



THE PLAY STANDARD | PILLAR ONE

Perseverance

Nine Lessons for Sprouts, Climbers, and Summit

What do I do when it is hard?

Document 2 of 12 | Version 1.0

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About This Pillar

Perseverance is the first pillar of The PLAY Standard because it is the pillar a child needs in order to receive the other three. A child who cannot tolerate difficulty leaves a program before leadership, attitude, or self-knowledge can reach them. Everything else in this curriculum is built on a child's willingness to stay in the room when the thing is hard.

The nine lessons in this pillar move from what a coach can see in a single session to what a child chooses when no one is watching. Lessons one through three are observable behaviors. Lessons four through six are habits visible across several sessions. Lessons seven through nine are internal dispositions.

The Nine Lessons

No.	Value	The Standard
P1	Effort	Effort is the part of any result you fully control.
P2	Trying Again	The time between a failure and your next attempt is where resilience lives.
P3	Mistakes	A mistake tells you what to adjust. It does not tell you who you are.
P4	Finishing	Finishing is a skill, and it is practiced at the end of hard things.
P5	Hard Things	Difficulty is not evidence of failure. It is the condition under which you improve.
P6	Patience	Progress is real long before it is visible.
P7	Courage	Courage is acting while the fear of looking bad is still present.
P8	Focus	Attention is a trainable skill and the first thing you lose when you are tired.
P9	Consistency	The athlete who shows up on ordinary days beats the one who is brilliant occasionally.

How to Use a Lesson Page

Each lesson is written three times, once for each age band. Coaches teach only the band in front of them. Do not read from the page during the session. Read the lesson before the session, choose the framing sentence and the question, and carry the three moments in your head.

What Each Section Is For

The Standard. The value in one sentence. This is what the lesson is actually about. It is written for the coach, not for the children.

Why This Lesson Exists. The reasoning behind the lesson's placement in the pillar. Read this once during certification, then not again.

Framing. The printed script for Huddle In. Deliver it as written. Sprouts framings name the word of the day and then define it in one sentence. Climbers and Summit framings are one or two sentences. No framing in this curriculum exceeds thirty words. The standard is not sentence count — it is that the coach adds nothing of their own. Extemporizing is what turns a three-minute Huddle In into a talk, and it is the most common failure in the entire frame.

Huddle-In Question. One question. Take two or three answers, not twelve. The question exists to make children look for the value during play, not to produce a discussion.

Moments to Watch For. Three specific, observable behaviors. During play the coach is watching for one of these. When one occurs, the coach names it out loud, immediately, using the child's name. This is the Call It Out step and it is where the teaching actually happens.

Huddle-Out Prompt. One question at the end of the session. The children answer. The coach does not summarize, correct, or add to their answers. Silence is acceptable and often productive.

Carry It Home. One small challenge, delivered in thirty seconds as the group breaks. It should be small enough that a child can complete it without help and specific enough that a parent can ask about it.

The Frame, in Order

1. Huddle In — three minutes. One sentence, one question.
2. Play — forty to fifty minutes. Run the sport session normally.
3. Call It Out — during play. Name the moment in real time, by name.
4. Huddle Out — five minutes. The children talk.
5. Carry It Home — thirty seconds. One challenge.

The sport is the vehicle. The life lesson is the cargo. If the session becomes a lecture, you have stopped driving.



Lesson P1 — Effort

The Standard. Effort is the part of any result you fully control.

Why this lesson exists. The first lesson of the entire curriculum, because it establishes the one thing a child can be held to regardless of talent, size, or experience. A coach cannot fairly demand results from a beginner but can fairly demand effort from anyone. Everything else rests on that distinction.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. TRY

Framing. "Today our word is TRY. Trying means you give your body and your brain to the thing, even when it is hard."

Huddle-In Question. "Can you show me your best trying face?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who keeps swinging, kicking, or reaching after missing several times in a row.
- A child who runs back to the line instead of walking.
- A child who attempts a new skill without needing to be asked twice.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who did you see TRY today? You can point at them."

Carry It Home. "Before we see each other again, try one thing at home that is a little bit hard for you. Tell your grown-up that you tried it."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "You do not control whether the ball goes in. You control how hard you go after it."

