

# Teaching Juniors

*Teaching Juniors can be wonderfully rewarding, as their energy and enthusiasm is very contagious. But teaching Juniors is a very different proposition to that of teaching adults. Here are few ideas I have about teaching Juniors.*

## Visualisation

**Children have wonderful imagination.** That's why they love games, cartoons, being read fictional stories, the idea of Father Christmas. By the time they are adults society has added realism to their thinking and to some extent reduced their ability to visualize and imagine.

**Visualization is a skill, and like with all skills it can be improved with practice.** One putting exercise I use with Juniors is that I ask them to squat behind the ball and visualize the ball going in the hole. Then when they have this picture, I ask them to hold the picture in the mind and then putt, only thinking of this image. Juniors at a more advanced level I may ask to do the same, i.e squat behind the ball visualizing the ball going in, but then I may ask them to give me a **creative image** of the ball going in the hole. I like the Juniors to create their **OWN imagery** as this is then more powerful. Some images my students have come up themselves are, "I visualize that the edge of either side of the hole represents gate posts, and then I imagine that the gate is open ready for my ball to go in the hole", another was "I imagine that from my ball to the hole there is a small channel cut into the

green, so I have to merely get the ball rolling and then the ball will automatically drop into the hole" or "I imagine that the hole is a big strong black magnet and my ball is a bit of metal being pulled towards it" I may try to prompt their thinking a little, for instance if I know the Junior is a keen Ice Hockey player I may suggest, "Imagine the putter is the ice hockey stick, the golf ball is the puck, and then the hole is the goal, and there's no goalkeeper in the goal" I then may say "would you be confident of putting the puck in the goal when there's no goalkeeper?" and they may answer "Yeah, it's easy, no problem", so I'll then say it's the same with putting the ball into the hole, cause also there is no goalkeeper. Thus, in their mind they've associated their intended action of putting as something easy.

These type of visualizing, using creative imagery, can obviously be applied to any area of the game.

## Imitation and mentoring

Children are great mimics. That's primarily how they learn to speak – first they hear and then they try to mimic. When adults try to learn a foreign language they often learn with the analytical left side of the brain, and so they need to know the logic behind the sentence construction etc, hence your language teacher explains to you grammar. But just imagine if you said to a 4 year old complex grammar rules you would then **paralyze their ability to learn**. It's the same if you try to teach a Junior golf in a technical manner. One exercise we use at my Academy is that we watch for 10 minutes a Tour Player on the computer, in slow motion on a continual loop. I say nothing, the loop acts as a kind of "**hypnosis**" and then I ask them to go out and practice, and then to **copy** what they've seen. Then later I may video the

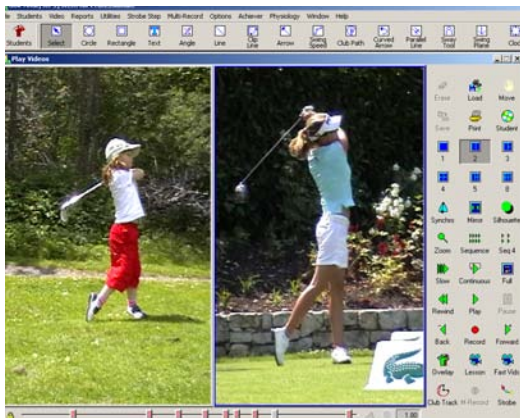


Junior and replay their swing side by side with the Tour Player, and then I ask **them** what the difference is, and then let them go and practice again. It's remarkable the improvement that can be made with virtually **no verbal information** given by the teacher.

Mentoring is similar to imitation – children can benefit from having a “role-model”, someone who they look up to and can then copy. A lot of Juniors like to pretend for instance that they are a Tiger Woods, and then try to copy his game. This is **mentoring**. I like to ask each Junior which is his or her favourite player, and then watch on a 2 split screen a picture of the Junior, with his favourite player next to it.

