EMPATHY
The Good Game program includes this Playbook, with information about Good Game, how to use the program and how to help your young athletes take action to address a community issue that they care about, as well as seven Fundamentals books, which include drills and activities you can use in practices and games.

Fundamental:
Empathy

Empathy starts with being open to put yourself in someone else’s place, or “stand in their shoes.” Some of the greatest moments in sport have come from unscripted moments of empathy, where an athlete makes a split-second decision that demonstrates respect for the game, the level of play, and their rival. Empathy in sport helps players to step back from the heat of the moment to support their teammates even when things don’t go well, and to show respect for their opponents. In tackling social issues, when people have empathy they gain a deeper understanding of others’ opinions and perspectives in order to craft a more holistic or lasting solution. When citizens have empathy, they treat one another with kindness, and they care about others’ problems, even if they don’t see a personal connection to those problems.

What Empathy Means in Sports:
An empathetic athlete understands that when the clock is running, you compete against the other team. When the whistle blows, you recognize that you’re all in the same game.

What Empathy Means in the Community:
An empathetic citizen understands that identifying with members of their community leads to shared understanding of “shared fate”—the hardships of some affect the well-being of all.

How Do We Know When Someone Has Mastered Empathy?
An empathetic player/citizen:
- Demonstrates sportsmanship by expressing goodwill, admiration, and respect for both teammates and opponents.
- Expresses support for teammates during success and failure.
- Listens to others without interruption and can express how they feel accurately.
- Honors the game and the rules and behaviors that keep it honestly competitive.
Introducing Empathy to the Team:

1. At the start of a practice, have players circle up in the center of the court/field.

2. Ask the players to define the word empathy. Give them some of the responses from above if they get stuck.

3. Ask how empathy is a part of sports (e.g., it helps us realize that we’re all trying to achieve the same things, such as improving our techniques or winning games).

4. Ask the players to give an example of when they did something show empathy. Something in sports?

5. Ask why they would want to develop empathy as athletes.

6. Ask how they can apply this characteristic in their community.

7. Ask how they can support each other to develop this characteristic. Try to have them come up with a tangible way to do this.

It is a good idea to introduce the Fundamental to the team at the start of the season and not just jump into it without explaining why you are doing things a little differently this season. When the players understand what they are being asked to do and why, they are more likely to do it with enthusiasm and purpose. In this case, you are trying to help them become more empathetic players and citizens.

By the end of the first practice, the team should have experienced at least one Empathy Sports Drill and one Empathy Community Drill, and they should be able to give at least two examples of what empathy means in sports and community.

Empathy Sports and Community Activities

“Win together now and we walk together forever.”
- Fred Shero, professional hockey player

Empathy Drill: College Sports Videos

Goal: Understanding the relationship between empathy and sportsmanship. This activity is best done after your team has chosen a Community Project. This is an excellent rainy-day activity.

Sport: All

Sports Skills: None

Materials: A computer or tablet with Internet access, paper and pencils or pens.

Setup: Bring up these video clips from YouTube before the presentation

Soccer video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UvEobeNfGcc

Softball video: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xVlKtI7yd_s&playnext=1&list=PL5452911D72A3B63C

The Drill: In this drill, players will have a chance to reflect on ways they can be an empathetic athlete by understanding how empathy is related to good/positive sportsmanship.

1. Ask the team for someone to explain what empathy means. Take a few answers.
2. Tell the team they’re going to see a couple of video clips that will help them develop a deeper understanding of empathy in sports.

3. Show the first video clip of the hair-pulling incident involving a University of New Mexico soccer player.

4. Ask them what this has to do with empathy? Take a few responses.

5. Say, “Now we’re going to look at another video that shows much better sportsmanship and empathy.”

6. Show the second clip of the softball match.

7. Ask, “What did this have to do with empathy?” Take responses.

8. Say, “These are extreme examples of sportsmanship. The first one demonstrates horrible sportsmanship and the second one was inspiring. What is the relationship between empathy and sportsmanship? What are some ways that you can show empathy as a player on this team?”


10. Tell them to write down one way that they will try to show empathy this season. It can be anything you just discussed or it can be something else. Ask for people to share their responses.

The Cool Down (Ask these questions):

- Have there been times when you reached out to someone who was a competitor to help them (like in the softball video)?
- What do you think you would have done in the case of the softball video?
- What is one way that you might show empathy toward others while doing the Community Project?

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**Empathy Drill: Commonalities**

**Goal:** For players to learn they have things in common with their teammates

**Materials:** None

**Setup:** None

**The Drill:** This could be played at either the start of the season to bring people together or during mid-season if the team has a falling out or is not getting along or working well together.

1. Have players find a partner and between the two of them find one thing they have in common (e.g., both like ice cream, both play defense, both go to the same school).

2. Once they have done that, have them grab hands and hold them up in the air (like we are the champions!) so you know they’re done. Then, tell them to go find another pair and between the four of them they have to find something they all four have in common.

3. When they have found something in common, they need to go find four more people (now eight of them) and find something the whole group has in common.