Huddle-In Question. "Name one thing in this sport you cannot control, and one thing you can."

Moments to Watch For

- Sprinting after a ball that is clearly out of reach.
- Resetting into ready position quickly after losing a point or a possession.
- Asking for one more repetition at the end of a drill.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who put in effort today that had nothing to do with the score? Tell us what it looked like."

Carry It Home. "Pick one class or one chore this week where you usually coast. Give it full effort one time and notice what changes."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Effort is the only variable in performance that is fully yours, which makes it the only honest measure of an athlete."

Huddle-In Question. "Where in your training do you already give full effort, and where do you quietly hold back?"

Moments to Watch For

- Maintaining technical standards during conditioning when no one is checking.
- Choosing the harder progression when given a choice.
- Continuing to compete in a game or set that is already decided.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Give someone here specific credit for effort today. Be specific enough that they know you were actually watching."

Carry It Home. "Rate your effort out of ten after every session this week. Bring the numbers back and be honest about the low one."

Lesson P2 — Trying Again

The Standard. The time between a failure and your next attempt is where resilience lives.

Why this lesson exists. Children rarely quit at the moment of failure. They quit in the gap that follows it, when the failure has time to become a story about themselves. This lesson makes that gap visible and treats shortening it as a trainable skill rather than a personality trait.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. AGAIN

Framing. "Our word is AGAIN. When something does not work, we do not stop. We say AGAIN and we go."

Huddle-In Question. "What is something you could not do before, but you can do now?"

Moments to Watch For

- Picking up a dropped ball or racquet and returning to the drill without being told.
- Asking for another turn after a miss.
- Getting back up quickly after a fall.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who said AGAIN today? Show me your AGAIN face."

Carry It Home. "The next time something at home does not work the first time, say the word AGAIN out loud and try once more."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Everybody misses. What separates players is how fast they are ready for the next ball."

Huddle-In Question. "How long does it usually take you to shake off a mistake — a second, a minute, or the rest of the game?"

Moments to Watch For

- A player who misses badly and is set for the next repetition within seconds.
- A player who attempts the same difficult shot again instead of avoiding it.
- A player who asks how to fix it instead of complaining about it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who had a rough moment today and came back from it? What did their reset look like?"

Carry It Home. "Invent your own reset. A breath, a tap on your leg, a word. Use it three times before our next session."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Resilience is not feeling nothing after failure. It is shortening the distance between the failure and your next full-effort attempt."

Huddle-In Question. "What is your current recovery time after a mistake, and what is it costing you?"

Moments to Watch For

- Returning to an unsuccessful tactic with a correction rather than abandoning it.
- Holding technical discipline through consecutive errors.
- Re-engaging teammates after a personal mistake instead of withdrawing into silence.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Describe your reset to the group. Be honest about what actually works and what only looks like it works."

Carry It Home. "Name one setback outside this sport that you are still carrying. Decide on one action that counts as your next attempt."

Lesson P3 — Mistakes

The Standard. A mistake tells you what to adjust. It does not tell you who you are.

Why this lesson exists. The most damaging habit in youth sport is the conversion of an error into an identity. This lesson separates the two and gives children a use for their mistakes, which is the fastest way to reduce the fear of making them.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. OOPS

Framing. "Our word is OOPS. OOPS is not a bad word. OOPS means we just learned something."

Huddle-In Question. "Can everybody say OOPS with a smile?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who shrugs off a miss and keeps going.
- A child who changes something after a miss, such as stepping closer or swinging differently.
- A child who tells another child it is okay after they miss.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who had a good OOPS today?"

Carry It Home. "Tell your grown-up about one OOPS you had today and what you learned from it."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "A mistake is data. It is telling you exactly what to work on next."

Huddle-In Question. "What mistake do you make most often in this sport? Say it out loud. It is not a confession, it is a starting point."

Moments to Watch For

- A player who identifies their own error before the coach does.
- A player who adjusts technique mid-drill after a miss.
- A player who repeats a mistake, notices it, and names it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What did a mistake teach you today?"

Carry It Home. "Remember one mistake from today and the fix for it. Bring the fix to the next session."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Elite performers audit their errors. Everyone else just replays them."

