First Year Kid Pitch: Tips for Parents and Coaches

8U-10U | Parent Communication | Coach Nick & the YSC Coaching Team

The first inning of our first kid pitch game last spring took 31 minutes. Our starter walked four, hit one, and threw two balls to the backstop. The other team's pitcher did the same. A grandpa in a lawn chair said "this is unwatchable" loud enough for the whole bleacher to hear, and our leadoff hitter, a 9-year-old who had raked all fall in coach pitch, stood as far from the plate as the box would let him and watched three strikes go by.

None of that was a problem. It was a normal first year of kid pitch. The problem would have been if nobody had warned the parents.

The short answer: the first season of kid pitch is slow, full of walks, and a little scary for hitters, and that is normal. Coaches should keep pitching instruction to two or three simple cues, follow the league's pitch count and rest rules exactly, and teach hitters how to get out of the way of a pitch. Parents help most by setting expectations at home and cheering effort, not results.

The Parent Note: Send This Before the First Game

Copy this, change the names, and send it the week before your first kid pitch game. It answers the questions you would otherwise get in the parking lot.

Subject: What to expect from our first season of kid pitch

Hi families,

This is our team's first season with kids pitching, and we want you to know what it will look like so nobody is surprised.

Games will be slow. Expect lots of walks, some wild pitches, and innings that end on a run limit instead of three outs. That is true for every team at this age, not just ours.

Some kids will be nervous at the plate. Facing a pitcher their own age is a big change from coach pitch. Hitters may step away from the plate or stop swinging for a while. We are practicing how to get out of the way of a pitch safely, and confidence comes back with reps.

Every kid who wants to pitch will get a chance. We follow the league's pitch count and rest rules exactly, and we track every pitch. Please do not ask us to stretch a pitch count, and please tell us if your child threw at another practice or lesson this week.

How you can help: Cheer the effort, not the strike count. After the game, ask "What was fun?" instead of "Why did you walk so many?" Please leave pitching instruction to the coaches during games, so your pitcher hears one voice.

Questions are always welcome. Please give us 24 hours after a game before bringing them up.

Thanks, Coach ____

If you want a fuller version with a season calendar and contact policy, our parent communication letter templates cover the whole season.

What Coaches Should Expect in Year One

Walks are the game for a while

In our experience, most first-year pitchers throw strikes somewhere around 40–50% of the time. That means long counts and lots of free bases. Little League's own coaching guidance warns against over-instructing young pitchers, and we agree completely: a

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9-year-old who is thinking about his front shoulder, his glove arm, his leg kick and his arm slot is not thinking about the catcher's mitt.

We give a first-year pitcher two cues for the entire season: "eyes on the glove" and "finish to the catcher." That's it. Our pitching mechanics guide for 8–10 year old beginners covers the full delivery for when a kid is ready, but in game one, less is more.

Pitch count rules are not suggestions

For Little League, 7–8 year olds max out at 50 pitches in a day and 9–10 year olds at 75. Rest days follow pitch totals: 21–35 pitches needs one calendar day of rest, 36–50 needs two, 51–65 needs three, and 66 or more needs four. Check your league's rules if you play USSSA or rec ball, because they vary. Assign a parent to count every pitch, including warmups between innings if your league counts them.

Fastballs only

Parents will ask about curveballs, and kids will ask about changeups. A changeup lesson we watched from a respected pitching coach this fall made the case that the grip itself is simple and safe. We still hold it until a pitcher can throw a fastball for strikes more often than not. Our article on when to teach youth pitchers a changeup lays out the readiness markers we use.

The Part Nobody Covers: The Hitter's Fear

Most first-year kid pitch advice is about the kid on the mound. The bigger issue on our teams has always been the kid in the box.

In coach pitch, the ball comes from an adult who almost never hits anyone. In kid pitch, it comes from a 9-year-old who might throw one at your ear. Kids figure that out fast. I had a hitter last season, a strong left-handed kid, who took three straight walks and then started stepping toward the dugout on every pitch. He wasn't soft. He'd never been taught what to do if a ball came at him, so his body made the only choice it knew.

The fix is to teach getting hit before it happens. We spend 10 minutes at the first two kid pitch practices on this, and it pays back all season. A properly fitted youth batting helmet with a face guard also helps more than parents expect. It takes the scariest outcome off the table, and kids feel it.

The First-Week Practice Sequence

We run this the week before the first game. It builds the athletic skills under all of it (tracking, rotation, balance), not just pitching reps.

> **Step 1 — Tennis Ball Turn-Away (10 min)** Hitter in the box with a bat and helmet. A coach tosses tennis balls underhand from 20 feet, a few aimed at the hip and back. On an inside pitch the hitter tucks the chin, turns the front shoulder toward the catcher, and takes it on the back or backside. Never turn toward the pitcher or throw the hands up. Coaching cue: "Chin to shoulder, show him your number."

> **Step 2 — Soft Ball Live Box (10 min)** Same setup, but now a teammate pitches soft-core balls from a shortened distance. Hitters must stay in their stance and track each pitch all the way into the catcher's glove, swinging only at strikes. Coaching cue: "See it hit the mitt."

> **Step 3 — Glove-Target Bullpen (15 min)** Every kid who wants to pitch throws 15 pitches to a catcher, no batter. The only score that counts is hitting the glove. Keep a simple tally and celebrate the best percentage, not the hardest throw. Coaching cue: "Eyes on the glove, finish to the catcher."

> **Step 4 — Walk-Off Situations (15 min)** Live at-bats with coaches calling counts like 3-1 or 2-2 before the first pitch. Pitchers learn to throw strikes under pressure, and hitters learn to take a walk without sulking. Coaching cue for pitchers: "Next pitch." Coaching cue for hitters: "A walk is a hit."

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Step 5 — Catcher Block Ladder (10 min) Your catcher sees more balls in the dirt in year one than in any other season. Coach throws short-hops left, right and center; catcher drops to the knees and keeps the ball in front. Coaching cue: "Chest over the ball, not glove at the ball."

Your catcher is the most underrated player in first-year kid pitch. A catcher who blocks keeps a walk from turning into a three-base run. Our youth catcher drills go deeper, and pitching accuracy and command drills are a good next step once your pitchers get comfortable.

Tips for Parents

- **Don't coach from the stands.** A pitcher hearing "step toward him!" from mom and "slow down!" from the coach freezes.
- **Count the pitches at home too.** If your child has a pitching lesson on Tuesday and a game on Wednesday, tell the coach. Rest rules only work if the coach knows.
- **Practice tracking the ball, not just catching it.** Ten minutes of soft-toss in the backyard where your child just watches the ball into your glove builds the comfort that carries into the box.
- **Expect a dip.** Batting averages drop in year one for almost every kid. That isn't regression. It's a new game.

For more on the full youth season, start with our baseball coaching hub.

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