Middle school wrestling crash course

Four sample sessions. Clear partner roles. Readiness before resistance.

Sample 60-minute sessions for middle school beginners, adapted by the supervising coach. Times include instruction, partner changes, water, and recovery. Repeat a session when athletes need more practice. Stop immediately on pain, unsafe contact, or the coach's signal. No unsupervised partner work.

Before starting

Use an appropriate wrestling mat and coach-assigned partners matched by size, experience and readiness. Demonstrate the start, allowed actions, finish and stop signal. Build in water and recovery. These are sample teaching plans, for use alongside appropriate supervision.

Progression

Start cooperatively, then add one predictable reaction. Use controlled position rounds only after both partners can reproduce the skill. Repeat sessions as needed. The clock does not require the coach to move athletes past their readiness.

Contact and landing

Keep the neck aligned. Do not strike through a crossface, twist a trapped knee, force a posted shoulder, or use neck pressure as conditioning. Mat returns are separate directly supervised lessons. Do not leave your feet to cut out a partner's leg from rear standing.

Injury response

Stop on pain or loss of control. Remove an athlete immediately if a concussion is suspected. No same-day return; return-to-sport clearance is a healthcare decision. Notify the parent or guardian and follow emergency procedures.

References and scope

USA Wrestling Core Curriculum

NFHS wrestling rules resources

CDC concussion response

These are original WOTM practice notes. WOTM is not affiliated with or endorsed by USA Wrestling. Confirm the event ruleset and current local modifications. Revision: September 12, 2026.

SESSION 1 / SAMPLE 60-MINUTE PLAN

Stance, movement & a first entry

Maintain balance, create a close entry, and recover a stable base.

10 MINUTES | Prepare to move

Easy locomotion, comfortable mobility, stance-and-freeze games, then slow solo level changes. Use short bouts with resets; the warmup should leave athletes ready to learn.

12 MINUTES | Stance and penetration

Show foot spacing, knee and hip bend, and hands ready. Rehearse a short level change and knee-touch entry on the mat, with a soft contact and immediate trail-leg recovery. No entry races.

12 MINUTES | Wrist tie to single-leg entry

Demonstrate the setup and head-inside entry. Start with a cooperative partner and stop at a stable captured-leg position. Teach one controlled finish only after the coach checks both partners; otherwise keep the drill entry-only.

10 MINUTES | Cooperative decision drill

The partner presents a leg or keeps it out of range. Enter only when close enough; reset when the lane closes. No surprise sprawls, hopping, or twisting against a captured knee.

10 MINUTES | Apply through a movement game

Use mirror stance or controlled hand-touch games in a clear area. No takedowns or push-out scoring. Alternate brief turns with recovery and feedback; success is balance and responding to the stop signal.

6 MINUTES | Recover and review

Walk, take water, and show one controlled entry. Each athlete names a useful cue and one partner responsibility. Record what needs repeating next session.

READINESS CHECK

Both athletes can stop on command; the attacker keeps the neck aligned and recovers the trail foot. Practice the finish only after a coach checks the entry and both athletes' landing mechanics.

Allotted time includes instruction, transitions, water and recovery. Stop and repeat cooperative practice whenever control deteriorates.

SESSION 2 / SAMPLE 60-MINUTE PLAN

Stop a shot & find the corner

Use distance and defensive position before connecting to a go-behind.

10 MINUTES | Prepare familiar movement

Use easy stance motion, level changes, and solo leg-back steps. Rehearse a light sprawl shape without a partner before adding contact. Include resets and water.

12 MINUTES | Review the attack

Repeat the day-one entry. Teach athletes to recover stance when the opening closes instead of forcing a second shot. High-crotch entries are an optional later progression, not an automatic response to every missed single.

12 MINUTES | Defend, then circle

Show distance, hands and head position, then hips as the shot gets deeper. Use a controlled entry-to-sprawl and go-behind. Keep pressure off the neck and clear the legs before circling.

10 MINUTES | One predictable reaction

The attacker gives a slow shallow or deeper entry as directed. The defender chooses a step-back defense or a light sprawl. Reset after the shot stops; add the go-behind only when the position is stable.