Huddle-In Question. "Do you analyze your mistakes or relive them? There is a difference, and only one of them makes you better."

Moments to Watch For

- Requesting specific feedback rather than general reassurance.
- Distinguishing an execution error from a decision error when describing a play.
- Coaching a younger or less experienced player through an error without judgment.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Name one error pattern you have noticed in yourself this month and what you are doing about it."

Carry It Home. "Keep an error log for one week. Sort every entry into technique, decision, or effort."



Lesson P4 — Finishing

The Standard. Finishing is a skill, and it is practiced at the end of hard things.

Why this lesson exists. Most children have far more practice starting than finishing. This lesson moves the coach's attention to the last repetition, the last lap, and the last point, which is where the habit is actually formed and where it is most often abandoned.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. FINISH

Framing. "Our word is FINISH. FINISH means we go all the way to the end, even when we are tired."

Huddle-In Question. "Show me how you look when you are almost done but you keep going anyway."

Moments to Watch For

- Completing a full lap, lane, or drill without stopping short.
- Staying in position until the coach says the drill is over.
- Putting equipment away before leaving the area.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who finished strong today?"

Carry It Home. "Finish one thing at home all the way. Put away every single toy, not most of them."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Most people quit with a little left in the tank. The finish is where the growth is."

Huddle-In Question. "Where do you usually start to fade — the beginning, the middle, or the end?"

Moments to Watch For

- Full-speed effort on the last repetition of a set.
- Playing out a point or a possession that looks lost.
- Staying to help pack up instead of drifting off.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who finished today better than they started?"

Carry It Home. "Pick something you have left unfinished at home or at school. Finish it this week."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "How you finish is a habit you are building right now, and it will show up in every arena that matters to you later."

Huddle-In Question. "What have you started this year and not finished? What actually stopped you?"

Moments to Watch For

- Holding technical standards through the final third of a session.
- Competing fully in a match that is already out of reach.
- Following through on something promised to a teammate earlier in the session.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What does finishing well require from you specifically? Not in general. From you."

Carry It Home. "Choose one unfinished commitment. Set a date to complete it and tell someone the date."

Lesson P5 — Hard Things

The Standard. Difficulty is not evidence of failure. It is the condition under which you improve.

Why this lesson exists. Children read difficulty as a signal that they are bad at something. This lesson reframes difficulty as the location of growth, which is the single most useful belief a young athlete can hold and the one that most reliably keeps them in a sport past the first plateau.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. STRONG

Framing. "Our word is STRONG. Hard things make us STRONG, the same way lifting something heavy makes our arms strong."

Huddle-In Question. "What is one thing that is hard for you here?"

Moments to Watch For

- Choosing the harder station or the farther target when offered a choice.
- Continuing a challenging task without asking to switch.
- Saying that something is hard and staying with it anyway.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What was hard today, and who stayed with it?"

Carry It Home. "Do one hard thing at home. Ten jumps, or one more page than you usually read."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "If it feels easy, you are practicing. If it feels hard, you are improving."

Huddle-In Question. "Would you rather be comfortable or be better? You cannot always be both."

Moments to Watch For

- Requesting a tougher partner or a harder progression.
- Staying with a skill that is not working instead of switching to a strength.
- Not asking to stop when fatigue is clearly showing.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What was the hardest part of today, and what did you learn by doing it anyway?"

Carry It Home. "Practice your worst skill for five minutes before you practice your favorite one."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Growth happens at the edge of your capability, which is the only place that is uncomfortable by definition."

Huddle-In Question. "Are you training your strengths because they matter most, or because they feel good?"

Moments to Watch For

- Deliberately working a weakness in front of peers.
- Sustaining quality under fatigue rather than trading form for survival.
- Accepting a correction that requires unlearning something familiar.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Where is your edge right now? Name it specifically enough that we could watch you work on it."

Carry It Home. "Design one training block this week that targets only what you are worst at."

Lesson P6 — Patience

The Standard. Progress is real long before it is visible.

