



Frequently Asked Questions: Starting a *Badges for Baseball* Program

These answers are primarily aimed at organizations running a full-scale *Badges for Baseball* program, using baseball/softball/Quickball and the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*. However, even if your organization would simply like to begin incorporating law enforcement volunteers to assist with your current youth programs (sports, music, life skills, etc.), we hope that some of this information will be helpful in getting started.

Program Schedule & Implementation

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

The *Badges for Baseball* program includes the following components:

- Character education in the form of 12 life lessons in the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*
- Regular interaction with mentors who are law enforcement, military, or public safety officers
- Sports or other physical activities

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

What type of facility do we need?

Be creative! You do not need a classroom, a gym, or a baseball diamond. Many groups deliver the lessons in a cafeteria, gym, or on the bleachers at a park. Teaching the lessons or holding discussions in the environment where the kids will be playing sports may help remind them of how to show that character lesson during play; however, it may also make it more difficult for some kids to focus on a reading or writing activity like those included with some of the lessons, so consider your kids' maturity and review the lesson activities ahead of time. Some groups are better served delivering the lesson and having discussions in a formal classroom setting, then moving to a gym or field to play baseball/softball/Quickball. **What is most important is that your kids and your coaches are comfortable and open to talking.**

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

Plan at least one (1) day per week to dedicate to *Badges for Baseball*:

- Consider your existing capacity (staff/volunteers, space, etc.) for programming.
- **Set a specific day of the week and time for *Badges for Baseball* lessons.**
 - Plan approximately 30 minutes for discussion and lesson activities
 - Decide where you want to teach the program – classroom, auditorium, gym
 - Teaching one (1) and no more than two (2) lessons per week is ideal. Otherwise, the program is not as effective.
- **Set a specific day of the week and time (or several) for baseball/softball and/or Quickball.** This may be immediately following or concurrent with the lesson, but it does not have to be.
 - You can schedule Quickball every day as part of “open gym” or structured play time
 - Consider specifics when scheduling recreational or competitive baseball/softball activities (facilities, transportation, coaches, numbers of kids, skill levels, etc.)

Some groups integrate the lesson components into sports instruction or practice. They might start with the warm-up, introduce the key points, and then use the breakin' it down section and sharing the story of an uncommon person or team. This would be followed by playing baseball, with the coach/mentor pointing out teachable moments or displays of the lesson topic. Then the group could wrap up with the lesson in action activity or by discussing how they used what they learned that day and how they plan to put the lesson into action at school, at home, or on the field in the future.

Other groups hold separate sessions for the lessons and for the sport component. For example, *Badges for Baseball lessons*, including the lesson activities, are on Tuesdays at 4 p.m., while baseball practice is on Thursdays at 4 p.m., with the coach/mentor using teachable moments to reinforce the key points from Tuesday.

Regardless, an ideal *Badges for Baseball* schedule includes **at least 1-2 hours per week of programming** (*Badges for Baseball* lessons and some baseball/softball activity, community outreach project, or other hands-on activity) as outlined above. As you schedule these times, make any partners or volunteers aware of the schedule. The more you **create a concrete schedule and stick to it**, the more likely you are to engage and sustain law enforcement coaches, partners, and other volunteers.

Can we run the program with activities other than sports?

An essential component of *Badges for Baseball* is its athletic component. **Sports, especially team sports, offer many teachable moments and provide concrete examples** for the importance of teamwork, leadership, etc. Additionally, **playing sports together can break down barriers** and allows mentors and kids can get to know each other as people first through a fun activity.

However, **it is more important that kids have fun and are physically active** as part of a healthy lifestyle. Even if your kids love baseball or softball, incorporating different games as warm-ups can keep things from getting stale and help build different skills. That's why the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual* includes various types of activities with each lesson.

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 program. However,

- mentoring relationships are more impactful when youth and mentors meet regularly and the relationships are sustained over a longer time period (i.e. at least a year);
- and all research in character education has shown that lessons are most effective when taught, reinforced, and taught again – woven into the fabric of the organization.

