



THE PLAY STANDARD | PILLAR TWO

Leadership

Nine Lessons for Sprouts, Climbers, and Summit

What do I owe the people around me?

Document 3 of 12 | Version 1.0

Play Academy Foundation, Inc.

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About This Pillar

Leadership is the second pillar because it converts a child who can endure into a person others can rely on. Perseverance is what a child does for themselves. Leadership is what a child does for the group, and it cannot be taught to someone who has not yet learned to stay in the room when things are hard.

This pillar deliberately begins with objects rather than people. A child is given responsibility for equipment and space before they are given responsibility for teammates, because responsibility for things is assignable on day one and responsibility for people has to be earned in front of the group.

The nine lessons 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
L1	Responsibility	You are responsible for your equipment, your space, and your own readiness.
L2	Initiative	Leaders move before they are asked.
L3	Teamwork	Your job is to make the person next to you more effective.
L4	Accountability	Own the mistake out loud, then fix it. Excuses cost you more than errors do.
L5	Encouragement	Naming what someone did well is a leadership act, not a courtesy.
L6	Communication	Say it early, say it clearly, say it loud enough to be useful.
L7	Service	Do the work nobody sees and nobody thanks you for.
L8	Integrity	Play by the rules when no one is watching and the call would go your way.
L9	Influence	You set the tone of a group whether or not you intended to.

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.

Leadership in this curriculum is not a title, a captaincy, or a personality type. It is a set of behaviors available to every child in the session, including the least skilled one.

Lesson L1 — Responsibility

The Standard. You are responsible for your equipment, your space, and your own readiness.

Why this lesson exists. Leadership begins with objects before it reaches people. A child who cannot be trusted with a ball bag will not be trusted with a teammate. This lesson is first because it is the only leadership value a coach can assign to every child on day one regardless of temperament or skill.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. JOB

Framing. "Our word is JOB. Everybody here has a JOB, and your first job is taking care of your own things."

Huddle-In Question. "What is one thing here that belongs to you today?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who puts equipment back where it belongs without being asked.
- A child who keeps track of their own water bottle or towel.
- A child who picks up something that fell, even if they did not drop it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who did their JOB today?"

Carry It Home. "Pick one job at home that is yours. Do it before anybody reminds you."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Nobody here is going to chase your gear, your water, or your readiness. That is your job."

Huddle-In Question. "What is something you have been letting somebody else be responsible for?"

Moments to Watch For

- Arriving with the right equipment without a parent handling it.
- Setting up or breaking down a station without being assigned to it.
- Taking care of shared equipment as carefully as their own.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who took responsibility for something today that was not assigned to them?"

Carry It Home. "Take over one thing at home this week that a parent currently does for you."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Responsibility is the entry fee for leadership. Nobody follows a person who cannot manage their own affairs."

Huddle-In Question. "What are you still outsourcing that you should have taken over by now?"

Moments to Watch For

- Managing their own schedule, equipment, and preparation without reminders.
- Taking ownership of a shared space or piece of team equipment.
- Correcting a problem they did not create because they noticed it first.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Name one thing in this program that would fall apart if nobody took responsibility for it. Who is doing it now?"

Carry It Home. "Identify one recurring thing your family or team handles for you. Take it over completely this week."

Lesson L2 — Initiative

The Standard. Leaders move before they are asked.

Why this lesson exists. Most children are trained by school and home to wait for instruction. This lesson deliberately rewards the child who acts first, which is uncomfortable for coaches who value control and is precisely why it has to be taught on purpose.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. GO

Framing. "Our word is GO. Sometimes you do not wait to be told. You see something that needs doing and you GO."

Huddle-In Question. "Can you find one thing right now that needs to be picked up?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who starts helping set up without being asked.
- A child who volunteers to go first.
- A child who notices a cone out of place and fixes it.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who said GO today without waiting?"

Carry It Home. "Find one thing at home that needs doing and do it before anybody asks you."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "The gap between noticing something and doing something about it is where leadership lives."

Huddle-In Question. "What did you notice needed doing last week that you walked past?"

Moments to Watch For

- Beginning a drill correctly before the coach finishes explaining it.
- Organizing teammates into groups without being assigned.
- Helping a struggling teammate without being prompted.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who moved first today, before anybody told them to?"

Carry It Home. "Do one useful thing this week that nobody asked you to do and nobody assigned to you."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Waiting to be told is a habit, and it is a hard one to break at twenty-five if you never broke it at fifteen."

Huddle-In Question. "Are you a person who waits for permission? Answer honestly."

Moments to Watch For

- Leading a warm-up or drill segment without being assigned to it.
- Raising a problem to the coach with a proposed solution attached.
- Setting a standard for the group by doing the thing first.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What did somebody here do today that you should have done and did not?"

