her count.

#### **MANDATORY PLAY RULE**

- All players who dress out for a game cannot sit consecutive innings unless authorized by the program supervisor

#### **SPEED UP RULES**

- **Catchers** on base with **1 out (may) or 2 outs must be removed** and a pinch runner substituted in her place. The runner is the player who made the **last out** that inning. The catcher is the player who will be catching when the team goes on defense. The player who scored the team's last out will run for the catcher.
- Following a put out with no one on base, the ball will be returned to the pitcher without being thrown around the infield.

#### **BASE COACHES**

- The offensive team will be allowed to have two (2) base coaches. One (1) base coach will be positioned near first base and the other coach will be positioned near third base.
- Base coaches must be an eligible player in team uniform or one of the coaches. One (1) adult must always remain in the dugout area to monitor for safety. If there aren't two (2) assistant coaches preset, the head coach must recruit a parent to monitor the dugout at all times. **A player or anyone under the age of 18 must wear a batting helmet while coaching bases.**
- Base coaches must remain in the area of the coach's box and move to avoid interference with defensive players.

## **PITCHING**

- Any member of a team may pitch subject to the restrictions of the pitching rules in their age division.
- If it is discovered that a team is using an ineligible pitcher, there will be no penalty if upon the discovery, the pitcher is removed from the mound. If the coach refuses to remove the ineligible pitcher, the offended team may play the game under protest. Note: It is the responsibility of the scorekeeper and the head coaches to work together to avoid violations of this rule. Remember that these rules are for the safety of the players.
- A pitching change must be made when a coach makes the second visit to the mound to the same pitcher during the same inning. A trip to the mound will be charged whenever a defensive coach enters the playing field to confer with the players. A visit will not be charged if the coach enters the playing field because of an injury. **Teams will not have a limit on the total number of mound visits per game.**
- It is recommended that pitchers wear face masks (not required).

## **COLLISION**

- Collision Rule: A base runner must attempt to avoid a collision if the defensive player has possession of the ball. If the base runner does not attempt to avoid a collision and makes aggressive contact with the defensive player, they are automatically called out and will be ejected from the game if deemed flagrant. (This is not a “must slide” rule). If a defender is blocking the path of a runner, without the ball, this is called “obstruction” and the runner should be awarded the base. The umpires have discretion on the timing and call of this play. See NFHS Rule 8-1 for more information.

## **13. Instructional Softball (7-8) Specific Rules**

- Games will have a 1-hour time limit dead stop.
- Game scores and standings will not be recorded in the coach pitch league.
- A batter shall be given 4 pitches from the coach. If the ball is not put into play on 4 pitches, the batter will be allowed one swing off the tee to put the ball in play. If the ball is not put in play the batter is declared out. The manner of pitch (overhand, underhand, coach kneeling, etc.) and distance between the pitcher and hitter, is at the discretion of the coach.
- The ball will be considered dead when it reaches the infield after being thrown in from the outfield. The base to which the runner will advance is determined by the halfway point between bases and the judgment of the coach instructing in the area.
- The field will be occupied defensively by all players present.
- 1 catcher, 1 “pitcher-fielder,” and 4 other infielders. Two defensive coaches are allowed in the outfield to verbally assist their players.

- The team at bat will bat through the entire line-up before changing sides. Outs will be called and players have to go to the bench, but the number of outs in an inning does not matter.
- Batters may wear a helmet with or without a face mask/guard.

#### **14. Farm Softball (9-10) Specific Rules**

- 9-10 Softball league will play a 6-inning game with an 80-minute time limit. No new inning will begin after the time limit has expired. A new inning begins immediately after the final out of the previous inning. A game stopped due to the time limit will be considered a complete game.
- A game ending in a tie will play until a winner is reached only if time allows. If time expires and an inning finishes in a tie, the game will be recorded as a tie.
- A ten (10) run mercy rule will be in effect for all games after 3.5 innings when the home team is leading or 4 innings if the away team is winning.
- Ten (10) fielders may be on the field each inning but play may go on with as few as seven (7).
- In situations where the second game of a week night cannot begin before 8:30pm, said game will be played on a later date in the season.
- Runners are not permitted to steal bases.
- The batter will be declared out in the event of a dropped third strike.
- All offensive players must wear a batting helmet with a securely fastened face mask/guard.
- No infield fly rule.