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

How can we reinforce the lessons without sounding repetitive?

Can anyone learn about leadership too many times? No, but the key to not sounding like a broken record is repetition with variation:

- Teach the lessons with a different sport each season to show how they apply to a variety of situations.
- **Apply the core character education lesson to different aspects of life off the field, using the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation's *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* (HCHC) curriculum.**

For example, displaying respect on the field means you treat your teammates, opponents, and coaches in a positive manner. But respect at school or at home might be displayed by speaking up when someone makes a mean comment about another classmate, or by reaching out to welcome the new kid who just moved to the neighborhood.

HCHC includes editions on a variety of topics, including bullying, financial literacy, resilience, careers in STEM fields, etc. All *HCHC* curriculum materials are available at CRSFPortal.org/Materials.

What might a year-round program look like?

If you run a summer program or have extended hours over the summer:

- Teach 1-2 *Badges for Baseball* lessons each week during the summer, weaving them into sports and other daily activities
- Reinforce the lessons the rest of the year with different sports, and/or by using a different *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children (HCHC)* edition to focus on a different topic each month.

If your schedule and attendance is fairly consistent year-round:

- Pick a topic each month. For example, the first month might Sportsmanship.
- Teach the Sportsmanship lesson in the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual*.
- Follow up by using the *HCHC: Adaptive Sports Edition* and discussing sportsmanship in terms of physical or other challenges we and others face in life.

We suggest the pairing below of *Badges for Baseball* lessons and *HCHC* editions. However, feel free to be creative and help kids make their connections wherever you see the opportunity!

<i>Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual</i>	<i>Healthy Choices, Healthy Children</i>
Sportsmanship	Adaptive Sports Edition
Leadership	Civics & Leadership Edition
Respect	Rise Above Bullying Edition
Resilience	Resilience Edition
Personal Responsibility	Financial Literacy Edition
Developing Good Life Habits	Fitness Edition
Choosing to Be Healthy	Nutrition Edition

We also offer the *HCHC: Quickball Edition*, which introduces 4 different Quickball games that, respectively, emphasize teamwork, sportsmanship, communication, and leadership. This makes *HCHC: Quickball Edition* an excellent “booster” as the games can be thrown into the mix at any time, or it can also serve as a fun way to introduce the program when recruiting kids for *Badges for Baseball*.

How do I engage 100 kids or more?

The Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation works with a wide variety of community based organizations. Some groups serve thousands of kids each year, others are smaller, neighborhood based groups and may only have 75 kids registered in their programs. No matter the size of your organization, we encourage you to use this program as an opportunity to recruit new kids. Ask a local middle school principal, or school resource officer to identify some kids who may benefit from the program, or who would not otherwise have an opportunity to play baseball/softball.

Again, the organizational capacity dictates what type of schedule or rotation you would use to engage at least 100 kids in the program; however, some suggestions include:

- Divide kids by age (10-11 year olds, 12-13 year olds, 14 and up)
- Divide by gender and offer a “girls only” sports program – may help encourage more girls to participate
- Offer multiple sessions – after school in the spring and during summer camps in the summer
- Develop an intramural baseball/softball league and split the kids into teams (designate 2-3 coaches per team of 20-30 kids, including a law enforcement coach)

How many kids can we serve at a time?

This depends a lot on your organization and the number of coaches you have available. **A ratio of 2-3 adults per every 25-30 kids builds the best scenario for developing meaningful, impactful relationships that open the door for better discussion and communication.**

We encourage organizations to split the kids into teams or groups. Once kids are divided into teams or groups it is much easier to assign coaches and law enforcement volunteers to help with each team.

The easiest divisions are by age and allow you and your coaches to tailor lessons and discussions appropriately (10-11 year olds, 12-13 year olds, 14 and older – or similar). Many groups have found splitting boys and girls to be more effective in keeping girls involved in the athletic portion of the program.