Why this lesson exists. The gap between effort and visible result is where most young athletes lose faith in the process. This lesson gives children a way to keep working through that gap, and gives coaches language for the period after a technical change when performance temporarily gets worse.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. WAIT

Framing. "Our word is WAIT. Some things take many, many tries before they work, and that is normal."

Huddle-In Question. "Can you show me your patient body? Still feet, calm hands."

Moments to Watch For

- Waiting in line without pushing or cutting.
- Staying calm when a turn takes longer than expected.
- Continuing with a skill that has not worked yet without getting upset.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who was patient today?"

Carry It Home. "Practice waiting one time at home without complaining. Tell your grown-up that you did it."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "You will not see the improvement on the day you actually earn it."

Huddle-In Question. "What skill have you been working on the longest?"

Moments to Watch For

- Sticking with a technical change that is temporarily making performance worse.
- Waiting for the right ball instead of forcing every one.
- Not rushing a teammate who is still learning.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What are you still waiting on, and are you willing to keep working on it?"

Carry It Home. "Name one skill you will still be working on a month from now. Say it out loud so you remember it is supposed to take that long."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Technical change usually costs performance before it repays it, and most athletes quit inside that dip."

Huddle-In Question. "What have you abandoned too early because the results did not arrive fast enough?"

Moments to Watch For

- Holding a new technique through a poor stretch.
- Building a point or a possession patiently instead of forcing the outcome.
- Giving a developing teammate time rather than taking over.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What are you in the middle of right now that is not paying off yet?"

Carry It Home. "Pick a change you started and stopped. Restart it with a defined timeline of at least four weeks."

Lesson P7 — Courage

The Standard. Courage is acting while the fear of looking bad is still present.

Why this lesson exists. Fear of public embarrassment is the largest single brake on skill development in youth sport, and it intensifies with age. This lesson names the fear openly so that children stop treating it as a private defect and start treating it as a normal condition they can act through.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. BRAVE

Framing. "Our word is BRAVE. BRAVE means you try even when your tummy feels a little nervous."

Huddle-In Question. "What makes you feel brave?"

Moments to Watch For

- Attempting a new skill in front of the group.
- Volunteering to go first.
- Entering the water, court, or field after being nervous about it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who was BRAVE today?"

Carry It Home. "Do one brave thing before we meet again. Say hello to someone new, or try a food you have not tried."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Everyone here is worried about looking bad. The players who improve fastest do it anyway."

Huddle-In Question. "What do you avoid trying here because you might look bad at it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Volunteering to demonstrate.
- Trying an unfamiliar position or stroke in front of peers.
- Asking a question out loud instead of staying quiet.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who tried something today that they could have easily avoided?"

Carry It Home. "Do one thing this week that you have been avoiding because you might not be good at it."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "The fear of public failure never fully goes away. You simply stop obeying it."

Huddle-In Question. "What would you attempt in this sport if you knew nobody would judge you for it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Taking the decisive shot or leading a set with the group watching.
- Competing against a clearly stronger opponent without lowering effort.
- Admitting a gap in knowledge in front of peers.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What did courage cost you today, and what did it give back?"

Carry It Home. "Say yes to one thing this week that scares you slightly and is good for you."

Lesson P8 — Focus

The Standard. Attention is a trainable skill and the first thing you lose when you are tired.

Why this lesson exists. Coaches routinely tell children to focus without ever teaching them how. This lesson treats attention as a mechanical skill with a reset procedure, which converts a vague instruction into something a child can actually practice.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. EYES

Framing. "Our word is EYES. Focus means our eyes go where our body needs to go."

Huddle-In Question. "Can you keep your eyes on my hand while I move it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Watching the ball all the way in.
- Listening to instructions without turning away.
- Coming back to the drill after getting distracted.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who kept their EYES on the job today?"

Carry It Home. "Watch one thing all the way through at home without looking at a screen."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "You cannot concentrate for a whole hour, but you can concentrate for the next repetition."

Huddle-In Question. "What pulls your attention away most — other people, the score, or your own head?"

Moments to Watch For

- Recovering attention quickly after an outside distraction.
- Running the same short routine before each serve, shot, or start.
- Staying engaged during somebody else's turn.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "When did you lose focus today, and what brought it back?"