- In the event of an overthrow at first base, the runner(s) may only advance one base with the risk of being thrown out. **EXAMPLE: If a runner is on first base and a ground ball is hit to the pitcher, the pitcher then overthrows the first baseman. The runner going from 1<sup>st</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> may advance to 3<sup>rd</sup> with the risk of being thrown out. The same goes for the batter, they may advance to 2<sup>nd</sup> with the risk of being thrown out.**
- Pitchers can pitch a maximum of 3 innings per game. One pitch thrown constitutes an inning pitched.
- A pitcher has the option of fast-pitch or modified styles of pitching. Modified pitching should be taught before fast pitch in this age group.
- The Farm League will use an 11" softball.
- Bats must be permanently stamped with an ASA or USA logo.
- Pitching plate shall be set at 35ft. Bases shall be set at 60ft.
- There will be no walks in 9-10 softball. When a batter receives a pitched 4<sup>th</sup> ball, an offensive coach will come in to pitch a max of three (3) pitches. If the player is unable to put the ball in play they are declared out. The coach must pitch the ball underhand to the batter and from the pitching plate. If the player fouls off the last pitch they may continue hitting until they are out. Players are not allowed to bunt while a coach is pitching.

#### Run Rule:

- In the 1st inning, both teams may score a maximum of 5 runs each. Once 5 runs have been scored or 3 outs have been achieved, the inning will roll over.
- In the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, & 5th inning the trailing team will always have the chance to tie the score and score an additional 5 runs. The team leading may only score 5 runs before the inning rolls over.
- In the 6th inning, there is no run limit for either team.

- Innings will roll over once a team gets 3 outs or the maximum number of runs has been scored.

## 15. Major Softball (11-12) Specific Rules

- Will play a 6-inning game with an 80-minute time limit. No new inning will begin after the time limit as expired. A new inning begins immediately after the final out of the previous inning. A game stopped due to the time limit will be considered a complete game.
- A game ending in a tie will play until a winner is reached only if time allows. If time expires and an inning finishes in a tie, the game will be recorded as a tie.
- A ten (10) run mercy rule will be in effect for all games after 3.5 innings when the home team is leading or 4 innings if the away team is winning.
- In situations where the second game of a week night cannot begin before 8:30pm, said game will be played on a later date in the season.
- Runners are permitted to steal bases but can only leave the base after the ball crosses the plate. Runners leaving early will be declared out.
- All offensive players must wear a batting helmet with a securely fastened face mask/guard.
- The infield fly rule shall apply in this league.
- Batter/runner may not advance to 1<sup>st</sup> on a dropped third strike
- Pitchers can pitch a maximum 4 innings per game. One pitch thrown constitutes an inning pitched.
- A pitcher has the option of fast-pitch or modified styles of pitching.

- 12" softball will be used
- Bats must be permanently stamped with an ASA or USA logo.
- Pitching plate shall be set at 40ft. Bases shall be set at 60ft.

#### Run Rule:

- In the 1st inning, both teams may score a maximum of 5 runs each. Once 5 runs have been scored or 3 outs have been achieved, the inning will roll over.
- In the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, & 5th inning the trailing team will always have the chance to tie the score and score an additional 5 runs. The team leading may only score 5 runs before the inning rolls over.
- In the 6th inning, there is no run limit for either team.
- Innings will roll over once a team gets 3 outs or the maximum number of runs has been scored.

### 16. Junior (13-15) Softball Specific Rules

- Will play a 6-inning game with an 80-minute time limit. No new inning will begin after the time limit as expired. A new inning begins immediately after the final out of the previous inning. A game stopped due to the time limit will be considered a complete game.
- A game ending in a tie will play until a winner is reached only if time allows. If time expires and an inning finishes in a tie, the game will be recorded as a tie.
- No run limit per inning in 13-15 softball.
- Games will be stopped under the mercy rule after reaching regulation (4.5 innings) if one team is ahead by 12 or more runs and has had equal times at bat, or the home team is leading.
- Batter runner may advance to 1<sup>st</sup> on dropped third strike in 13-15 SB.
- Runners are permitted to steal bases but can only leave the base after the ball leaves the pitcher hand.

- All offensive players must wear a batting helmet with a securely fastened face mask/guard.
- Pitchers can pitch a maximum 4 innings per game. One pitch thrown constitutes an inning pitched.
- A pitcher has the option of fast-pitch or modified styles of pitching.
- 12" softball will be used
- Bats must be permanently stamped with an ASA or USA logo.
- Pitching plate shall be set at 40ft. Bases shall be set at 60ft.