Recruiting Law Enforcement and Other Mentors

We have one officer from the local police department who already regularly comes by to volunteer, is that enough? Who else should we recruit to help?

Having one committed law enforcement coach is a great start, but you do not want to rely on just one volunteer. This makes it difficult for him/her to connect with all the kids in the program, and puts a lot of pressure on one person to come to events and activities. First, ask that committed volunteer if they have other colleagues or connections who may want to help. Then, reach out to other agencies that protect and serve in your community. Think about all the different public service agencies – city police departments, county sheriffs’ departments, the National Guard, a local FBI affiliate, the fire department, the United States Marshals Service (a committed CRSF supporter), university/college public safety agencies, a local military base (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard), etc.

When first approaching a group for support, ask for a conversation with the organization’s leadership. Their support is vital to building a successful partnership. Then provide them with some details of why you need volunteers and what types of jobs people can do to help. Consider scheduling an open house for interested groups to come to your facility, meet a few kids, and learn more about the ways they can help. The more you provide potential volunteers with options of how to serve the more likely you will be to engage committed partners – let them choose what they feel comfortable doing, and then provide them a structure within to serve (schedules, numbers of kids to expect, the adults in charge of those activities).

Refer to “How to Build a Successful Law Enforcement Partnership” under the Badges for Baseball section at CRSFPortal.org/Materials for more suggestions.

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

While law enforcement mentors can continue to coach a variety of sports or teach a weekly lesson, we recognize that many law enforcement agencies may not be able to have officers involved as mentors on a weekly basis for the full year.

However, it is important to provide opportunities for youth and officers to continue building relationships. **If continued weekly involvement is not possible, aim for monthly participation.** Here are some ideas for one-time events related to topics covered in various *HCHC* editions:

- Resilience – Invite law enforcement to discuss how they practice resilience on or off the job.
- Bullying – Invite law enforcement to discuss respect vs. fear and how they work to respect others and earn respect of citizens in order to protect and serve the community.
- Civics & Leadership – Invite law enforcement to discuss they work together with citizens and how citizens can work with law enforcement agencies in order to improve their communities.
- Adaptive Sports – Invite law enforcement to participate in a game with kids of mixed abilities, or set up a game with kids and Wounded Warriors or a similar organization.
- Financial Literacy – Invite law enforcement to discuss what financial literacy and responsibility (i.e. budgeting) allows them to do (either on the job or personally).
- Fitness – Invite law enforcement to discuss how staying physically fit helps them in their jobs and/or physical requirements to become an officer.
- Nutrition – Invite law enforcement to join in making and enjoying a healthy snack, or perhaps even share how they stay fueled during long days.
- Quickball – Invite law enforcement to join and play any of the weeks.

While the “badges” in *Badges for Baseball* are often law enforcement officers, youth will benefit from any relationship with caring adult mentors and in getting to know the men and women who protect and serve our communities and our country. Perhaps you might form partnerships with a few law enforcement and/or military agencies who participate in mentoring the kids during different activities at different times of the year. In addition, this helps youth see there are many different paths they can take.

For school resource or public safety officers working within schools, start a weekly pick-up game of Quickball afterschool and integrate an *HCHC* lesson. Or you can play different sports during different seasons throughout the school year.

Can I offer incentives to my coaches?

Absolutely – the inherent incentive will be the time spent with the kids and the relationships they form throughout the program. However, you can certainly offer some tangible incentives as well. Purchase coaches’ uniforms (t-shirts or polo shirts) for the coaches to match the kids’ uniforms. Ask the kids to make cards or banners thanking their coaches for helping out. Frame some pictures of the teams or ask the kids to make a poster using pictures to thank their coaches. You can buy or solicit donations for gift cards to local stores/restaurants and do a raffle for coaches who have volunteered at a certain number of events or for a certain number of hours. Have a thank you night for all adults, have the kids serve the food, set up, and clean up – this shows your adults you appreciate them, and teaches a great lesson in gratitude to the kids. Ultimately, we want your groups to form lasting partnerships, and showing appreciation for service can go a long way in helping build these relationships.

