

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™. You and your NJTL Chapter are about to embark on an exciting journey—not only introducing young people to the game of tennis, but helping them learn specific skills and valuable life lessons that will enable them to succeed in other areas of their lives. This curriculum contains the material, the structure, and many ideas on how to deliver the program. However, it is important to remember First Serve Life Skills Coaches are the key ingredient to a successful program.

Coaches make these materials come to life for First Serve participants. Their commitment and willingness to embrace curriculum concepts, confidence and familiarity with the activities, and ability to adapt the program to a specific location are all important to the program's success. First Serve coaches also serve as role models for the skills and values presented in the curriculum.

This Instructor Guide will serve as a resource manual for delivery of the curriculum. The introduction includes sections on curriculum design, overall program structure, national and local training, pacing and timing of lessons, and various other aspects of logistics and planning.

NJTL MISSION and FIRST SERVE LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM DESIGN

The USTA/National Junior Tennis & Learning (NJTL) network is a nation-wide group of community tennis organizations seeking to develop the character of young people through tennis and education. Founded in 1969 by Arthur Ashe, Charlie Pasarell, and Sheridan Snyder, this growing network of tennis providers share similar values, ideals, and goals by:

- reaching out to those who may not otherwise have the opportunity to play tennis
- instilling in youngsters the values of leadership and academic excellence
- giving all kids (regardless of income, race, gender) the opportunity to fully develop their tennis skills so they can derive a life time of enjoyment from the sport

Given this mission, the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ incorporates several important features of effective youth development programs. These include emphasis on the whole child, focus on developmental assets, mastery learning, and the importance of instructor preparation and training. These are briefly described below.

The Whole Child

The lessons and activities in this curriculum emphasize development of the whole child—within their environment—to help them grow physically, mentally, and socially. The curriculum is intended to be youth-centered (rather than teacher- or program-centered) and paced to suit the needs of participants. The curriculum is modular and flexible, so it can be adapted to individual sites that have a variety of settings, facilities, age groups, and available staff. (Further details about delivery and pacing of the lessons are included later in the Introduction.)

Assets

As participants move through the three levels of the curriculum—Game, Set, and Match—they will acquire an array of important life skills, among them how to communicate effectively,

manage emotions, work as part of a team, set and reach personal goals, and deal with peer pressure. These skills should be viewed as personal or internal assets that will help participants develop resiliency and long-term physical, mental, and social health.

Other assets are external and defined as positive experiences youth receive from the people and institutions connected with them. These include resources such as community programs, safe places, clear boundaries and expectations, adult role models, and opportunities for education.

The First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ lessons offer a context to provide external assets where young people can acquire personal or internal assets. Tennis and education programs offer a structure that includes fair rules, guided practice and competition, adult role models, and many opportunities to develop and integrate physical, social, and emotional skills. For additional information about asset models in youth development, refer to the Search Institute (www.search-institute.org).

Mastery Learning

Learning how to be good at something takes time. For example, a new player's forehand is rough and imprecise at the beginning. With adequate practice over time, the learner makes better contact and increases both pace and accuracy. Mastery of a good forehand stroke eventually comes with repeated skill instruction, reinforcement, and practice.

We have all seen this cycle of skill exposure, practice, and mastery when it comes to sports. Similarly, skills like interpersonal communication, healthy eating and drinking habits, and group socialization are mastered over time, with practice. Accordingly, the curriculum introduces specific skill sets in each unit for initial exposure and immediate practice. However, mastery of the skills will only come with added practice and use of these life skills over time. Additional practice activities are included in each lesson to help participants achieve mastery. In addition, certain life skills introduced earlier are reviewed in later units—often in a more advanced way to provide additional skill instruction and application.

More importantly, the skills need to be practiced by the participants and reinforced by coaches and education leaders during their day-to-day interactions. These everyday learning opportunities are often called *teachable or coachable moments*—times when a newly learned skill can be applied and reinforced in real-life situations.

Well-Prepared Local Program Leaders and Coaches

The concepts and skills introduced in the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ should be familiar to local education leaders and coaches. However, to deliver the lessons effectively, local leaders and coaches need to invest time to learn the content and sequence of the curriculum, practice the lessons and activities among themselves, and set the stage for success by planning how to best implement the program at their particular site.

Similar to the mastery learning curve for participants, education leaders and coaches may have a learning curve of their own. Excellence in program delivery—with ultimate benefits to youth—will come with repeated practice and improvement by local leaders to find what works best.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The summary chart on the following page indicates the structure and order of the curriculum and the skills addressed in each unit. As shown, there are three curriculum levels (Game, Set, and Match), 18 instructional units (six in each level) with several Foundation Lessons and practice activities. Each unit centers on one focal life skill. The curriculum provides practice and skill reinforcement, across all three levels, in five key life skill clusters.