## Make learning fun

Lecturing is not learning!  
**Learning** should be



**interactive**...a participation, a co-operation. For instance a Pro who lectures the children with the do's and don'ts of the rules will soon find his pupils losing attention. Instead, introduce each rule (maximum one rule per week) in a comical way. Perhaps put the ball up a tree and start the session asking for a volunteer to try and play the shot! When he fails, then explain that we need rules to help in situations we couldn't

otherwise play on from. Then ask for three volunteers who can then be “A”, “B” and “C”, to show the different options for the Unplayable Lie rule. Then the following week, open up with a quiz on the rules that they have learnt...a sure way to keep them **interested and motivated!**

Children have a much shorter attention span than adults, and have yet to develop a “rational adult style thinking ability”, and instead enjoy “**fun and games**”.



It's important to introduce

everything as a game, and not to dwell too long any one particular activity – instead mixing it up to keep them **constantly stimulated**.

## Building character and esteem

Golf is often cited as a sport which can engender and develop desirable personal qualities such as self **discipline**, self **control**, self **honesty**, **humility** and **compassion**. Thus, the game in this sense is a vehicle for learning far more important skills than getting the ball in the hole in the least amount of strokes possible.

If you do little competitions for the Juniors, involve “the spirit of how you play” as part of the **competition**. Have rules or etiquette quizzes, but more importantly explain the reason and logic behind each of the rules. To merely say to a Junior “you **MUST** stand there on the teeing ground” is not as effective as saying “the reason that you stand behind is so that you don't get hit on the head when the other player is making his backswing”

Young people's self esteem can be very fragile. One minute they win a little putting tournament and they feel top of the world, very validated and important. The next week they always finish last and soon revert to the opinion that “they are no good”. It's important

to take the focus away from external success. Put the focus on **internal success**. So if someone has scored 22 around the putting green one week, the next week you say your target is 20 and so on. **Make the competition personal, as opposed to the rest of the group.** And then **reward personal success**...ice creams are always a favourite! If I'm making a group award as opposed to a personal reward, I try to make it for things like "best etiquette today" or "best sportsmanship award", as opposed to lowest gross score.



Even though golf is normally regarded as an individual game, a sense of camaraderie and teamwork can still be nurtured. Doing competitive practices in pairs, whereby they act as scorers for each other can help with bonding, as well as give a sense of competition. Years ago, at my Dennis the Menace Academy in England, we used to have a Ryder Cup tournament, and we would pick two captains and divide the Juniors into Europe and USA, and then they had to give themselves a name of a player, and then pretend to be that player in a shoot out tournament.

Golf teaches **self responsibility**, i.e that you are responsible for the consequences of your own actions. This is a great lesson for young people to learn – it's easy to blame poor putting on bad greens, or their poor score because of the course. We all know that it's easy to make excuses, but I teach my young players that when they score 78, it's 78 with no "if's", no "buts", it's 78 – that was their level of play on this

particular day. Then go and write down on their analysis chart what they did well, write down what they learnt, and then it's finished.

It is important for young people to learn that life is not only about taking, but one should give at least as much as one receives. In our Junior Weeks, we often integrate one session where we "Help the Greenkeeper". This may include of going round with a bucket filling divots, or repairing pitchmarks and raking bunkers.

### Developing Excellence

Teaching good technique to a young player over a number of years is not difficult for any experienced teacher...it's just a nurturing process, feeding the player slowly, spoon by spoon. But how do you make a champion...or indeed can you make a champion? If you wrote down the qualities of a champion, what would they be? I think most people would include determination, willpower, desire, competitiveness, self belief. These important things are all **character traits**. **So I believe, that to develop excellence your Junior Programme should be devised around building and developing character.** How to go about this is a huge topic. But to give an example at our Academy we do exercises like at the end of the day each student must say "What they did well today", in order to build self belief.

Teaching Juniors is very rewarding, but remember the more fun you have doing it, the more fun they will have participating in it. And remember, a talented child will always find success, but isn't one way to judge a teacher is to judge him on his worst pupil? Your success as a teacher is judged by how much you progress your clients, in every sense.

## Summary

1. Visualisation - encourage creative imagery
2. Imitation and mentoring- show their swing side by side with their favourite player and let them hypnotise themselves
3. Make learning fun- keep them constantly stimulated and make learning interactive
4. Build character and esteem-make competition personal and reward personal success
5. Develop excellence- encourage and foster character traits such as determination, will



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