



Portland Soccer Club Coaching Guide

Thank you for volunteering your time to coach for the Portland Soccer Club. The following guide is a collection of coaching tips compiled across several sources. The first few sections highlight tips that are relevant for all rec coaches, followed by sections that are tailored to the specific age groups, Dribblers, Kickers, and Strikers.

This is intended to give you the resources you need to create a player and parent experience that is positive, fun, and rewarding, giving young players exposure to the joys and lifetime benefits that come from team sports and physical exercise. Please feel free to search online for additional tips, tricks, and videos.

The philosophy will be to create a positive environment for learning and having fun. At this age, it's not about the winning or losing, it's about learning the fundamentals, listening to a coach, following directions, being respectful to other players, and, most of all, *having fun*.

Effective coaches will lead age-appropriate activities and create a child centered learning environment.

Characteristics of Effective Youth Coaches

- **High Moral and Ethical Standards**

Be an appropriate role model.

- **Honesty**

Be fair, no one likes it if you cheat.

- **Respect of Players, Parents, and Community**

Develop strategies to develop positive relationships with all involved.

- **Understanding Readiness Factors for Participation**

Maturation — when to begin, how the game is structured.

Learning — what are children able to comprehend and how do they learn.

Motivation — internal desire to play and have fun.

- **Communication**

Appropriate verbal and nonverbal responses (body language & gestures).

Appropriate language (words, tone, volume, rhythm, articulation).

- **Development of an Appropriate Temperament for Coaching Children**

Be sensitive to each child.



Exhibit a calm personality.
Show patience.
Observe and Guide; Don't Direct.
Use your normal voice, not a whistle.

- **Ability to Motivate Positively**

Develop high levels of self-confidence.
Positive coaching.
Don't yell.

- **Possess Leadership Qualities**

Be prepared.
Be organized.
Demonstrate discipline — identify appropriate and inappropriate behavior and enforce team rules.
Learn to be critical of behavior, not a player's personality.

- **Be Dedicated to Child Development and the Sport of Soccer**

Understand what is appropriate for different ages and levels of play.
Let every child play (and play a lot).

- **Be Enthusiastic**

Your enthusiasm is contagious.
Celebrate!

- **Have a Good Sense of Humor**

Keep things light.
Have fun.
Smile and laugh.

- **Must Have Current Knowledge of Coaching Youth Soccer.**

Learn about children and how they learn.
Learn the rules.
Learn appropriate practices, activities, and content.
Learn appropriate tactics and strategy.
Learn how to have fun.

Feedback

For younger players, feedback should be **positive** and **frequent**. Players up to around age nine view effort and ability as synonymous. If they try hard, they believe they are really good. Coaches should try to combine feedback with the player's first name. It leads to a more personalized approach and players tend to focus on the feedback better.



The use of physical activity such as laps, push-ups, sit-ups etc., as punishment for misbehavior is an inappropriate method of discipline. Players will come to believe that physical training is actually a form of punishment. Players need to understand the importance of fitness and making them run when there is a behavior problem is counter to what you want to develop. When the consequences warrant, **short-term** exclusion from the activity will often get a positive result.

No Laps, Lines, or Lectures!

In practice, design activities that keep all players engaged throughout the length of the activity.

- If players are standing in line, and not moving, the activity will not keep their interest;
- Soccer is a game that is fluid, always in motion, and requires thinking at all times, so practices should simulate that when possible;
- Running laps, especially without a ball, is a waste of time. All practice activities should take place on the field, preferably with a ball;
- Lectures should be left for the classroom. Children come to practice to be active and participate, not to be talked to for extended periods of time



Working with Parents

Coaching is exciting and rewarding, and parents will appreciate any communication you can provide early and often throughout the season. Work with parents proactively, and try to provide as many updates as you can.

Occasionally you may experience difficulty with parents. Some parents may want their child to play more, others may question your judgment as a coach. Whatever the concern, a parent is generally just looking out for their child, often at your expense. Don't be discouraged. There are some things you can do to open up communication and make dealing with parents a positive aspect of your coaching duties.

Encourage parental involvement. (If you have a preference for a certain time to voice these concerns, such as after practice.)

Know what your objectives are and do what you believe to be of value to the team, not to the parents. No coach can please everyone! Know the club and game rules. Be prepared to abide by them and to explain them to parents.

Handle any confrontation one-on-one and not in a crowd situation. Try not to be defensive. Let the parent talk while you listen. Often a parent will vent their frustrations just by talking. Listen to their viewpoint, then thank them for it. Resist unfair pressure. It is your responsibility as coach to make the final decision. This doesn't mean that you can't still listen to parents. Don't discuss individual players with other parents. Show the same respect for each player on the team that you want the parents to show toward you.

Ask the parents not to criticize their children during practice or a game. Don't let your players be humiliated, even by their own parents. Don't blame the players for their parents' actions.

Be consistent! If you change a rule or philosophy during the season, you may be in for trouble. At the very least, inform players and parents of any change as soon as possible.

Most importantly, be fair! If you treat all players equally and with respect, you will gain their respect, and that of their parents as well.



Remember that you will be dealing with all types of children, and with parents having different backgrounds and ideals. The challenge for you as a coach is to address these differences in a positive manner so the season will be enjoyable for everyone involved.