Carry It Home. "Do fifteen minutes of homework with your phone in a different room."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Concentration is not sustained. It is repeatedly re-established, and having a reliable way to re-establish it is the actual skill."

Huddle-In Question. "What is your pre-performance routine, and does it genuinely reset you or just fill time?"

Moments to Watch For

- Consistent use of a pre-shot or pre-start routine under pressure.
- Refocusing after an officiating decision or crowd noise.
- Maintaining tactical awareness late in a session.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Describe the moment today when your attention was at its best. What made that possible?"

Carry It Home. "Build a three-step reset routine and use it once this week in a setting that has nothing to do with sport."

Lesson P9 — Consistency

The Standard. The athlete who shows up on ordinary days beats the one who is brilliant occasionally.

Why this lesson exists. This lesson closes the pillar because it is the disposition the other eight produce. It is also the value most visible to parents and community managers, since it shows up as attendance, punctuality, and steady behavior rather than as highlight moments.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. EVERY

Framing. "Our word is EVERY. We come EVERY time and we try EVERY time, not just on the fun days."

Huddle-In Question. "Who came today even though they were a little bit tired?"

Moments to Watch For

- Arriving ready to participate without needing to be coaxed.
- The same effort on the fifth repetition as on the first.
- Taking part fully on a day the child said they did not feel like it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who showed up strong today?"

Carry It Home. "Do the same small thing two days in a row. Make your bed, or brush your teeth without being reminded."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Talent gets attention. Showing up gets results."

Huddle-In Question. "What would happen to your game if you did one small thing every single day for a month?"

Moments to Watch For

- Equal effort during the least exciting part of the session.
- Being ready at the start time without prompting.
- Practicing a skill alone before or after the group.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who is the most consistent person in this group, and what do they do that the rest of us do not?"

Carry It Home. "Pick one habit that takes two minutes. Do it every day until we meet again, including the days you do not want to."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Motivation is an unreliable partner. Standards and systems are what carry you through the stretches when it disappears."

Huddle-In Question. "What do you do on the days you do not feel like doing anything?"

Moments to Watch For

- Full engagement in a low-stakes or repetitive session.
- Holding personal standards without supervision.
- Bringing steady energy on a day when the group's energy is low.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What is your non-negotiable — the thing you do regardless of how you feel?"

Carry It Home. "Define one non-negotiable standard for the next thirty days and tell one person who will ask you about it."

Coach Notes for This Pillar

The Most Common Delivery Errors

- Talking through Huddle Out. The children name the moments. If the coach fills the silence, the children stop preparing answers because they learn the coach will do it for them.
- Calling out a moment late. Naming a moment ten minutes after it happened teaches nothing. Name it within seconds, while the child still remembers the feeling.
- Calling out only the strongest athletes. Effort, resilience, and finishing are available to every child in the session regardless of skill. Track who you have named over the past three sessions.
- Adding to the framing. Deliver the printed script and stop. The frame collapses when the Huddle In turns into a talk, and it collapses because the coach kept going, not because the script had two sentences in it.
- Substituting praise for naming. "Great job" is praise. "Marcus, you chased that ball down after you already lost the point — that is effort" is naming. Only the second one teaches.

When a Child Resists

Resistance in this pillar usually means the child has decided they are bad at the sport and is protecting themselves. Reduce the difficulty of the task before you increase the pressure of the expectation. A child who is failing publicly cannot hear a lesson about effort.

Name a moment for that child within the first ten minutes of the next session, even a small one. Being seen is what reopens a child who has closed.

Talking to Parents About This Pillar

Parents ask what their child is learning. The answer for this pillar is short and worth memorizing: we are teaching your child that effort is the part they control, that mistakes are information, and that finishing matters more than starting. Then give the parent one specific moment you saw their child produce. One specific moment is worth more to a parent than any description of the curriculum.

Play Academy Foundation, Inc. is a national nonprofit that brings professional sports, wellness, and recreation programming directly into the neighborhoods where children live.

Roughly half of American high school students attend no physical education in a given week, and fewer than three in ten attend daily, against a national recommendation of daily physical education. That deficit has held for thirty years. The Foundation exists because it is not going to close on its own.