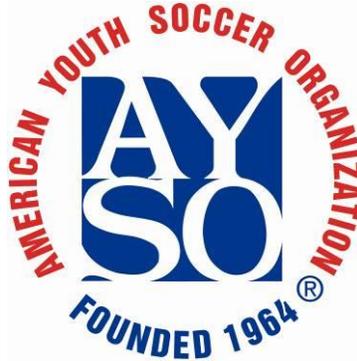


## Nurturing and Retaining Youth Referees



Change History	
August 1, 2007	Revised and renamed
October 15, 2008	Updated
February 10, 2012	Updated
August 29, 2012	Updated
August 5, 2013	Reviewed
October 13, 2013	Customer Service Pod Added
October 13, 2016	Reviewed

## **1. DESCRIPTION**

This workshop is designed to help participants understand the necessity of a youth program in their Region, or to improve their existing youth referee program.

## **2. GOALS**

At the completion of this workshop, the participants will be able to develop a plan for supporting the youth referees in their Region.

## **3. PREREQUISITES**

There are no prerequisites other than a desire to improve the refereeing program

## **4. ATTENDEE MATERIALS**

None. Instructors should make attendees aware of the Manual for Youth Referees available at [ayso.org](http://ayso.org)

## **5. INSTRUCTOR EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS**

1. LCD projector and computer
2. Power Point presentation
3. Flip chart and markers

## **6. INSTRUCTOR NOTES**

It would be helpful to have assistant instructors to help monitor breakout activities.

## LESSON PLAN

### I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduce yourself and co-instructors.
- B. With an emphasis on the development and retention of youth referees, this workshop will explore techniques for supporting the youth referees in your Region.
- C. Explain that this workshop is a sharing of ideas to strengthen and improve your referees in AYSO. It is not intended to help participants organize a youth referee program. However, these ideas can easily be used to initiate a Region's youth referee program if one does not exist. For more information, refer to the AYSO referee publication, "Developing and Maintaining a Youth Referee Program" available at the AYSO website - [www.ayso.org](http://www.ayso.org)

### II. BODY

- A. Begin by reviewing what a youth referee program is.
  1. In some organizations, US Soccer, for example, the term youth referee is used to refer to any referee who referees youth games. In AYSO, we define youth referees as referees between the ages of 10 and 17. In some AYSO Regions the youth referee program is called the PRO (Player Referee Organization) program, since most of the youth referees are also players. Because this group of referees is different from adult referees in many ways, AYSO has developed a support system to help Regions manage this valuable source of addition referees.
- B. A successful youth referee program is made up of the youth referees and the adults who help organize, administer and maintain the program. The Regional Referee Administrator should have oversight of this program so that it may be integrated with other referee programs and functions.
  1. Youth Referees: Youth referees can be boys AND girls between the ages of 10 and 17 with the following age restrictions for certification:

<b>Certification Level</b>	<b>Minimum Age</b>
U-8 Official	10
Assistant Referee	12
Regional Referee	12
Intermediate Referee	14
Advanced Referee	16
National Referee	18

2. The Adults: All adults who participate in the youth referee program – the organizers, PRO coordinator, instructors and mentors – must be currently registered volunteers and must complete AYSO’s Safe Haven Certification. It would be preferable for youth referee mentors, instructor coordinators, organizers and administrators to be certified referees as well

C. Development of youth referees

1. Ask, “What are some of the important things you should do to help prepare and develop youth referees? How are youth referees different from adult referees?”
2. Divide the class into small groups and ask the groups to think of ideas that aid in the development of young referees. (If the group is small, just have one discussion group). After a period of time, ask the group spokesmen for the groups’ suggestions. Write these down and discuss in class.
3. The ideas should include:
  - a. Train them well. Include in your discussion whether or not youth-only classes are preferred.
  - b. Refer them to the AYSO Manual for Youth Referees. Help them fill out the inside cover. (Download and print a copy for display at the Workshop).
  - c. Assign adult mentors to each youth referee. The mentors should watch them referee and stay in touch with them throughout the season.
  - d. Pair them with an experienced youth referee, if possible. A youth referee can provide insight that an adult may not have.
  - e. Appoint an active youth referee coordinator. The coordinator can arrange mini-training sessions, answer questions, act as a liaison between the youth referee and the Regional Referee Administrator, arrange fun activities, etc.
  - f. When should referee events consist of both youth and adults and when should events be separate?
  - g. Provide them with complete and proper uniforms. If they have completed the referee training and all the requirements to be a referee, you should provide them with a referee uniform. A “Referee” T-shirt on a young referee shouts the message, “Not a REAL referee.”
  - h. Teach them what to do about abuse from coaches or spectators. Practice dealing with those situations. Make sure they know that they should find an adult volunteer rather than confront the abuse directly, and that they should report the abuse afterwards.
  - i. ELIMINATE ABUSE before it happens.