Trouble Shooting:

- If players are misbehaving or not getting along, separate the players by having one as a sub while another plays on the field.
- If one player is scoring over and over, encourage them to only shoot with their weaker foot.



Coaching the Fundamentals

Some of the following general coaching points can be helpful as you develop the players. Please note that some skills (passing and shooting) are more relevant for the older groups than the younger kids, where the focus is more on dribbling alone.

DEVELOPING TOUCH & TECHNIQUE

- Maintain close control with both feet.
- Be agile, stay on toes.
- Use all parts of feet, inside, outside, laces, sole.
- Move to get behind balls path.
- Keep a soft contact.
- Concentrate on center of ball.
- Keep head up.
- Control ball first, don't just kick it away.
- Change direction and speed when turning.
- Be a friend with the ball.

PASSING

- Use inside of feet.
- Change body position so it's comfortable.
- Stay relaxed. Don't be like a robot.
- Look at ball when passing.
- Pass to other players, not just kick and hope.
- Move afterwards.
- Move away from players to receive ball.
- Turn body to face ball when receiving.
- Stay spread out.

SHOOTING

- Keep toe pointing down.
- Lock ankle.
- Strike with shoelaces.
- Strike through center of ball.
- Swing leg and follow through.
- Keep relaxed except keep foot locked.
- Accuracy before power.
- Keep knee and head over ball.
- Place standing foot alongside ball, not in front or behind.
- Aim for bottom corners of goal.
- Accuracy before power.
- Follow after shooting.
- Use foot closest to the ball. I.E. left or right foot.

GAMES

- All of the above.
- Keep moving.
- Encourage movement towards ball.
- Encourage use of width.
- Keep positions only loosely restricted.
- Take Time-out to rotate subs and positions.
- Coach, educate, and support during games.
- Explain all fouls and calls made.
- Create an understanding of the Laws of the Game.



Kickers Program:

U7 & U8 Recreational (Grades 1-2)

The Kickers program is also designed to develop a player's skill and "touch" of the ball. The matches are played with small sided teams in a 5-vs-5 format (4 and a goalkeeper) or 4-vs-4 format (no goalkeeper) to maximize the player's involvement. There is no score keeping or win/loss record. Success is measured by observing the first signs of passing and position play. This is an essential element of incremental improvement at this level. Boys and Girls play on the same team and all levels of experience can be found on any team. One practice per week in addition to the Saturday game day.



Communication with Kicker Parents

Parents enjoy being in the loop on how practices are run and what the kids are learning along the way.

During the first couple weeks, send a note to the parents to remind them of the expectations.

Requirements for each session

- **size 3 ball**
- **water bottle**
- **uniform** on Saturdays

Recommendations: **shin guards** and **cleats**

Let the parents know when the Kicker sessions are (e.g. Saturday morning session with one additional weekday practice session). Try to encourage parents to bring the players **on time** each session.

Inform the parents of the expectations for each player, as follows:

- **Team Activities:** One practice during the week allows each coach to work with the players in a practice setting, playing fun games, learning fundamentals of passing, dribbling, defending, and shooting, and allowing teammates to get to know each other. (See Recommended Kicker Team Activities)
- **Games:** There is a game each week. It is designed to be a 5-vs-5 or 4-vs-4 game with substitutes, lasting for four 10-minute quarters, with 1-minute break between each quarter. Coaches are responsible for coaching, substituting, and keeping track of time. Telling the parents this up front increases their understanding. (See The Kicker Game, below)
- **Vagell:** Each player is encouraged to join Coach Vagell for foot skills and Soccer Tunes. This session is great for developing skills in balance, foot control, and following directions, not to mention having fun! By reiterating the importance of this to the parents, they can help encourage the players to participate, even if they are hot or tired.

In all, remind the parents that the philosophy will be to create a positive environment for learning and having fun. As stated above, at this age, it's not about the winning or



losing, it's about learning the fundamentals of dribbling and passing the ball, listening to a coach, following directions, being respectful to other players, and, most of all, *having fun*.

About the Kicker Players

It is important to have a basic understanding of how a player thinks, feels, acts and moves. Below is a brief description of the domains of learning in seven and eight year olds.

This is the age where players can begin to understand the concept of working with a teammate. The notion, or willingness, to intentionally pass the ball to someone is just beginning to take hold.

Coaches will have more success encouraging players to pass the ball in the seven to eight year old age group. In this age group, the player begins to think beyond their personal needs and actively looks to pass to a teammate. In many cases they will pass to their best friend and not necessarily the player in the best position to receive the ball.

Some players will be more developmentally mature and seem more advanced than others. Some players will go back and forth between selfish play and cooperative play while others will appear to lag behind due to a slower developmental path.

At this age players now show a limited ability to tend to more than one task at a time; the simple task of controlling the ball demands most of the attention capacity, thereby leaving little or no capacity for tactical decision making.

They believe effort is synonymous with performance; in other words they believe if they *tried* hard then they must have *performed* well, regardless of performance.

Self-concept and body image are beginning to develop, but are very fragile. There is still a need for approval from adults such as parents, teachers, and coaches; they like to show individual skills and are easily bruised psychologically by adults: negative comments carry great weight.

Like toddlers, they still lack a sense of *pace*: they will run very hard most of the time and chase the ball until they drop.