4. Do this until the whole team can name one thing they all have in common. *

* You may have to adjust the math depending on the size of the team.
The Cool Down (Ask these questions):

- Who would like to share what they had in common with their first partner?
- Who would like to share what they had in common in their next group?
- What surprised you about what you learned about your teammates?
- What does it feel like to have something in common with a teammate?
- How could knowing something about your teammate be helpful on the field/court?
- How would you know what you have in common with someone in your community?

“One should treat others as one would like others to treat oneself.”
- Known as the Golden Rule

Empathy Drill: Too Hot, Too Cold, Just Right

Goal: To learn empathy through listening

Sport: None

Sport skills: None

Materials: Paper and pencil for all players

Setup: None

The Drill: This is a great indoor or rainy-day activity.

1. Ask the players, “Who can tell me what empathy is?”
   Take some responses.

2. Tell them that part of relating to other people’s feelings is to really listen to them. Say, “Today we are going to do an activity that will help us listen to each other, develop empathy and help us to perform better as athletes and as a team. First let’s talk about peak performance as an athlete. What does peak performance mean?”

3. Ask them to think about a time when they played really well. How did they feel? Were they excited? Relaxed? Intense? Nervous?

4. Tell them that research shows that athletes hit peak performance when they are excited but in control and relaxed. They are nervous enough to feel adrenaline but not scared. In other words, they are not too hot, not too cold, but just right. Say,
"Sometimes we find ourselves in a game or practice and we are too hot or too cold, and this is when we can rely on our teammates for support to help us get back into ‘just right.’ This is a complicated thing and it requires knowing yourself and your teammates really well.”

5. Ask if anyone can think of a time when they were too hot in game or practice. Take a couple responses. (You are looking for players to talk about when they were angry and couldn’t focus, or were flat and lethargic, or when outside drama was bothering them and they weren’t concentrating).

6. Tell them, “Let’s look at the example of someone who is ‘too cold.’ What might help this person get into ‘just right’? What could we say? What could we do?”

7. Say, “Let’s look at someone who is ‘too hot.’ What might help this person get into ‘just right’? What could we say? What could we do?”

8. Hand out paper and pencils.

9. Tell them to think about what could help them individually as players.

10. Have each player write answers to the following questions:
   a. When I’m “too cold,” I’m probably feeling ______________.
   b. My teammates will know I’m too cold because they will see me ________________.
   c. What would help me in this moment is ________________.
   d. When I’m “too hot,” I’m probably feeling ________________.
   e. My teammates will know I’m “too hot” because they will see me ________________.
   f. What would help me in this moment is ________________.

11. Go around and have each player share what they wrote. After each reading, ask the team to applaud if they think they can provide the type of support the player asked for. If they can’t, pursue why. It’s important for each athlete to feel supported in this activity.

The Cool Down (Ask these questions):
- How will understanding when each other is hot or cold, or just right, affect our season?
- What did you learn about empathy from this activity?
Empathy Drill: A Moment of Respect

Goal: To teach players to show empathy and respect when someone on the other team gets injured

Materials: None

Setup: None

The Drill: When a teammate makes a mistake, you could show empathy by reminding them to “flush” their mistake (from the Resilience Fundamental Module). If a player gets hurt, sometimes other players stand on the sideline in silence. In this activity, the team will create a ritual they can use in a game if someone from the other team gets hurt.

1. Ask the players if they ever notice what teams do when someone on the other team is hurt or injured (e.g., clapping when someone gets back up, standing on the sideline in silence, kneeling on the sideline in silence, taking their hat/helmet off and holding it over their heart, etc.)?

2. Ask if they’ve seen the other team stop and kneel until the player gets up or is taken off the field. Have they seen players on the other team run off the field to get a drink of water?

3. Ask what each action says about that team (e.g., one says the team is respectful and showing empathy to the player who might be hurt and focusing positive energy on that player, whereas the other behavior shows that the team is only interested in the game and themselves and not the person or people playing the game).

4. Ask what type of team they want to be known as.

5. Ask what type of ritual they would like to create to show empathy toward the other team if someone gets hurt?

6. Have them practice it a few times. Remind them to do it in a game situation.

The Cool Down (Ask these questions):
- How can you show empathy in the community?
- How can you help someone who is “down” in your community?
Empathy Drill:
Magical Shrinking Blankets

Goal: To learn empathy over the desire to label people as “others”

Sport: Any

Sport Skills: None

Equipment: Two old blankets, roughly the same size

Setup: Spread the blankets on the ground with about five yards in between them.

The Drill: When explaining this game, you should never refer to the other team as opponents and never talk about beating the other team. Because we are naturally competitive, the two teams will see each other as opponents. The trick is when the blankets get really small, they can only continue if they figure out to work together by putting the blankets together, or by leaning against the other group. You want to see if they have enough empathy to do this.