Who else can I recruit to help with the program? What do you mean when you say, recruit community partners?

We encourage you to use *Badges for Baseball* as a launching pad to build a community-wide program, ultimately making your neighborhoods safer, providing more and varied opportunities for kids, and bringing kids, parents,

families, and local community members together in a safe, fun program. Think about the ways you can involve a variety of groups – local businesses can donate uniforms or food, parents can help coach, colleges/universities can provide facilities and coaches, civic groups can sponsor field trips, companies can sponsor transportation, a middle school can identify new kids for participation, local leaders can act as guest speakers reinforcing any of the *Badges for Baseball* lessons. Be creative and ask the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation for help and guidance as you plan outreach and events.

Using Baseball, Softball, Quickball or Other Team Sports

What is Quickball? How is it played?

Quickball is a fast-paced game similar to baseball that can be played indoors or out. It's a fun way to teach the fundamentals of baseball while keeping everyone engaged.

Learn how to play Quickball by watching the Classroom training video at CRSFPortal.org/lesson/Quickball.

Can we use the program with other sports, or just baseball?

Focusing on one sport allows kids to build upon particular skills, which can be very rewarding. However, the lessons do not need to be paired with a single sport nor does it need to be a traditional team sport. If you have other strong sports programs, we certainly encourage you to use the *Badges for Baseball Coaches Manual* and *Healthy Choices, Healthy Children* materials and your law enforcement coaches to help with those programs as well.

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 kids engaged in a variety of activities and giving them an opportunity to build relationships with their mentors all year long.

We want to start a baseball/softball team, but do not have any coaches who feel comfortable leading the team, what should we do?

Remember that the purpose of playing baseball (or any team sport) in this program is to for kids and law enforcement officers to have fun, get to know each other, and stay active. For a first time baseball/softball team, you need a few committed adult coaches, but do not necessarily need strong baseball knowledge. Check out the resources available on CRSFPortal.org on coaching “The Ripken Way” and teaching fundamentals to first time players.

While having law enforcement or public safety officers involved as mentors is an essential component of the *Badges for Baseball* program, this doesn't mean you can't have other mentors or coaches involved in the 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 2 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 may even invite you to bring the kids 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 the kids who participated in the program last year/season?

Completing the lessons and activities in the *Badges for Baseball* and *HCHC* curricula is a great start, but does not have to mean the child can no longer participate in *Badges for Baseball*.

- Ask the kids to develop additional topics or ways to reinforce the lessons.
- Have older youth who have completed the program help coach or facilitate for younger groups.
- Encourage kids to recruit new participants, invite their friends from school or the neighborhood.
- Continue building your baseball/softball program, and as kids develop more skills, register teams in local leagues or help a child sign up for their school team. All kids can continue to benefit from increased options for physical activities, and time spent with law enforcement coaches.
- Schedule service days for the older kids to clean up a park, serve at a school, volunteer their time to help their community.
- Ask kids how they want to help by coming up with a project or another way they can put the character traits into practice.
- Check the Coaches Forum blog at CRSFPortal.org/forum for new ideas and activities!

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

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

It may be more difficult to engage older kids 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 kids who are reading below grade-level and feel overwhelmed by another reading/writing activity outside of school.

Emphasize discussion using the discussion questions provided in the books, then ask the teens to develop activities that help reinforce the lesson. Or, instead of using the activity in the book, relate the key points in the lesson to another activity they may already be participating in.

Ensure active participation from every member of the group by providing different ways to participate. Some kids will speak up more than others in a discussion. Give kids the chance to suggest relate topics (e.g. current events at school or in the community) or develop more questions—allowing kids to anonymously submit topics and questions is a great way to help them feel comfortable asking and talking about sensitive topics.

Help teens understand their influence on younger participants and consider how to use this influence positively. 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. Maybe 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 kids interested, engaged, and talking.** If the activities or workbooks are hindering that goal, be creative, or call the Cal Ripken, Sr. Foundation and we can help you develop another approach.