The cardiovascular system is less efficient than an adult's; a child's heart rate peaks sooner and takes longer to recover. The temperature regulation system is less efficient than adults; children elevate their core temperature more quickly and take longer to cool down than an adult. In hot weather, provide lots of water breaks.

Recommended Kicker Team Activities

A practice session should not exceed 1 hour.

Drills vs. Games: Drills are generally an absence of thought. An individual repeats the same movement or patterns exactly the same way each time. But during a soccer game, the environment is constantly changing, therefore the activities must also mirror this fluid environment. A game/activity approach creates an environment that allows technique, tactics, fitness and creativity to develop in harmony.

In each practice, try to start with slower-moving warm-up activities, then skill-enhancing activities, ending with a fun scrimmage on the day.

- **Warm-up**, each player with a ball, stretching and soccerastics (individual and paired activities with the ball). Allow 10 minutes for this. See below for suggestions.
- **Skill** activities--A mixture of individual and partner activities. Add more maze-type games and introduce target games. (30 min.) See below for suggestions.
- **Scrimmage:** If there are enough players, you could conclude with a small scrimmage game, with or without goalkeepers. (20 min). Full-size goals are not necessary. You could, for example, create a goal by placing two cones about 3-5 feet apart. This improves the player's concentration and accuracy when shooting. Stop the game as necessary to coach the players on rules and techniques. Make sure players stay focused. Soccer is a *thinking* game!

Protip: Coaches should explain to the parents what the players are learning before, during, or after the activities.

Don't forget ***water breaks!***

Warm-up activities:



Warm-up activities are designed to loosen the players up and ready their minds for practice. Use any combination of these activities for the first 10 minutes of practice.

Activities without a ball:

- **High stepping.** Ask players if they can touch their knees to their chests. Now faster and hop!
- **Rear kicking.** Ask players if they can kick themselves in the back side with the heels of their feet. Now faster and hop!
- **Reach for the sky.** Reach up as high as you can, and as low as you can. Now faster and hop!
- **Trotting sideways.** Ask the players if they can trot to the right, keeping their eyes on the coach. Tell them to go the direction you point. This teaches them to change directions and move, keeping their eyes and heads up. Now go left, right, mix it up, forward, backward, faster!

Activities with a ball:

- **Stationary Roll.** Roll ball with bottom of foot forwards and backwards with right then left. Repeat from side to side, and then in a circular motion. Repeat all with increased speed.
- **Tick Tock.** Pass the ball from inside of left to inside of right. To increase difficulty, now move the ball slightly forward each time. Take it the width of the field and back.
- **Hat Dance.** Lightly touch the ball with bottom of right foot then with left. Ball should remain still. Go faster! To increase difficulty, slightly move the ball forward with each touch and work your way down the field.
- **Dribble slalom.** Ask players to slowly dribble around cones laid in a straight line. Left around one cone, right around the next. This may work better if there are two groups of cones and players to avoid players waiting in “line”
- **Roll back.** Roll backwards with the sole of the shoe
- **Cut.** Cut across body with inside, then with outside.
- **Cryuff.** Put standing leg alongside ball. Look to shoot (but don’t shoot) then drag ball back behind standing foot with inside of other foot.
- **Barnes.** Step over ball with outside of one foot (LUNGE), then push ball forwards with outside of other foot.
- **All of the above!** Every now and then, let them dribble around in space and try as many of the moves they’ve learned above!
- **Juggling.** In later practices, you could ask the players to gently toss the ball up and knee it, then catch it. Try two knees before catching. Now feet. Can you do knee, then foot? What about the head?



- **Throw ins.** In pairs practice throwing to each other. Two hands squarely behind the ball with thumbs together. Your palms will push the ball forward. Two feet on the ground at release.

Skill activities:

Skill activities are designed to improve players soccer skills in dribbling, touch, passing, defending, spatial awareness, sharpness of the mind, and control. Use any combination of these activities for the next 30 minutes of practice.

Try not to spend too much time on any one activity to avoid the players losing interest and focus.

Keep in mind that soccer is a sport that requires constant movement, thinking, and a perfect blend of discipline and creativity. The following activities are designed to simulate that environment.

- **Dribbler Activities for Kickers.** There are several Dribbler activities that would still be fun, relevant, and just as challenging and beneficial to the Kickers. Refer to the Recommended Dribbler Team Activities section later in this guide, especially the ones where all players have a ball at the same time. These Dribbler drills benefit players of all ages and are recommended for Kickers, too.

○ ***Explanation:*** These games work dribbling, touch, pace, and on spatial awareness.

(Note you could probably focus on the dribbling activities alone for the first week or two, before working in the passing drills below in later weeks)

- **Ball Retrieve in Pairs.** Work with one ball between two players. Using general field space, start from the middle of the field. One pair of players hands the coach a ball who tosses it away and calls out a number from 2-10. Whatever number the coach calls, each pair of players must return the ball to the coach by passing the ball with their feet in exactly the asked for number of touches. The players decide how to solve this problem. The coach should rapidly toss balls away to keep the activity flowing. The coach can also move to a different space after the ball has been tossed so that players must be aware of where they are going.



- **Explanation:** The activity encourages passing, working in pairs, playing to a target, and keeping the heads up to scan the environment.