1. Separate the group into two teams. Tell them they have 30 seconds to decide on a team name.
2. Have each team stand in a circle around a blanket.
3. Tell them, “Your task in this game is to have your whole team on the blanket.”
4. Tell them the rules:
   - To be successful, all of you must be on the blanket at the same time for at least three full seconds.
   - No part of your body may be touching the ground outside of the blanket.
5. Ask if they are ready, then tell them: “Go!”
6. The teams should easily stand on their blanket for three seconds.
7. Congratulate each team for successfully accomplishing the task and tell them to step off the blanket.
8. Say, “Now we will try it again, only this time, the blanket has magically shrunk!”
9. Fold each blanket in half.
10. Repeat the rules.
12. The teams should again stand fairly easily on their blankets for three seconds.
13. Continue as such, folding each blanket in half after each successful round.
14. When the blankets get small, the teams will need time to strategize how they can all fit on the blanket. If they ask questions, simply repeat the rules.
15. They can’t unfold the blankets, but they can move them. No one can touch the ground outside the blanket, but not everyone needs to make contact with the blanket during the three seconds. Piggy backing, carrying and the like are fair play.
16. Continue going until both teams can’t go anymore (ultimately the blankets will be too small).
The Cool Down (Ask these questions):
- How was that game? Fun? Frustrating? Exciting?
- What were your strategies to deal with the blanket getting smaller and smaller?

If the teams figured out to work together, ask:
- Whose idea was it to work together? Did everyone accept that right away? Why or why not?
- What happened when you worked together?
- What does that have to do with empathy?
- Is it easy to have empathy when people are different from us? Say, “Sometimes it can be hard to have empathy when we see people as being different. Like sometimes we don’t like the other team, just because they are on a different team. You folks were able to figure out that you could be more successful if you worked together on this team. It took empathy to do that—to recognize that everyone on the other team was in the same situation as you.”

If they did not figure out how to work together, ask:
- Did anyone think about working together with the other team? Why didn’t you?
- What would have happened if you did? Say, “When you try to understand someone else’s situation and feelings, that’s called empathy. It takes a lot of empathy to understand people on a different team, even though they are so similar to us and doing the same things we are. In this exercise we wanted to compete, even though it wasn’t a competition.”
- What are ways that you can show empathy for your own teammates?
- What are ways that you can show empathy for the other team?

Empathy Drill: Celebrating the End of the Season

Goal: For players to learn they have things in common with their teammates

Materials: Sample statements (below)

Setup: Players sit with eyes closed

The Drill: Win or lose, create an opportunity to celebrate the season by acknowledging people’s contributions and achievements.

1. Tell the team you are going to call out three months. If their birthday falls within that month they should stand. (If it doesn’t, they should stay seated with their eyes closed until their month is called.)

2. Tell them you are going to read a statement and the people who are standing are going to silently walk around the circle and gently tap the back of the person they feel the statement applies to. Then you will tell them to sit down and another group will stand until you’ve called all of the months.

3. Finally, instruct everyone to stay seated with their eyes closed and to envision themselves on and off the field, court, etc., living and improving the things you just read.

Note: Keep an eye out to make sure that everyone gets tapped at least once, which may mean that you have to step in and do that.

The Cool Down (Ask these questions):
- What was that like for you?
- What surprised you about the activity?
- Was it important for you to know who tapped you?
Feel free to make up other statements!

The statements: January–March

*Gently tap the shoulder of someone who*
  ...demonstrated “accountability”
  ...taught you something new
  ...demonstrated focus

The statements: April–June

*Gently tap the shoulder of someone who*
  ...demonstrated “cooperation”
  ...demonstrated “resilience”
  ...was willing to try new things

The statements: July–September

*Gently tap the shoulder of someone who*
  ...demonstrated “courage”
  ...took a risk and tried something new
  ...demonstrated “creativity”

The statements: October–December

*Gently tap the shoulder of someone who*
  ...demonstrated “empathy”
  ...grew as a player
  ...demonstrated “commitment”

**Empathy Drill: Crossing the Line**

**Goal:** For people to express empathy towards their peers

**Materials:** None

**Setup:** None

**The Drill:** This drill requires a little maturity and needs to be framed such that players understand that statements made during this activity should be kept confidential.

1. Tell the group to stand in a line side by side, along an imaginary line on the field/court.

2. Tell them you are going to read some statements. If the statement applies to them, they should take a step forward. If the statement does NOT apply to them, but they want to show support (empathy) for that person, they can raise their hand with the peace sign (pointer and middle fingers up). Tell them to make sure to look around as the statements are being read so they can fully feel the support.

3. Remind them that the topic you are discussing is empathy. Ask someone to remind the group what empathy means. (You can refresh their memory by reading the first page of this section).

4. Ask if anyone has any questions. Say, “If this statement applies to you, step forward.”
I have felt scared before a game.

Sometimes I worry about my future.

It is hard for me to express frustration.

I know someone with cancer.

I have been bullied.

I try to be a good family member.

Sometimes I feel like giving up when things get difficult or challenging.

It’s important to me to do well in school.

I have lost a pet.

Feel free to create additional statements.

The Cool Down (Ask these questions):

- What was it like to take that first step?
- How did it feel to have people raise their hands in support?
- What did it feel like to raise your hand for someone?
- How does this activity help us understand the concept of empathy?
- How can being empathetic toward others help us with our Community Project?
For more information about Good Game, how to use the program and how to help your young athletes take action to address a community issue that they care about, please see the Good Game Playbook.