- Three Program Levels.** The curriculum has three levels: Game, Set, and Match. The first two levels are designed so that participants can complete the activities with the guidance of a life skills coach. Match is for more experienced participants who are a bit older and have more experience. The curriculum is designed, so that a program level can be completed in one school year if a participant regularly attends an after-school First Serve program.
- 18 Instructional Units.** Each of the three levels contains six units, which introduces and provides practice on a focal life skill.
- Foundation Lessons and Practice Activities.** Each unit has both Foundation Lessons, which are delivered in a set sequence for all participants, and Practice Activities, which provide extra practice opportunities later in the year. Each unit has four Foundation Lessons and several additional Practice Activities. A sample school year schedule for a core program at the Game Level is illustrated below.

Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
	Core Participants → First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ →									Summer Programs	
	Game units 1-6, 24 Foundation Lessons, Approximately 1 unit per month						Practice Activities		Graduation Challenge		

- Life Skill Clusters.** Five major skill clusters are practiced across all three levels of the curriculum: using interpersonal skills, demonstrating teamwork, applying healthy habits, managing emotions, and improving organizational skills. Tennis is actually the sixth skill cluster, but the First Serve program is based on the understanding that each Chapter has a tennis skills instruction program in place. Therefore, the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ should be integrated into the tennis instruction programs.

FIRST SERVE LIFE SKILLS CURRICULUM™ OVERVIEW

CURRICULUM UNIT/FOCAL LIFE SKILL	SKILL CLUSTERS PRACTICED ACROSS THE CURRICULUM				
	Using Inter-personal Skills	Demonstrating Teamwork	Applying Healthy Habits	Managing Emotions	Improving Organizational Skills
GAME LEVEL					
1. Being a Team Player	X	X			
2. Being Positive	X	X		X	
3. Understanding Rules		X		X	
4. Practicing Proper Hygiene			X	X	
5. Talking with Others	X	X			
6. Appreciating Diversity	X	X			
SET LEVEL					
7. Embracing Fitness		X	X		
8. Understanding Nutrition		X	X		
9. Improving Study Skills	X				X
10. Staying Calm and Focused			X	X	
11. Dealing with Peer Pressure		X	X	X	
12. Resolving Conflicts	X		X	X	
MATCH LEVEL					
13. Speaking in Front of Others	X				X
14. Making Good Decisions			X	X	X
15. Setting Personal Goals					X
16. Planning to Attain Personal Goals					X
17. Overcoming Challenges				X	X
18. Giving and Receiving Help	X	X			

TEACHING MATERIALS

First Serve provides three primary teaching resources: an Instructor Guide, a participants' guide called the First Serve Playbook, and a Graduation Challenge Guide.

The Instructor Guide

The Instructor Guide provides step-by-step explanations of how to conduct the lessons and activities at each level, with many examples of the types of answers expected and the intended outcomes of the discussions, activities, and role-plays. In addition, all lessons and activities begin by itemizing the materials that might be needed, the best location for delivery, the teaching format, and the estimated duration of the lesson.

Each unit contains four sections: the first three provide some background and identify major instructional topics taught in the unit; the last two provide the “meat” of the unit, the actual instructional material, as outlined below:

- **Introduction:** Provides the rationale for the unit and overviews the major concepts.
- **Learning Objectives:** Identifies specific skills and behaviors that the participants should be able to perform after completing the lesson.
- **Foundation Lessons:** Presents step-by-step instructions for introducing and practicing the life skill in each lesson. These are considered mandatory activities that will enable all participating children to participate in common program elements. Each unit contains four Foundation Lessons, or 24 per program level. The Foundation Lessons reflect the core program and are delivered first, in sequence—prior to the Practice activities.
- **Practice Activities:** Includes supplemental activities designed to reinforce concepts and give participants additional practice in applying them to different situations, on and off the court. These activities are based on the premise it often takes repeated exposure and practice for participants to acquire the skills in this program, just as it takes repeated practice to improve one's tennis strokes. Participants engage in these activities after all Foundation Lessons are completed in order to hone their life skills and prepare for the Graduation Challenge.

The Playbook

A separate Playbook is provided for participants at each level of the program (Game, Set, and Match). It summarizes essential points made in the lessons, and provides space for completing activities by filling in the blanks, and making personal notes. The Playbook is for participants to keep and it serves as a record of life skills completed at each level.