(Note this is an enhancement to *single-player ball retrieve*, where each player retrieves the ball individually and dribbles it back to the coach, a fine drill to do before this one)

- **Gates in Pairs.** Using pairs of cones, the coach constructs 8 to 12 randomly spaced goals that are placed approximately three yards apart. Each pair of players should have one ball. After a signal from the coach, pairs of players attempt to play as many passes to each other as possible through the gates in 60 seconds. Players cannot play a ball through the same gate on consecutive passes. At the end of 60 seconds, challenge players to improve on their first score.

- **Explanation:** This activity works passing, problem-solving, changing direction, receiving and passing to feet, communication and cooperation.

(Note this is an enhancement to *single-player gates*, where each player passes the ball through the gates individually, another fine drill to do before this one)

- **Pac Kid.** Each player has a ball in a confined area of approximately 20 x 20 yards. Adjust the space to accommodate the number of players. All but two players must place their ball outside the area. The two players with the ball are the Pac Kids. Pac Kids dribble their balls and attempt to hit other players below the knee with a pass. Players try to avoid being hit by running, dodging and jumping. Once a player is hit, he/she gets their ball and becomes a Pac Kid. The game continues until all players have been hit and have their ball.

- **Explanation:** The activity encourages dribbling and passing to a moving target, decision making, changing direction, cardio-respiratory endurance, and allows all ability levels to play equally. If players are hit early, they will have more opportunity to dribble. If they manage to avoid getting hit until near the end of the game, their challenge increases greatly.

- **Pass and Stop and Go.** In pairs, players are 3 yds apart facing each other. Player 1 passes and Player 2 traps the ball to a standstill. Player 2 moves backward and Player 1 moves forward to pass the ball again. Player 2 stops the ball again. Repeat the length of the field and then return with the player roles switched.



- **Explanation:** This works passing, trapping, and foot skills.
- **Passing with Increasing Complexity.** In pairs, players are 5 yds apart facing each other. Pass back and forth. Be sure player stops ball first before passing it. Teach proper passing technique. See Coaching the Fundamentals section. Now in group of 3 in a straight line, A then B then C, with 2 balls at Player A and Player C feet. Player A passes to Player B. Player B stops the ball and passes it back to Player A. Player B turns to Player C when Player C passes it to B. Again B stops the ball and passes back to Player C. Repeat several times, then change player roles.
 - **Explanation:** This works passing, trapping, and foot skills. In 3-player version, Player B is turning quickly developing additional spatial awareness.

(Note: Older players could further enhance by slowly moving together while they do it. Another enhancement is for Player B in the middle to pass back without trapping.)
- **Passing in Motion.** Two pairs of players in a square, one ball for each pair. On command, pass to your partner. Players must keep moving around in the square. Don't let the ball hit the other team's ball. Don't let the players dribble. When the ball comes to them, they have to stop and wait for the command.
 - **Explanation:** This works passing, foot skills, listening, and spatial awareness. An enhancement is allow them to pass constantly without waiting for command, but still no dribbling allowed, one-two touches only!
- **Passing Circle.** Set up 2 circles. Player A is in the center of each. Other players have to pass across the circle, while Player A tries to get the ball. All players must have a turn as Player A.
 - **Explanation:** This works defense, passing, spatial awareness.
- **1 vs 1.** Set up a square for each pair of players. Player A is the ball-possessor, and player B is the shadow. Player A tries to put the ball on the other side of the square by going around Player B. Player B is allowed to move but can't steal the ball. First time, player A carries the ball in hands. Second time, player A uses his



or her feet to dribble. Use the moves you've learned in practice. Change directions, change speeds, use "fakes"

- **Explanation:** This works defense, foot skills, ball skills, spatial awareness, changing directions and speed.

(Note: to increase complexity, try putting two pairs of 1 vs 1 in the same square, one pair going north-south, the other pair going east-west.)

- **Shooting.** Circle around coach. Players sit on their back sides in the crab position. Try to kick the ball back into the coach's hands. Now stand up, and each player drops the ball on their foot. Same objective. Now pair up and kick to each other about 5 yards apart. Now try to kick through partner's legs. Now start with the ball on the ground. Now back up.

- **Explanation:** Goal is to strike with the laces. Strike middle of ball, strike with center of foot, keep ankle solid, flex from hip and knee, focus on ball only, be relaxed

- **Game simulation with a twist.** This is a small-sided game of 4 v 4 to two small goals and is played in an area of approximately 20 x 30 yards. The coach is standing at the midline with all of the balls. Ball one is put into play and the game begins. As soon as a goal is scored or a ball goes out of bounds, the coach tosses or kicks in another ball. When the coach runs out of balls, players run to collect and return all the balls and the game begins again.

- **Explanation.** Note to Coaches and Parents: don't retrieve balls! The game must have a natural ending point. When a coach runs out of balls, players must gather them up if they want to keep playing.

It's a short season, and, while there are plenty of chances to use any of the above activities, do try to develop a plan at the beginning to ensure as much of the above is covered throughout the season.