Carry It Home. "Start one thing this week that you have been waiting for someone else to start."

Lesson L3 — Teamwork

The Standard. Your job is to make the person next to you more effective.

Why this lesson exists. Children hear teamwork as a rule about sharing. This lesson reframes it as a performance obligation, which is both more accurate and more useful, and it applies equally in individual sports where the teammate is a practice partner rather than a line-mate.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. TEAM

Framing. "Our word is TEAM. TEAM means we help the person next to us do better, not just ourselves."

Huddle-In Question. "Who is on your team today? Point at them."

Moments to Watch For

- A child who passes when they could have kept it.
- A child who waits for a slower partner.
- A child who helps someone else get ready.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who helped somebody else today?"

Carry It Home. "Help one person at home do something faster or easier than they could alone."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "You can have a great session and your partner can still have a terrible one. That means you did half the job."

Huddle-In Question. "What is one thing you could do that would make your partner better today?"

Moments to Watch For

- Feeding a partner good balls in practice rather than difficult ones.
- Making the extra pass or the simple play instead of the individual one.
- Adjusting their own pace so a partner can stay in the drill.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who made somebody else better today, and how?"

Carry It Home. "Do one thing this week that makes a sibling, classmate, or teammate better at something."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Individual excellence that does not raise the group is a smaller achievement than it feels like from the inside."

Huddle-In Question. "Does this group get better because you are in it, or just because you are good?"

Moments to Watch For

- Deliberately partnering with a weaker player rather than the strongest available.
- Sacrificing personal statistics or reps for the group's outcome.
- Sharing a technical insight instead of keeping an advantage.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Name one person here who makes everybody around them better. What specifically do they do?"

Carry It Home. "Pick one person in this program who is behind. Do something concrete this week to bring them forward."

Lesson L4 — Accountability

The Standard. Own the mistake out loud, then fix it. Excuses cost you more than errors do.

Why this lesson exists. This lesson pairs directly with P3, Mistakes. P3 handles the error internally. L4 handles it socially. A child who has learned that a mistake is information can now afford to say it out loud, which is the step that builds trust in a group.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. MINE

Framing. "Our word is MINE. When we make a mistake, we say MINE, and then we fix it."

Huddle-In Question. "Can everybody say the word MINE with a strong voice?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who admits they went the wrong way instead of blaming somebody.
- A child who says sorry without being told to.
- A child who fixes something they knocked over.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who said MINE today?"

Carry It Home. "The next time you make a mistake at home, say MINE out loud before anybody says it for you."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Everybody in this group already knows whose mistake it was. Saying it out loud only costs you the two seconds of discomfort."

Huddle-In Question. "What is your usual move when you make a mistake in front of people — own it, explain it, or blame it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Claiming an error immediately instead of letting it hang.
- Refusing to blame a teammate, a call, or the equipment.
- Apologizing to a specific person rather than to the group in general.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who owned something today that they could have let slide?"

Carry It Home. "Take responsibility for one thing this week that you have been quietly blaming on somebody else."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Excuses are expensive because they teach the people around you that your word needs verifying."

Huddle-In Question. "What is the last thing you explained away that you should have simply owned?"

Moments to Watch For

- Owning a tactical or judgment error, not just an execution one.
- Accepting responsibility for a group outcome they only partly caused.
- Declining to correct the record when an excuse was available and true.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What does it cost a group when one person never takes responsibility? Be specific."

Carry It Home. "Go to one person this week and own something with them directly. No explanation attached."

Lesson L5 — Encouragement

The Standard. Naming what someone did well is a leadership act, not a courtesy.

Why this lesson exists. Encouragement is the leadership behavior most available to the least skilled child in the group, which makes it the fastest route to giving a struggling child a real role. It is also the behavior that most directly reinforces the Call It Out step of the frame by teaching children to do what the coach does.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. CHEER

Framing. "Our word is CHEER. When somebody does something good, we say it out loud so they can hear it."

Huddle-In Question. "Can everybody give me one big cheer right now?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who claps or cheers for somebody else.
- A child who tells another child "good job" without being prompted.
- A child who encourages somebody who missed.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who cheered for somebody else today?"

Carry It Home. "Tell one person at home something they did well today."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Anybody can shout "good job." A leader tells you exactly what you did well, which is the part you can repeat."

Huddle-In Question. "What is the difference between somebody cheering for you and somebody telling you exactly what you did right?"

Moments to Watch For

- Giving specific rather than generic praise to a teammate.
- Encouraging the player who is struggling most, not the one already succeeding.
- Being the first voice after somebody else's mistake.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who said something specific to you today that you want to hear again?"

