

Coaches Toolkit

Coaching Beyond the Scoreboard



COACHING IS MORE THAN A GAME

This toolkit was developed to help coaches recognize and strengthen the powerful role they play in youth development, substance use prevention, and healthy decision-making. This toolkit will:

- Highlight the important role coaches play in youth development and substance use prevention.
- Provide strong protective factors that help youth thrive and reduce risk.
- Provide practical strategies for building positive team cultures and healthy norms.
- Equip coaches with tools to foster connection, belonging, and healthy decision-making

WHY COACHES MATTER

The Kansas Communities That Care (KCTC) Survey provides valuable insight into the experiences, attitudes, and behaviors of Kansas youth. The survey helps communities identify both the strengths and challenges facing young people and highlights the importance of positive adult influences in their lives. The 2026 KCTC data continues to demonstrate that the majority of Kansas youth are making healthy choices:

- More than 92% of Kansas youth reported not consuming alcohol in the past 30 days.
- More than 94% reported not vaping in the past 30 days.
- Nearly 92% reported never using prescription medications without a prescription.
- Nearly all youth reported that their friends believe it is wrong to misuse prescription medications.
- More than 93% recognized the dangers associated with fentanyl use.

These findings are encouraging and reinforce an important message: **most Kansas youth are making healthy choices!** The question for communities is how we continue to support those positive outcomes. One important answer is through trusted adults, including coaches.

Visit www.KCTCdata.org to view county and state data.





Prevention efforts are most effective when they focus not only on reducing risk, but also on strengthening the protective factors that help young people succeed. Coaches play a critical role in that work. For many youth, coaches are among the most consistent and influential adults in their lives. Through daily interactions, coaches help establish expectations, model healthy behaviors, build confidence, and create environments where young people feel connected, supported, and valued

Research consistently shows that youth who experience strong connections with caring adults, positive peer relationships, and clear expectations are less likely to engage in substance use and other risky behaviors. The influence of a coach extends beyond athletic performance. By strengthening protective factors and reducing risk, coaches contribute to the development of life skills, healthy decision-making, resilience, and a sense of belonging that can positively impact youth long after a season ends.

HOW CAN COACHES HELP REDUCE RISK?



YOUTH RISK FACTORS

HOW COACHES CAN HELP BUILD PROTECTION

• Belief that most peers use substances	Establish team norms that promote healthy choices & accountability
• Perception that substance use is socially acceptable	Model healthy behaviors & reinforce positive decision-making
• Early initiation of substance use	Connect youth to structured, substance-free activities & positive peer groups
• Low perception of harm	Provide consistent messaging about health, safety, & long-term goals
• Unclear expectations	Establish clear expectations & hold athletes accountable
• Lack of positive adult connections	Provide a trusting relationship, encouragement, & support
• Social isolation	Create belonging & opportunities for connection among the team
• Limited opportunities for meaningful involvement	Provide youth with opportunities to contribute, lead, and develop skills.
• Easy access to substances	Reinforce conversations about safe storage, healthy choices, & seeking help when needed

HOW CAN COACHES PROMOTE HEALTHY NORMS?

Young people are constantly observing the behaviors, attitudes, and expectations of the adults around them. Coaches have a unique opportunity to reinforce healthy norms and help athletes understand that most youth are making positive choices.



Examples include:

- Reinforcing that most Kansas youth do not use alcohol, vape, or misuse prescription medications.
- Celebrating effort, character, teamwork, and leadership—not just athletic performance.
- Setting clear expectations for behavior on and off the field.
- Encouraging athletes to support and hold one another accountable.
- Addressing unhealthy behaviors or comments when they occur.
- Modeling healthy ways to manage stress, disappointment, and adversity.
- Creating team environments where every athlete feels respected and valued.

When coaches consistently communicate positive expectations and healthy behaviors, athletes are more likely to view those behaviors as the norm.

Coaches have the opportunity to influence youth in ways that extend far beyond athletic achievement. By building relationships, setting expectations, encouraging growth, and creating positive team environments, coaches help strengthen protective factors that support healthy development and reduce risk. **Long after the season ends, young people remember the adults who believed in them, challenged them, encouraged them, and helped them grow.**