The Kicker Game

- Games will be 5 on 5 (4 players w/ 1 Goalkeeper) or 4 on 4 (no Goalkeeper)
- Parents are asked to please sit on the opposite side of the field to limit the distraction of the players.
- Players will alternate positions throughout the game, to get the players familiar with each position. Also strive to give each player equal playing time at this level.
- Games will be four - 10 minute quarters with 1 minute between quarters.
- Substitutions will be on the referee's whistle.
- Kickers will use throw ins and goal kicks. No corner kicks or penalty kicks
- On kick offs the offense must touch the ball twice before defense can attach the ball.
- On kicks offs, throw ins and goal kicks, the defense should set up 5 yards back from the ball to allow offense a chance to advance the ball.
- Alternate ball possession at the beginning of each new quarter.
- Team players will sit together while not in game play.
- At the end of each game, players are encouraged to line up for a "good game" hand shake with players from the opposing team.
- No coaches on the field during game play.
- For games with goalies:
 - Be sure to rotate your goalkeepers regularly. Do not make the same players fill that position over and over.
 - Encourage goalkeepers to roll or throw the ball to their teammates.
Discourage punting.



While coaching the games:

Do ... Display good sportsmanship!

You're the role model for your players

Do ... Point out situations to the subs where players are (and are not) working on targeted skills. The game provides great visual pictures and the subs are a captive audience.

Do ... Use specific game scenarios (and names) when coaching and making changes at half time! (Be positive).

Don't ... Yell and scream from the sidelines (at players or the Ref).

Don't ... Try to coach every decision the players are making on the field!

Do ... Let the kids play and have fun!

“If a coach is constantly talking or yelling at players during the game, it prevents your players from thinking for themselves.” Steve Sampson, Former Men’s National Team Coach, June 1998.





Dribblers: U6 Recreational

(Kindergarten)

The philosophy will be to create a positive environment for learning and having fun. At this age, it's not about winning or losing, it's about

1. learning the fundamentals of **dribbling** the ball,
2. **listening** to a coach & following directions, and
3. being **respectful** to other players, and most of all....
4. **Having Fun!**

The Dribblers program is designed to develop a player's skill and "touch" of the ball. The matches are played with 3 vs 3 teams (No goalie) to maximize their involvement. There is no score keeping or win/loss record, as the joy of the game and a player's self confidence are the important measures of a team and individual player's success. Boys and Girls play on the same team and will have various degrees of soccer experience.



Communication with Dribbler Parents

Parents enjoy being in the loop on how practices are run and what the kids are learning along the way.

During the first couple weeks, send a note to the parents to remind them of the expectations.

Requirements for each session:

- **size 3 ball**
- **water bottle**
- **uniform** on Saturdays

Recommendations: **shin guards** and **cleats**

Let the parents know when the Dribbler session is (e.g. Saturday morning session with no weekday practice sessions). Try to encourage parents to bring the players **on time** each week.

The Saturday session is generally broken up into 3 parts.

- One part allows each coach to work with the players in a practice setting, playing games, loosening up the players, and allowing teammates to get to know each other. (See Recommended Dribbler Team Activities)
- There is a game each week. It is designed to be a 3 vs 3 game with substitutes, lasting for four 8-minute quarters, with 2-minute breaks between each quarter. Coaches are responsible for coaching, substituting, keeping track of time, and refereeing. Telling the parents this up front increases their understanding. (See The Dribbler 3 vs. 3 Game)
- Each player is encouraged to join Coach Vagell for foot skills and Soccer Tunes. This session is great for developing skills in balance, foot control, and following directions, not to mention having fun! By reiterating the importance of this to the parents, they can help encourage the players to participate, even if they are hot or tired.

In all, remind the parents that the philosophy will be to create a positive environment for learning and having fun. As stated above, at this age, it's not about the winning or losing, it's about learning the fundamentals of dribbling the ball, listening to a coach, following directions, being respectful to other players, and, most of all, *having fun*.



About the Dribbler players...

Activities should fit the developmental levels of the children. Otherwise, the child will show frustration or boredom.

As players get older, their development (i.e. psychomotor, cognitive and psychosocial) levels mature. This growth allows coaches to create more complexities in the training environment. For example, under-6 players must each have a ball; under-8 players should use one ball in pairs; under-10 can share one ball among four players and one ball for eight players is appropriate for under-12 players. The imbalance of more players and fewer balls forces more abstract thinking by the players.

Activities should be designed in which players are provided the opportunity to practice a wide range of locomotor movements (running, skipping, hopping, galloping, leaping, etc.), nonlocomotor movements (bending, pulling, twisting, pushing, etc.) and other movement components such as balance, change of direction, strength, and cardiovascular endurance.

Kindergarteners play at full speed until they drop and then after a brief rest, they are ready to go full speed again. Children in this age range need multiple breaks during practices and games to allow for recovery.... *Give lots of **water** breaks!*

Tactics at this age are very limited. They can perform tasks one at a time when simple directions are given. Their biggest concern during their play is to determine which way to go when they have the ball. Boundaries may not mean much to many children in this age group. It is common to see most or all of the players continue to chase the ball after it has gone out of bounds.

Recommended Dribbler Team Activities

Drills vs. Games: Drills are generally an absence of thought. An individual repeats the same movement or patterns exactly the same way each time. But during a soccer game, the environment is constantly changing, therefore the activities must also mirror this fluid environment. A game/activity approach creates an environment that allows technique, tactics, fitness and creativity to develop in harmony.

Here are some recommended activities to get the players loosened up and having fun, in the first 15 minutes of practice, *before the 3 vs 3 game.*



Protip: Coaches should explain to the parents what the players are learning during the activities.