10 MINUTES | Constrained position rounds

Use brief coach-supervised rounds from familiar neutral positions, with equal or longer recovery. Limit allowed actions to the skills checked today. Avoid live front-headlock starts for athletes who have not learned the hold and release.

6 MINUTES | Recover and review

Walk and take water. Demonstrate a controlled defensive step and name when to reset. Do not use repeated partner snaps or neck pressure as conditioning.

READINESS CHECK

The defender can stop a slow entry without impact on the neck, free the legs, and circle under control. Add resistance only to positions both partners already understand.

Allotted time includes instruction, transitions, water and recovery. Stop and repeat cooperative practice whenever control deteriorates.

SESSION 3 / SAMPLE 60-MINUTE PLAN

Build a base & escape

Connect base, hand control, feet, and a turn to face the partner.

10 MINUTES | Prepare bottom movement

Use comfortable hip movement, base-to-stand repetitions, and a slow solo hip heist. Keep support hands close enough to protect the shoulder. Omit neck-loading rolls and partner carries.

12 MINUTES | Base and hand control

Explain referee's starting position separately from active wrestling. Rebuild knees beneath hips, identify the controlling wrist, and keep elbows close. Never pry individual fingers.

12 MINUTES | Stand and face

Show a foot underneath the hips, coordinated chest and hip rise, controlled hands, and a turn to face. Repeat this escape before introducing a switch; the switch is an optional later lesson.

10 MINUTES | Cooperative escape drill

The top partner supplies a light, predictable waist-and-arm connection and releases as directed. The bottom partner builds base, controls a wrist, stands, clears, and faces. Reset before either athlete loses balance.

10 MINUTES | Short escape challenges

Begin with coach-approved light resistance for brief rounds. End the attempt at a balanced stand-and-face or at the stop signal. The rider follows without lifting; repeat cooperative work if control deteriorates.

6 MINUTES | Recover and review

Take water and rehearse one clean solo stand-up. Ask why standing alone is not a completed escape. Note hand-control or balance corrections for the next session.

READINESS CHECK

The bottom athlete can rise with hand control and finish balanced, facing the partner. The rider can release on cue. No lifts or mat returns in this introductory escape drill.

Allotted time includes instruction, transitions, water and recovery. Stop and repeat cooperative practice whenever control deteriorates.

SESSION 4 / SAMPLE 60-MINUTE PLAN

Top control & skill review

Follow the hips, complete one controlled breakdown, and review familiar positions.

10 MINUTES | Prepare and review

Use familiar stance, entries, and solo stand-ups at a gradually increasing pace. Review the stop signal and safe partner roles. Include recovery; no nonstop requirement.

12 MINUTES | Ride and one breakdown

Teach an angled waist-and-arm connection and active feet. Choose either a controlled chop or spiral breakdown. Move the partner's base without striking an elbow or wrenching a shoulder. Repeat one option well.

12 MINUTES | Control before a turn

Continue the ride or demonstrate a cooperative half-nelson entry only when the coach approves. Turn the torso with footwork; never force the neck. Crossfaces, ankle rides, and mat returns remain separate supervised lessons, not required day-four skills.

10 MINUTES | Follow and reset

The bottom athlete rebuilds slowly while the rider follows the hips. Stop when the bottom athlete reaches a stable standing position; reset instead of adding an unlearned return. No lifts or cut-backs.

10 MINUTES | Coach-selected skill rounds

Use short rounds from familiar neutral or top/bottom positions with clear allowed actions and recovery. Score the learning task, such as maintaining base or completing a checked escape. Full matches require separate readiness and rules instruction.

6 MINUTES | Recover and next steps

Take water, review one neutral action and one mat action, and choose the next practice target. Explain that completing these sessions does not certify competition readiness.

READINESS CHECK

The rider can follow without loading the neck or trapping an arm. Both partners can demonstrate the stop and release. Competition-style rounds are optional and require coach approval of the relevant skills.

Allotted time includes instruction, transitions, water and recovery. Stop and repeat cooperative practice whenever control deteriorates.