



**Jefferson County  
Parks and Recreation**

*The Benefits are Endless*



**Jr. Soccer Coaches  
Handbook and Rules  
2024**

Dear Families:

Please find below our Concussion Information Form. Please go over this information with your participant(s) Thank You, Rec Staff



## Jefferson County Parks and Recreation Fall Soccer League

### Concussion Information Sheet

A concussion is a brain injury and all brain injuries are serious. They are caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to the head, or by a blow to another part of the body with the force transmitted to the head. They can range from mild to severe and can disrupt the way the brain normally works. Even though most concussions are mild, **all concussions are potentially serious and may result in complications including prolonged brain damage and death if not recognized and managed properly.** In other words, even a “ding” or a bump on the head can be serious. You can’t see a concussion and most sports concussions occur without loss of consciousness. Signs and symptoms of concussion may show up right after the injury or can take hours or days to fully appear. If your child reports any symptoms of concussion, or if you notice the symptoms or signs of concussion yourself, seek medical attention right away.

#### Symptoms may include one or more of the following:

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|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Headaches</li><li>• “Pressure in head”</li><li>• Nausea or vomiting</li><li>• Neck pain</li><li>• Balance problems or dizziness</li><li>• Blurred, double, or fuzzy vision</li><li>• Sensitivity to light or noise</li><li>• Feeling sluggish or slowed down</li><li>• Feeling foggy or groggy</li><li>• Drowsiness</li><li>• Change in sleep patterns</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Amnesia</li><li>• “Don’t feel right”</li><li>• Fatigue or low energy</li><li>• Sadness</li><li>• Nervousness or anxiety</li><li>• Irritability</li><li>• More emotional</li><li>• Confusion</li><li>• Concentration or memory problems (forgetting game plays)</li><li>• Repeating the same question/comment</li></ul> |
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#### Signs observed by teammates, parents and coaches include:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appears dazed</li><li>• Vacant facial expression</li><li>• Confused about assignment</li><li>• Forgets plays</li><li>• Is unsure of game, score, or opponent</li><li>• Moves clumsily or displays in-coordination</li><li>• Answers questions slowly</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Slurred speech</li><li>• Shows behavior or personality changes</li><li>• Can’t recall events prior to hit</li><li>• Can’t recall events after hit</li><li>• Seizures or convulsions</li><li>• Any change in typical behavior or personality</li><li>• Loses consciousness</li></ul> |
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## **What can happen if my child keeps on playing with a concussion or returns to soon?**

Adapted from the CDC and the 3rd International Conference on Concussion in Sport  
Document created 6/15/2009

Athletes with the signs and symptoms of concussion should be removed from play immediately. Continuing to play with the signs and symptoms of a concussion leaves the young athlete especially vulnerable to greater injury. There is an increased risk of significant damage from a concussion for a period of time after that concussion occurs, particularly if the athlete suffers another concussion before completely recovering from the first one. This can lead to prolonged recovery, or even to severe brain swelling (second impact syndrome) with devastating and even fatal consequences. It is well known that adolescent or teenage athlete will often under report symptoms of injuries. And concussions are no different. As a result, education of administrators, Coaches, parents and students is the key for student-athlete's safety.

### **If you think your child has suffered a concussion**

Any athlete even suspected of suffering a concussion should be removed from the game or practice immediately. No athlete may return to activity after an apparent head injury or concussion, regardless of how mild it seems or how quickly symptoms clear, without medical clearance. Close observation of the athlete should continue for several hours. The new "Zackery Lystedt Law" in Washington now requires the consistent and uniform implementation of long and well-established return to play concussion guidelines that have been recommended for several years:

"a youth athlete who is suspected of sustaining a concussion or head injury in a practice or game shall be removed from competition at that time"

**and**

"...may not return to play until the athlete is evaluated by a licensed health care provider trained in the evaluation and management of concussion and received written clearance to return to play from that health care provider".

You should also inform your child's coach if you think that your child may have a concussion Remember its better to miss one game than miss the whole season. And when in doubt, the athlete sits out.

For current and up-to-date information on concussions you can go to:

<http://www.cdc.gov/ConcussionInYouthSports/>

Adapted from the CDC and the 3rd International Conference on Concussion in Sport  
Document created 6/15/2009

## Age/Grade Information

1. Players should be on the “age-appropriate” team only
2. The league coordinator reserves the right to request birth certificates at their discretion
3. Pre-K is for ages 4 and 5
4. K is for children who are at least age 5 by September 2024
5. Grade 1-2 is for children entering 1st or 2nd grade in the fall of 2024
6. Grade 3-4 is for children entering 3rd or 4th grade in 2024
7. Grade 5-6-7 is for children entering the 5th or 6th grades in 2024