The Playbook also includes a **My Serve** activity at the end of each unit. My Serve requires participants to apply a life skill beyond the First Serve setting—at school, home, or in the community. Each My Serve activity identifies a specific task where participants can apply a specific life skill, record the results of their efforts, and discuss their experience with their First Serve coaches and teammates.

Playbook pages appear in the Instructor Guide text where relevant, with a reference for the instructor to call out the page number for participants. For instructors, answers are provided in italics and parentheses in the Instructor Guide.

PROGRESS ASSESSMENT AND GRADUATION

Participants in First Serve will receive recognition after they graduate from each level of the curriculum. To receive that recognition, they must successfully complete a Graduation Challenge—The Game Challenge, the Set Challenge, or the Match Challenge, depending on where they are in the program.

The Graduation Challenge Guide

The Graduation Challenge Guide delineates how to assess participant progress and complete challenge procedures (this guide is a separate document). Each challenge consists of two mandatory components to verify that participants: 1) participated in the Foundation Lessons and completed the learning activities, and 2) can recognize and recall basic knowledge associated with life skills and demonstrate the skills in the First Serve setting. The following describes these elements.

1. Participation

- Review of the Playbook, and sign off, by a trained First Serve Life Skills Coach, to ensure a participant has properly completed all activities.
- Verification, by the First Serve Life Skills Coach, the participant completed all Foundation Lessons and was listed on the First Serve core participant roster during the school year (First Serve monthly reporting).
- Review of My Serve activities to reinforce how life skills have been used beyond First Serve—in other settings such as home, school, or the community.

2. Skill Knowledge Assessments

- Completion of an objective knowledge assessment that includes true/false and multiple-choice questions. The questions assess knowledge of the life skills and how they are used. Knowledge assessments are created by the Home Office and scored by Chapter coaches and educators based on specific criteria.
- A skill demonstration administered by a trained First Serve Life Skills Coach. This skill assessment requires participants to demonstrate a specific skill, and described how it is used, when prompted by a First Serve leader or coach.

LOCAL LOGISTICS AND PLANNING

Several logistical issues must be considered in order to deliver the most successful life skills program possible. While it is likely you have already worked through many of these issues, please take some time with your local team to consider the planning issues presented below.

Life Skills Coaches

One local representative from each site who attends the national training should be identified as the lead life skills coach for planning and delivery of the curriculum. The curriculum does require new learning and new routines for working with participants. And the experience and expertise of the leader will determine, to a great extent, how much participants learn and benefit from the program. Delegating life skills delivery responsibilities to several poorly trained individuals is not recommended because it will result in a weak program for participants. However, once the program is solidly under way at a local site, additional volunteers and staff can be trained to help deliver the curriculum.

Location

The First Serve program requires participants to engage in a combination of tennis, academic support, and life skills lessons. There should be access to tennis courts and a nearby indoor facility such as a recreation center, classroom, or private facility. The facility where you conduct First Serve lessons should be free of major distractions such as, close proximity to other active groups, or excessive noise. The curriculum has been designed so that most activities can be done either indoors or outdoors. However, it would be best if you can identify a consistent location or pair of locations where you will conduct the lessons. This will help participants develop a learning routine. For example, outdoor lessons might be conducted on a specific court that has bleachers or benches, while indoor lessons might be conducted in a particular classroom that has chairs, tables, and a whiteboard or flipchart for recording participants' ideas. Each lesson has guidelines for the best location.

Equipment

Most life skills lessons demand simple equipment, like tennis rackets and balls, the Playbook, and/or paper and pencils. Sometimes they require or recommend a flipchart or whiteboard for recording participants' responses to questions. Occasionally some special item is necessary, such as a measuring device or specific educational tool.

It is important to review each lesson early on, identify the equipment you will need, and have it ready before the lesson begins.

Timing and Pace

Ideal timing and pace for delivering the lessons is illustrated in the chart below. The First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ should be delivered in an after-school setting, throughout the school year, to be successful. If the curriculum is delivered too fast, out of sequence, or with few practice opportunities, concepts are unlikely to be absorbed by the participants or internalized before they are asked to move on to a new topic.

First Serve recommends delivering life skills lessons twice per week throughout the school year. The first session should include formal delivery of a Foundation Lesson and the second session should involve at least some additional practice with the same Foundation Lesson skills. This will allow Chapters to complete approximately four Foundation Lessons per month. Moving faster may result in poor skill mastery by the participants.

In addition to the core program, if other aspects of your program include a drop-in program where participants come intermittently, or a summer program, you can use First Serve Lite™, the modified life skills program, with these groups.