Carry It Home. "Give three people specific credit this week. Not "good job" — tell them what they actually did."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Groups run on whoever is willing to speak first after something goes wrong. Decide whether that is going to be you."

Huddle-In Question. "Are you generous with credit, or do you quietly keep score?"

Moments to Watch For

- Publicly crediting a teammate for something the athlete could have claimed.
- Encouraging a rival or a competitor for the position.
- Speaking up immediately after a teammate's visible failure.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who in this group is the first voice after something goes wrong? What does that do for the rest of us?"

Carry It Home. "Give credit to one person this week in front of somebody whose opinion matters to them."

Lesson L6 — Communication

The Standard. Say it early, say it clearly, say it loud enough to be useful.

Why this lesson exists. Communication is placed in the habits band because it takes several sessions to establish. Children speak late and quietly not because they lack the words but because speaking up carries social risk. The coach's job is to make the group reward it.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. CALL

Framing. "Our word is CALL. When you want the ball or you need help, you CALL out loud so we can hear you."

Huddle-In Question. "Can everybody call out their own name as loud as they can?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who calls for the ball.
- A child who says they need help instead of going quiet.
- A child who warns somebody that a ball is coming.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who used their big CALL voice today?"

Carry It Home. "Ask for one thing at home using your clear, out-loud voice instead of pointing or waiting."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Information that arrives too late is not information. It is commentary."

Huddle-In Question. "Do you talk during play, or do you go quiet and hope somebody else handles it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Calling for the ball or calling a teammate off before the play, not after.
- Asking a clarifying question during instructions rather than guessing.
- Telling a teammate something useful mid-drill.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What did somebody say today that actually helped you in the moment?"

Carry It Home. "Say one thing out loud this week that you would normally keep to yourself and later wish you had said."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Most failures inside a team are not talent failures. They are two people who each assumed the other one had it."

Huddle-In Question. "When you go quiet under pressure, what is it actually protecting?"

Moments to Watch For

- Organizing the group verbally without being the designated leader.
- Delivering a correction to a peer directly rather than through the coach.
- Staying vocal when the group is losing or fatigued.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who talks when it is going badly? That is worth more than who talks when it is going well."

Carry It Home. "Have one direct conversation this week that you have been avoiding by going around the person."

Lesson L7 — Service

The Standard. Do the work nobody sees and nobody thanks you for.

Why this lesson exists. This lesson moves leadership from visible to invisible, which is the transition that separates a child who enjoys being in charge from a child who is actually useful. It also seeds the community service component of the Foundation's cross-curricular programming.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. HELP

Framing. "Our word is HELP. Helping counts even when nobody notices you did it."

Huddle-In Question. "Can you find one way to help before we start today?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who cleans up something that was not theirs.
- A child who helps carry equipment without being asked.
- A child who holds a door, a gate, or a net for somebody.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who helped today when nobody was watching?"

Carry It Home. "Do one secret helpful thing at home. Do not tell anybody you did it."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "The jobs nobody wants are the jobs that tell you who somebody actually is."

Huddle-In Question. "What is the least fun job here, and who usually ends up doing it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Volunteering for setup, breakdown, or the least appealing station.
- Helping a younger or newer participant without being assigned.
- Finishing a task somebody else abandoned.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who did the unglamorous work today?"

Carry It Home. "Do one job at home this week that nobody likes doing, and do not mention it."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Service without recognition is the only reliable test of a motive, and you are the only person who can run it on yourself."

Huddle-In Question. "Would you still do it if nobody ever found out you did?"

Moments to Watch For

- Mentoring a younger athlete with no audience and no credit.
- Handling logistics or equipment that no one tracks.
- Declining recognition for something they did.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What work keeps this program running that most people never see?"

Carry It Home. "Find one need in your community this month and meet it without posting about it."

Lesson L8 — Integrity

The Standard. Play by the rules when no one is watching and the call would go your way.

Why this lesson exists. Integrity is placed in the dispositions band because it is only observable in the absence of supervision, which means the coach almost never sees it directly. It is taught by making the standard explicit and by naming it loudly on the rare occasions it becomes visible.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. TRUE

Framing. "Our word is TRUE. We tell the TRUE thing even when the other thing would be better for us."

Huddle-In Question. "What does it mean to tell the truth?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child who calls their own ball out.
- A child who admits they stepped over the line.
- A child who says somebody else got there first.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who told the TRUE thing today?"

Carry It Home. "Tell the true thing one time this week when it would have been easier not to."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "The rules you follow when nobody is looking are the only rules you actually have."

Huddle-In Question. "Has anybody here ever taken a call they knew was wrong? You do not have to answer out loud."