- **Clap!** Each player with a ball. The players must toss their ball in the air and clap as many times as they can before catching the ball. The coach then asks each player how many claps they did before they caught the ball. (Players are to be congratulated whether they clapped twice or six times). They are then asked if they think they could beat their number with a second try. The answer hopefully will be, “I’ll try!”
 - **Explanation for parents:** this builds trust with the players, loosens them up, and encourages them to try hard and accept a challenge.
- **Ball Retrieve:** The coach stands in the middle of the training site and collects all of the balls. The coach then explains that he will throw the balls in different directions and that each player must bring their ball back to the coach as quickly as they can, using their feet only!
 - **Explanation for parents:** This activity gets the kids focused on the ball, and trains them to keep their eye on the ball, pursue, retrieve, and dribble.
- **Body Part Dribble:** Each player has a ball. Players dribble their ball in the space and avoid touching other players. While they dribble, the coach or leader calls out a body part, such as “forehead,” “elbow,” “chin,” “knee,” etc. After the player has touched the body part to the ball, the player should then immediately continue to dribble.
 - **Explanation for parents:** This activity promotes listening skills and body awareness.
- **Red light/green light:** Each player dribbles the ball around, and avoids hitting the other players. Coach shouts “red light” and all players must stop and put their foot on the ball. You can call it their “foot brake”. They go when they hear “green light” as fast as they can. After the players get good at this, the coach can mix it up, and instruct them that a “yellow light” means the player must slow down and dribble slowly.



Other ideas to add in as the season goes along:

- “purple light” -see what the kids do. Ask them what purple light should mean. They might suggest it means you hop on one leg! Encourage creativity.
 - “Flat Tire” Players sit on their ball and make a sound like air leaking out. Encourages players to keep the ball close as they dribble so they can sit on it
 - “Honk the Horn” players put their nose on the ball and make a horn sound
 - “Ambulance or Siren” Go over what parents have to do when they drive. Players should “drive” their ball to the end of the space to “pull over”.
 - “Highway” Ask players how their parents drive on a highway. They should dribble faster but still under control. Maybe good for the end of the season.
 - “U-Turn” Players have to turn and dribble the other way. You can introduce ways to turn or see what the players come up with
- ***Explanation for parents:*** this is creating spatial awareness, so the kids don’t dribble into their friends, a valuable skill on the field during a game when a defender is trying to take the ball away.
 - ***Glob:*** Stand in the middle of the area and talk and act like a Glob, challenging the players to try to run across the space without being caught (tagged) by the nasty Glob. Ham it up a bit to have more fun. Then, have them try to get across Glob Country by dribbling their ball while the coach tries to touch their ball out of bounds.
 - ***Explanation to parents:*** this is training the player to run fast with their ball and protect it from a defender. Again, by having all children running at once, it also increases spatial awareness.
 - ***Memory Magician:*** Assign a number to a ball skill as players dribble around the space. When you say “1” all players stop and do toe taps on top of the ball. When you say 2 they knock the ball back and forth between their feet. Encourage them



to bend their knees. Be creative or ask players for ideas. As the season progresses and players know how the game works, you can increase the numbers and increase the difficulty of what task is. Other ideas:

- Turn and dribble the other way
 - Leave your ball and get another player's ball
 - Dribble in a circle
 - Jump over your ball
 - Crawl around your ball
- ***Explanation to parents:*** This game encourages players to work on their spatial awareness and thinking (decision making) skills. It also works on moving and stopping while keeping the ball under control.
 - ***Everybody's it:*** controlled mayhem. Each player runs around with their ball, staying inside the boundaries, trying to tag as many other players while at the same time trying to not get tagged themselves. Give a signal of when to begin and let them play for 30-45 seconds.
 - ***Explanation to parents:*** It's a game of total vision, requiring the players to have full awareness of what's around them. They need to learn how to move into spaces to attack (tag), and out of space to retreat (avoid being tagged).
 - ***Robot:*** Half of players have a ball and other are running. Players with the ball try to pass it into the robot's (runner's) legs below the knees. If they get hit, they have to hop on one leg. If they get hit a second time, they sit down until the round is over.
 - ***Explanation to parents:*** This game encourages the passers to pass the ball under control and aim for a target. The robot's are working on their spatial awareness looking for dribblers coming from different directions.



The Dribbler 3 vs 3 Game

At this age it is more important to give all children playing time. In most cases the Dribblers are OK playing briefly and then substituting out. (Sometimes you might even find one wandering off the field to find a parent or look at something in the grass!) Rotate the players and strive for equal playing time among all players.

The game is designed to be a 3 vs 3 game with substitutes, lasting for four 8-minute quarters, with 2-minute breaks between each quarter.

Out of bounds:

The players will frequently run beyond the end lines and sidelines. Coaches will need to be vigilant, and corral them back toward the playing field. If the players go too far and need to be brought back to the playing field, simply pick up the ball and point the players in the right direction.

Throw-ins:

It is not recommended to require the players to throw the ball in. If the players don't bring the ball back toward the playing field, the coach can simply pick up the ball, and toss it gently back to the playing area. Try to minimize the pauses and increase the playing time.

Hand balls:

If a player places a hand on the ball, simply pick up the ball, and remind the players of the rule. Give the ball to the other team and play on.

Penalty:

If a child intentionally pushes or kicks another child, calmly pick up the ball, and remind all the players of the rules. Give the ball to the other team and play on.

Goalies:

Please try to prevent players from playing goalie at this level. Encourage them to go after the ball!