#### D. Retention of Youth Referees

1. Ask the participants to go back into their groups and think of ideas that will help retain the youth referees and keep them coming back season after season.
2. After a short time, ask the group spokesmen for their suggestions and discuss. Be sure to include these points:

- a. Make sure they were well-trained.

The first step in retaining a referee is to provide them with adequate training. If you provide your new referees with good training, they will be better prepared for it and have fewer problems with games. If games go well, referees will want to keep doing them. Also, you are more likely to retain them because they will be enjoying themselves.

- b. Eliminate bad behavior by coaches and spectators.

It isn't fun to referee while under verbal attack. You will lose referees. Make sure the board enforces a strict "zero tolerance" policy regarding referee abuse. When referees are having pleasant experiences they are more likely to continue. Have senior referees and/or Region staff at each field to intervene when coaches or spectators are inappropriate.

- c. Assign mentors to support them.

New referees often need extra support at the beginning. A mentor can answer questions, help with touchline control and offer suggestions. They can help the referee build confidence while they gain valuable experience. They can help a young referee overcome a "bad game". For this reason, it is important that they be experienced referees themselves. Use experienced women referees as mentors for new young female and male referees. This will help to cement the reality that women are as capable as men when it comes to officiating.

- d. Establish good communication.

Keeping your referees informed and up to date is critical. New youth referees will feel lost if they are not kept well-informed. Do not rely on word of mouth to convey important information; do use more than one form of communication. Facebook, Twitter, e-mail, game-day posting and telephone are all valuable tools. Regular meetings are valuable as well. People do their best when they know what is expected of them.

- e. Form a youth referee club.

Forming a special club for youth referees can provide them with the opportunity to share their unique view of the refereeing world. Perhaps a PRO group would be appropriate in your Region. Be sure to have fun at

these meetings. Play Soccer Bingo. Show video clips. Serve pizza.  
Remember: If you feed them, they will come!

- f. Supply them with uniforms that actually fit.

Youth referees grow. After a while their uniform may not fit. Show that you value their contribution by periodically updating the uniform. Don't forget that some girls will prefer a woman's cut uniform.

- g. Don't push them into games they aren't ready for.

It's a delicate balance between encouraging young referees to do more challenging matches and pushing them into situations they are not ready for. Doing a match that you simply can't handle is disheartening and many referees have let this end their careers.

- h. Encourage continuing training.

Referees will gain confidence as they learn more about the games they officiate. Offer frequent opportunities for additional training. These can range from complete courses to mini-sessions on a limited topic.

- i. When you are looking for youth referees, recruit entire teams.

The new referees will go through training together and share experiences. These referees may feel more comfortable throughout the process and may be able to work together on the field with someone they already know. Youth referees are often very responsive to refereeing with a buddy. Encourage them to work on referee teams with their friends: for example, where there are similar skill levels, make it easy for two to sign up together as assistant referees for a game.

- j. Recruit brothers and sisters.

Siblings can provide continual support to one another and even the ride to and from the field can become an opportunity for learning.

- k. Make sure you encourage your more experienced referees to upgrade.

Entry level referees should see that youth referees can progress with experience and additional training to do upper level matches and that all referees can aspire to do the most challenging matches.

- l. Work around their schedules.

Youth referees have varied interests. Allowing referees to work around their other obligations will make it more convenient for them to help with games. Be flexible.

- m. Reward them.

There are many ways to reward unpaid volunteers. Tell them when they do a good job. Volunteers appreciate sincere praise. Provide water and

snacks to them. If your Region has a snack bar, make sure referees can get drinks and food throughout the day. Give them equipment. Have an end of the season party. Provide them with soccer videos and books. Give them special flipping coins, movie tickets, amusement park tickets, college or professional soccer game outings. And anything else you can think of!

- n. Thank them.

Finally, thank them, just as you thank all your referees. Thank them often. Make sure players and coaches thank them. Thank them publicly, at meetings and in print.

### **III. CONCLUSION**

- A. Stress that if a youth referee program is to succeed, it must have the full support of the Region management and the adult referees.
- B. Youth referees must be treated with respect and must not be abused or exploited in any way.
- C. The youth referee program must be a part of the overall referee program, but not the principal provider of referees.
- D. Ask for and respond to any questions.
- E. Ask participants to please consider implementing the plans that they have developed today. With a little effort it is sure to benefit both their Regions and the youth volunteers who participate.