***Clinton Youth Softball Player Progression by Age Group:***

**Coach Pitch (Grades K-1st):**

* This division is primarily for those just starting to play organized softball, the overall goal is to teach the fundamentals of hitting and fielding. The objective by the end of the season is to ensure that each player has a “positive experience” with softball, the desire to return next season and has successfully demonstrated the following skills:
  + **General Skills**
    - Warm up techniques
    - Good sportsmanship (end each game with a high five line and cheer)
  + **Defensive Skills**
    - Names and location of defensive positions
    - Players should know how to execute a throw (proper grip) and mechanics
    - The fundamentals and form of catching a ball (how to hold your glove, flipping it under the waist, two hands to catch the ball)
    - Proper fielding position (down and ready)
  + **Offensive Skills**
    - Ability to identify each of the bases and their location
    - The ability to follow a batting order
    - Proper batting stance, location and how to hold a bat properly
    - Players should start to understand the difference between a good pitch and bad pitch (ball and strike) and be familiar with this terminology
    - What to do after the ball is hit (as a batter and a runner)
    - Knows how, why and when to run to the next base

**Minor Division/U10 (Grades 2nd, 3rd, 4th)**

* This level of softball is where the players should recognize situations and understand "HOW BEST" to make certain plays. This division will feature a wide range of skills as you will have players new to the league, new to the division and those that have been playing in the age group for the previous two seasons.
  + **General Skills**
    - Emphasis on the importance of teamwork, and working together.
    - Ability to follow coaches instructions
    - Warm up techniques and routine
    - Teach players the importance of bringing proper equipment to games/practice (uniform, visor, glove, water bottle, etc)
    - Number of outs per inning
    - Help players to identify 3-5 positions that they like playing and want to learn more about
    - Good Sportsmanship (End each game with a High Five)
  + **Defensive Skills**
    - Understanding of different defensive situational plays
    - Fielding techniques (proper down and ready position)
    - Ability to identify all defensive positions and what the responsibilities are at each position
    - Uses both hands to catch the ball vs. one handed or trapped catches
    - Understands where to make the defensive play and why
    - The ball is always "LIVE"
    - Ground ball fielding techniques vs. Fly ball fielding techniques
    - Relaying the ball from the outfield to the infield
    - Communication (calling for a fly ball)
    - Backing up plays
    - Fundamentals of pitching mechanics
    - Difference between a Force Play and a Must Tag
  + **Offensive Skills**
    - Understanding of base running strategies, and following instruction from base coaches
    - Ability to follow and adhere to a batting order with reduced guidance from coaching staff
    - Proper Batting stance and feet position based on being right handed or left handed
    - Proper base running (on the ground vs. in the air)
    - Teach the fundamentals of stealing a base:
      * When to steal (when ball leaves pitcher’s hand)
      * How to Steal
    - Identification of a ball vs. a strike

**Junior Division/U12 (Grades 5th, 6th, 7th)**

* The primary objective at the senior level is the same as the previous levels with emphasis on preparing players for advancement to high leagues and more competitive play. The junior level is both competitive and instructional. It is critical that the managers and coaches of this division provide sound training and good balance of playing time and position rotations for all players.
  + **General Skills**
    - Coming on time to practices and games prepared to play softball
    - Player led warm-up routine (captain or team leader)
    - Help player begin to specialize in 2-3 positions
    - Teach consistency in player skills
    - Always show good Sportsmanship on and off the field (no bad mouthing other players)
  + **Defensive Skills**
    - Player has the ability to make strategic defensive decisions and understand why they are making a certain play
    - Correct pitching mechanics
      * Advanced pitching mechanics, beginning to learn different types of pitches
    - Proper footwork to field and throw quickly
    - How to judge a fly ball and get in the correct position
    - How to rundown a base runner (pickle)
    - Covering bases and backing up positions after a hit
    - Use Catching skills (blocking the plate with the ball, blocking wild pitches, throwing out runners)
    - Catcher takes on leadership role informing the team of the next play
  + **Offensive Skills**
    - Competence in batter's box, body positioning, situations, etc
    - Proper grip of the bat
    - Acceptable level of determining ball vs. strike
    - Proper base running techniques including:
      * Stealing after the ball crosses the plate
      * When to tag up
      * How and when to slide
    - Introduction to bunting (form, and understanding of when to bunt)

**Senior Division/U14 (grades 7th, 8th, 9th)**

* This division is both competitive and instructional with more emphasis on the competitive aspects of the game. Managers focus on fielding a competitive team while also providing the players with a fun learning experience. All players are ensured playing time. Players should focus on refining their softball skills with a strong emphasis on consistency. Often the difference between an average player and a good player is the ability to consistently execute the required skills.
  + **General Skills**
    - Come on time to practice and prepared for practice or games (including safety equipment)
    - Always show good Sportsmanship on and off the field (no bad mouthing other players)
    - Player led warm-up routine (captain or team leader)
  + **Offensive Skills**
    - Show proper batting stance, bat position, and swing execution
    - Reasonable competence and consistency in making contact with the ball
    - Know the difference between bunting for a base hit and a sacrifice bunt
    - Demonstrate proper base running techniques including:
      * Exploding off the base after the ball crosses the plate
      * When to tag up vs. going half way
      * Proper sliding techniques
  + **Defensive Skills**
    - Execute proper pitching motion
    - Improved catching skills (blocking the plate with the ball, blocking wild pitches, throwing out runners)
    - Cover bases correctly when receiving a throw or fielding a ball
    - Complete understanding of how to catch a fly ball (positioning, calling the ball, relaying it to the infield etc)
    - Properly execute a double play
    - Know what can happen after a ball is caught in foul territory