After a goal:

Bring the ball back to the middle and let the other team begin. (It's OK if the kid runs full speed with the ball, let the action go!)



Time: 8 minutes per quarter

Number of quarters: 4 quarters; don't worry about changing sides.

While coaching the games:

Do ... Display good sportsmanship! You're the role model for your players.

Do ... Point out situations to the subs where players are (and are not) working on targeted skills. The game provides great visual pictures and the subs are a captive audience.

Do ... Use specific game scenarios (and names) when coaching and making changes at half time! (Be positive).

Don't ... Yell and scream from the sidelines (at players or the Ref).

Don't ... Try to coach every decision the players are making on the field!

Do ... Spend time with the substitutes. Ask them questions about the game to keep them involved.

Do ... Let the kids play and have fun!

“If a coach is constantly talking or yelling at players during the game, it prevents your players from thinking for themselves.” Steve Sampson, Former Men's National Team Coach, June 1998.

Protip: During the game, spend a minute with the parents to remind them of the goals at this level:

- developing touch on the ball,
- playing a team sport,
- listening to their coach, and
- having fun.
- It's not about winning and losing, it's about dribbling and listening!



Other Resources

- http://www.usyouthsoccer.org/assets/1/15/2012_coaching_manual_for_web.pdf
- Connecticut Junior Soccer Association, Inc. offers licensing programs for coaches. There is a CT Youth G License course designed for the U6 – U8 age group and will be most beneficial for the clubs recreational as well as U9 level coaches and will form a foundation for any additional Licensing courses. Any Recreational Coach that is planning on coaching with the club is welcome to attend. Additionally any rec coach that is interested in transitioning to a travel coach in the future is highly encouraged to attend this training as this will provide a great transition between recreational soccer and travel soccer and help develop as a coach.
- CPR Training is recommended for Rec coaches (required for Travel coaches)
- Concussions: Keep the following concussion guide handy.



HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

These signs and symptoms may indicate that a concussion has occurred.

SIGNS OBSERVED BY COACHING STAFF	SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE
Appears dazed or stunned	Headache or "pressure" in head
Is confused about assignment or position	Nausea or vomiting
Forgets sports plays	Balance problems or dizziness
Is unsure of game, score, or opponent	Double or blurry vision
Moves clumsily	Sensitivity to light
Answers questions slowly	Sensitivity to noise
Loses consciousness (even briefly)	Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
Shows behavior or personality changes	Concentration or memory problems
Can't recall events prior to hit or fall	Confusion
Can't recall events after hit or fall	Does not "feel right"

ACTION PLAN

If you suspect that a player has a concussion, you should take the following steps:

1. Remove athlete from play.
2. Ensure athlete is evaluated by an appropriate health care professional. Do not try to judge the seriousness of the injury yourself.
3. Inform athlete's parents or guardians about the known or possible concussion and give them the fact sheet on concussion.
4. Allow athlete to return to play **only** with permission from an appropriate health care professional.

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

FILL IN THE NAME AND NUMBER OF YOUR LOCAL HOSPITAL(S) BELOW:

Hospital Name: _____

Hospital Phone: _____

Hospital Name: _____

Hospital Phone: _____

For immediate attention, CALL 911

If you think your athlete has sustained a concussion... take him/her out of play, and seek the advice of a health care professional experienced in evaluating for concussion.

For more information and to order additional materials **free-of-charge**, visit:
www.cdc.gov/ConcussionInYouthSports

July 2007



A Fact Sheet for COACHES

HEADS UP CONCUSSION IN YOUTH SPORTS

To download the coaches fact sheet in Spanish, please visit www.cdc.gov/ConcussionInYouthSports

Para descargar la hoja informativa para los entrenadores en español, por favor visite

www.cdc.gov/ConcussionInYouthSports

THE FACTS

- A concussion is a **brain injury**.
- All concussions are **serious**.
- Concussions can occur **without** loss of consciousness.
- Concussions can occur **in any sport**.
- Recognition and proper management of concussions when they **first occur** can help prevent further injury or even death.

WHAT IS A CONCUSSION?

Concussion, a type of traumatic brain injury, is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head. Concussions can also occur from a blow to the body that causes the head and brain to move quickly back and forth—causing the brain to bounce around or twist within the skull.

This sudden movement of the brain can cause stretching and tearing of brain cells, damaging the cells and creating chemical changes in the brain.

HOW CAN I RECOGNIZE A POSSIBLE CONCUSSION?

To help spot a concussion, you should watch for and ask others to report the following two things:

1. A forceful bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body that results in rapid movement of the head.
2. Any concussion signs or symptoms, such as a change in the athlete's behavior, thinking, or physical functioning.

Signs and symptoms of concussion generally show up soon after the injury. But the full effect of the injury may not be noticeable at first. For example, in the first few minutes the athlete might be slightly confused or appear a little bit dazed, but an hour later he or she can't recall coming to the practice or game.

You should repeatedly check for signs of concussion and also tell parents what to watch out for at home. Any worsening of concussion signs or symptoms indicates a medical emergency.

It's better to miss one game than the whole season.

SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS¹

SIGNS OBSERVED BY COACHING STAFF

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets an instruction
- Is unsure of game, score, or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior, or personality changes
- Can't recall events prior to hit or fall
- Can't recall events after hit or fall

SYMPTOMS REPORTED BY ATHLETE

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy, or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion
- Just "not feeling right" or "feeling down"

Adapted from Lovell et al. 2004

WHAT ARE CONCUSSION DANGER SIGNS?