Moments to Watch For

- Calling their own ball out or their own foul when nobody saw it.
- Completing the full repetition when the coach is looking elsewhere.
- Correcting a score in the other side's favor.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Why does it matter what you do when nobody is watching, if nobody is watching?"

Carry It Home. "Do one thing properly this week that you usually shortcut when nobody would know."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "Character is what your standards hold at when the cost of holding them is real and the benefit of dropping them is available."

Huddle-In Question. "Where are your standards softest? Everybody has a place where they bend."

Moments to Watch For

- Making an honest call in a decisive moment.
- Holding a training standard with no supervision present.
- Refusing an advantage that was offered and would not have been questioned.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "What is the smallest thing you could get away with here? What does it mean that you do not?"

Carry It Home. "Identify one place your standards are soft. Close it this week and tell no one."

Lesson L9 — Influence

The Standard. You set the tone of a group whether or not you intended to.

Why this lesson exists. This lesson closes the pillar by telling children something they usually have not considered: leadership is not optional and not a title. They are already influencing the group. The only question is in which direction, and this is the lesson that makes older children usable as peer leaders in the Huddle Out.

SPROUTS | AGES 3 TO 7

Word of the Day. COPY

Framing. "Our word is COPY. The little kids COPY what the big kids do, so we do good things on purpose."

Huddle-In Question. "Who here has somebody at home who copies you?"

Moments to Watch For

- A child whose good behavior spreads to the children near them.
- A child who sets a good example for a younger participant.
- A child who does the right thing first and others follow.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who did something today that other people copied?"

Carry It Home. "Do one good thing at home where somebody younger can see you do it."

CLIMBERS | AGES 8 TO 12

Framing. "Your energy spreads to the four people closest to you every session, whether you meant it to or not."

Huddle-In Question. "If everybody here copied you today, would this group get better or worse?"

Moments to Watch For

- Lifting the energy of the group at a low point.
- Setting a standard others match without being asked.
- Refusing to join in when the group starts complaining or cutting corners.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who changed the mood of this group today, and which direction did they change it?"

Carry It Home. "Notice one place this week where people follow your lead. Lead somewhere good on purpose."

SUMMIT | AGES 13 TO 17

Framing. "You do not get to choose whether you influence the room. You only get to choose the direction."

Huddle-In Question. "What are you currently making acceptable in this group by participating in it?"

Moments to Watch For

- Setting the tone at the start of a session without being asked to.
- Shutting down a negative pattern in the group by not joining it.
- Mentoring a younger band and adjusting their behavior by example.

Huddle-Out Prompt. "Who here has the most influence in this group, and is it the person with the most talent?"

Carry It Home. "Pick one standard you want this group to hold. Model it every session for the next month without mentioning it."

Coach Notes for This Pillar

The Most Common Delivery Errors

- Assigning leadership to the best athlete by default. The most skilled child in the group is not automatically the one setting its tone, and treating them as the leader teaches everyone else that leadership is a reward for talent.
- Naming only the loud leadership behaviors. Initiative and communication are easy to see. Service and integrity are nearly invisible, which is exactly why they need to be named out loud on the rare occasion a coach catches them.
- Letting one child lead every session. Rotate who runs the Huddle Out, who sets up, and who calls the group in. Leadership that is never distributed becomes a role rather than a skill.
- Correcting a child's leadership attempt in front of the group. A child who takes initiative and gets it slightly wrong must be affirmed for moving first, then adjusted privately. Correct it publicly once and no one in that group volunteers again.
- Treating accountability as an apology ritual. The standard is owning it and fixing it, not performing contrition. A child who says sorry and changes nothing has not met the standard.

When a Child Resists

Resistance in this pillar usually comes from one of two places. Either the child has been burned before for stepping forward, or the child does not believe the group will accept them in a leadership role. Both are social problems, not character problems, and neither is solved by asking the child to try harder.

The remedy is a small assigned role with a guaranteed outcome. Give the child sole responsibility for one concrete thing — the cones, the scorekeeping, the count-in — and then publicly credit them for it. Manufactured competence in front of peers is what reopens a child who has decided leadership is not for them.

A child who resists by over-leading, taking charge of everything and directing peers constantly, needs the opposite intervention. Give that child L3 Teamwork and L7 Service as their personal assignment, and name it for them when they make somebody else better instead of doing it themselves.

Talking to Parents About This Pillar

The answer for this pillar, worth memorizing: we are teaching your child to take responsibility for their own things, to move before they are asked, to own a mistake out loud, and to make the people around them better. Then give the parent one specific moment you saw their child produce.

Parents of quieter children often assume this pillar is not for their child. It is worth saying plainly that service, integrity, and encouragement are leadership behaviors that require no volume at all, and that the quiet child in a group is frequently the one holding its standards.

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.