The figure below illustrates how a Chapter can complete the Game Level with a group of participants. This chart assumes the program is delivered in an after-school setting that begins in mid September and ends in early June—corresponding to a school-year calendar. NJTL understands that most Chapters will likely alter the schedule somewhat to accommodate local calendars. The Foundation Lessons, for all six Game units, are delivered in sequence, starting in September and continuing through February. The Practice Activities provide additional skill practice and reinforcement in March and April. These activities help prepare the participants for the Graduation Challenge in May, which is followed by a graduation celebration in early June. A similar schedule is recommended for participants enrolled in Set and Match levels.

Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug
Core Participants → First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ →									First Serve Lite™		
Game units 1-6, 24 Foundation Lessons Approximately 1 unit per month					Practice Activities		Graduation Challenge Celebration				
Drop-in, and Summer Participants → First Serve Lite™											

Identification and Placement of Participants

In order for the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™ to have a significant impact, youth need to be exposed to the lessons and participate in the activities on a consistent basis. Therefore, Chapters must communicate to all participants and their parents the importance of consistent attendance during the program period. The Chapter should make it clear the core program is not a drop-in program. Prior to enrollment, parents and participants should be notified that regular attendance is required and participants are expected to follow the behavior policies specified by the Chapter. Participants, and their parents, who cannot commit to a regular schedule should be served with the First Serve Lite™ program.

The USTA/NJTL White Plains office has guidelines for participant placement and parent communications that support optimal attendance and program participation at a Chapter.

Attendance and Make-Up Lessons

To graduate from each level of the First Serve Life Skills Curriculum™, participants must attend all Foundation Lessons, complete the related Playbook activities, and complete the skill assessments. This is to ensure that all First Serve participants have been exposed to a common set of skills that can benefit them in tennis, school, and other aspects of their lives.

Some participants will miss lessons periodically, so it is important to schedule make-up opportunities. These lessons can be conducted in small groups or individually. Some Chapters may set aside a specific time each week for make-up lessons—and only use the time as needed. It is also important for participants to be responsible for their own make-up lessons by

monitoring their Playbooks for activity completion. Remember, taking personal responsibility for full participation and program progression are valuable life skills.

Age of Participants

Of course, there will be some variation in the ages of participants among Chapters. In general, younger participants are expected to move through the program at a slower pace in order to ensure the basic concepts are learned and reinforced in smaller increments. Alternately, older participants can grasp many of the early lessons quite quickly, and move through the program a bit faster.

Student/Instructor Ratio and Grouping

The age of participants also has implications for grouping and program delivery. In order to implement a quality program, participant/instructor ratios should not exceed 12 to 1 in the life skills lessons—with the ratios for the younger or less mature participants below 8 to 1. This curriculum cannot be properly implemented with ratios in the 30 or 40 to 1 range, as participants will not receive the attention they need to learn the concepts. Team teaching and training volunteers and tennis coaches to reinforce concepts are good strategies to ensure that participants receive the proper level of support.

Blending Life and Tennis Skills

In most cases, the skills introduced throughout the curriculum can be applied in tennis, school, and other situations in participants' lives. For example, the curriculum identifies why it is important to communicate well on the court, in school, and in the community. Further, the prescribed activities offer opportunities to practice the target skill in a variety of environments. Likewise, goal-setting and controlling your emotions apply to tennis, school activities, and personal endeavors. The curriculum provides many examples and specific guidance on how to make these linkages, while My Serve activities require the application of life skills in other settings. However, you are encouraged to add personal ideas and examples in order to make the program more relevant for participants and bring the concepts and skills to life.

Activity, Discussion, and Demonstration

Lecturing to groups of participants is the least effective way to implement this program. Interaction, dialogue, role-play, competitive games, and physical activity all work better. Lessons and activities have been designed to encourage active participation through physical activity, demonstration, dialogue, role-play, Playbook exercises, and group work on and off the court. Participants should always be doing something that allows them to participate during the lessons.

Participating by doing will not always involve a tennis activity. In many cases it means working with a group to generate a written list and share ideas (mental doing), role-playing (introducing yourself), or participating in simple games (positive comments about teammates) to illustrate a point. Ultimately, the curriculum calls on your creativity and personal experiences to add activities, examples, and games that will help participants engage as they develop new skills.

ONGOING TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

NJTL will provide ongoing technical assistance to help individual Chapters implement the curriculum and operate programs that effectively support learning. This assistance will emphasize operational planning and implementation support for delivering the curriculum, as well as general help in establishing a Chapter, generating resources, evaluating programs, and connecting with the media and with professional tennis players and organizations. These activities will also involve periodic visits to local sites and consultation with key individuals. For up-to-date information about technical assistance services, please contact:

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