In rare cases, a dangerous blood clot may form on the brain in an athlete with a concussion and crowd the brain against the skull. Call 9-1-1 or take the athlete to the emergency department right away if after a bump, blow, or jolt to the head or body the athlete exhibits one or more of the following danger signs:

- One pupil larger than the other
- Is drowsy or cannot be awakened
- A headache that gets worse
- Weakness, numbness, or decreased coordination
- Repeated vomiting or nausea
- Slurred speech
- Convulsions or seizures
- Cannot recognize people or places
- Becomes increasingly confused, restless, or agitated
- Has unusual behavior
- Loses consciousness (even a brief loss of consciousness should be taken seriously)

WHY SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT CONCUSSIONS?

Most athletes with a concussion will recover quickly and fully. But for some athletes, signs and symptoms of concussion can last for days, weeks, or longer.

If an athlete has a concussion, his or her brain needs time to heal. A repeat concussion that occurs before the brain recovers from the first—usually within a short time period (hours, days, weeks)—can slow recovery or increase the chances for long-term problems. In rare cases, repeat concussions can result in brain swelling or permanent brain damage. It can even be fatal.^{2,3}

HOW CAN I HELP ATHLETES TO RETURN TO PLAY GRADUALLY?

An athlete should return to sports practices under the supervision of an appropriate health care professional. When available, be sure to work closely with your team's certified athletic trainer.

Below are five gradual steps that you and the health care professional should follow to help safely return an athlete to play. Remember, this is a gradual process. These steps should not be completed in one day, but instead over days, weeks, or months.

BASELINE: Athletes should not have any concussion symptoms. Athletes should only progress to the next step if they do not have any symptoms at the current step.

STEP 1: Begin with light aerobic exercise only to increase an athlete's heart rate. This means about 5 to 10 minutes on an exercise bike, walking, or light jogging. No weight lifting at this point.

STEP 2: Continue with activities to increase an athlete's heart rate with body or head movement. This includes moderate jogging, brief running, moderate-intensity stationary biking, moderate-intensity weightlifting (reduced time and/or reduced weight from your typical routine).

STEP 3: Add heavy non-contact physical activity, such as sprinting/running, high-intensity stationary biking, regular weightlifting routine, non-contact sport-specific drills (in 3 planes of movement).

STEP 4: Athlete may return to practice and full contact (if appropriate for the sport) in controlled practice.

STEP 5: Athlete may return to competition.

If an athlete's symptoms come back or she or he gets new symptoms when becoming more active at any step, this is a sign that the athlete is pushing him or herself too hard.

The athlete should stop these activities and the athlete's health care provider should be contacted. After more rest and no concussion symptoms, the athlete should begin at the previous step.

PREVENTION AND PREPARATION

Insist that safety comes first. To help minimize the risks for concussion or other serious brain injuries:

- Ensure that athletes follow the rules for safety and the rules of the sport.
- Encourage them to practice good sportsmanship at all times.
- Wearing a helmet is a must to reduce the risk of severe brain injury and skull fracture.
 - However, helmets are not designed to prevent concussions. There is no "concussion-proof" helmet. So, even with a helmet, it is important for kids and teens to avoid hits to the head.

Check with your league, school, or district about concussion policies. Concussion policy statements can be developed to include:

- The school or league's commitment to safety
- A brief description of concussion
- Information on when athletes can safely return to school and play.

Parents and athletes should sign the concussion policy statement at the beginning of the season.

ACTION PLAN

WHAT SHOULD I DO WHEN A CONCUSSION IS SUSPECTED?

No matter whether the athlete is a key member of the team or the game is about to end, an athlete with a suspected concussion should be immediately removed from play. To help you know how to respond, follow the Heads Up four-step action plan:

1. REMOVE THE ATHLETE FROM

PLAY. Look for signs and symptoms of a concussion if your athlete has experienced a bump or blow to the head or body. When in doubt, sit them out!

2. ENSURE THAT THE ATHLETE IS EVALUATED BY AN APPROPRIATE HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONAL.

Do not try to judge the severity of the injury yourself. Health care professionals have a number of methods that they can use to assess the severity of concussions. As a coach, recording the following information can help health care professionals in assessing the athlete after the injury:

- Cause of the injury and force of the hit or blow to the head or body
- Any loss of consciousness (passed out/ knocked out) and if so, for how long
- Any memory loss immediately following the injury

- Any seizures immediately following the injury
- Number of previous concussions (if any)

3. INFORM THE ATHLETE'S PARENTS OR GUARDIANS.

Let them know about the possible concussion and give them the Heads Up fact sheet for parents. This fact sheet can help parents monitor the athlete for signs or symptoms that appear or get worse once the athlete is at home or returns to school.

4. KEEP THE ATHLETE OUT OF PLAY.

An athlete should be removed from play the day of the injury and until an appropriate health care professional says they are symptom-free and it's OK to return to play. After you remove an athlete with a suspected concussion from practice or play, the decision about return to practice or play is a medical decision.

REFERENCES

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*If you think your athlete has a concussion...
take him/her out of play and seek the advice of a health care professional
experienced in evaluating for concussion.*

For more information, visit www.cdc.gov/Concussion.