## Recommendations for All Players and Coaches

1. The main concern is the physical and emotional safety of the children under your supervision. The kids come first -- soccer comes second.
2. Try to keep games moving forward without complicated interruptions.
3. **Parents are not allowed to yell directions from the sidelines.**
4. It is recommended that coaches do not transport players in their vehicles. As coaches, you should encourage your parents to organize carpooling amongst themselves.
5. Coaches should recruit “team” parents to help organize snacks and drinks for your practices/games.
6. Please run organized practices that start and end on time.
7. Please plan on being early to your games to avoid unnecessary delays.
8. Please keep the league coordinator informed of your practice times and locations. This will aid in avoiding any questions or conflicts.
9. Hitting, kicking, pushing, cussing, etc. from your players are fouls and result in:  
[www.countyrec.com](http://www.countyrec.com)

- a. **First time:** change of possession
- b. **Second time:** player sits by sideline until coach says they may return to the game
- c. **Third time:** player sits out the rest of the game and speaks with coach and parent after the game. (If it reaches this level please contact the league coordinator to make them aware of the situation.)

10. Please limit “gifts” to your players (such as medals or trophies, etc.) If you choose to purchase these items please keep them at a very low-cost

If you do decide to give awards please keep your ceremonies private. Do not hand out awards in front of other teams on the last day. This helps to eliminate the pressure other coaches may feel and the sadness players may experience as well. Thank you for your sensitivity.

## Rules, Notes, and Game Formats

Division	Ball Size	Roster Size	# On Field	Special Notes	Field Size	Goal Size/Goalie	Referee	Game Format
PreK-Kinder	3	10-12	6/7	Spectators stand on sidelines and tap the ball back into play when it goes out. If it goes out on the end-line then stop the game and do a throw in. Offside do not apply	About 75X120 feet	About six feet-No Goal Keeper	Coaches will be on the field as referees	Four six minute quarters with two minute breaks
1-2	3	10-12	7/8	Teach the goal-keeper to play 'up'. Offside do not apply	About 75X120 feet	About six feet-Keeper/Sweeper	Coaches will be on the field as referees	Four ten minute quarters with two minute breaks
3-4	4	12-14	7/9	Teach the goal-keeper to play 'up'. Offside do not apply	About 75X135 feet	6X12/Goal Keeper	Coaches off the field. Referees provided	Two 20 minute halves with a five minute break
5-7	4	12-14	10/11	Teach the goal-keeper to play 'up'. Off-sides apply	About 110X175 feet	Full Size/Goal Keeper	Coaches off the field. Referees provided	Two 20 minute halves with a five minute break



# Jefferson County Parks and Recreation

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## League Philosophy, Policy and Recommendations to Coaches

**Introduction.** Soccer is a game played primarily with the feet. The head and other parts of the body can be used but the hands and arms (up to and including the shoulder) cannot be used except on a "throw-in" and by the goalie in certain circumstances. If you've ever played basketball, many of the concepts you learned such as "give and go", "inbound plays", "getting open", "support", "man-to-man", "zone defense" and others are very applicable to soccer. You will also find similarities in many other team sports including hockey, rugby and American football. Concepts such as "follow through", "staying on your toes" and a "quick first " are used in most field sports. Soccer is very much a team sport and coaching begins to make a great difference by age 9. After that age a well-coached team will almost always beat a poorly coached team, even if the poorly coached team has better athletes.

**Recreational & Select Soccer.** There are 2 types of youth soccer programs; one is called "recreational" (or "rec") and the other is called "select", "club" or "travel".

- a. "Recreational" soccer is what most youth participate in. There are usually fall and spring seasons, the sponsoring organization lines up the coaches & recruits the players, during the season there is usually one game per week, fun and good sportsmanship are stressed. Each player plays at least 50% of each game. Coaches are usually parent volunteers.
- b. "Select" soccer is more competitive and teams often practice several times per week and play year-round. There are usually try-outs for these teams. Players can be "cut" and playing time is not guaranteed. The focus of these teams is often on winning tournaments; that is how their success is judged. They are sometimes called "travel" teams because they travel to tournaments in other cities. These teams often have paid coaches or a paid trainer.
- c. Recreational soccer programs are mainly run by local recreation departments. "Select" programs are usually either organized by non-profit clubs or are affiliated with a recreational soccer association.

**Equipment.** Equipment is vital for learning. We are encouraging every player to have their own ball and equipment that fits.

- a. All players must wear shin guards to every practice and every game. Hard surfaces of shin guards must be covered with socks. (Referees will check this). Encourage parents to buy

properly sized shin guards that have a hard surface (plastic or fiberglass) and padding to cover the anklebone.

- b. No shoes with front cleats may be worn (i.e., no baseball or football shoes if they have a front cleat, unless you cut it off). Only rubber cleats are allowed; metal cleats are not allowed. (Referees will check).
- c. No jewelry, metal devices, or hazardous equipment may be worn. (Casts can be allowed if they are padded and the Referee approves them before the game).
- d. Each player should bring a plastic water bottle to games and practices. Coaches should allow adequate water breaks during practice and bring extra water (some players will always forget to bring water).
- e. Each player should have a stitched ball (as opposed to a hard seamless ball) of proper size. (Soccer balls come in 3 different sizes: 3, 4, and 5. The ball size is shown on the ball. Also, look for a stamp that says either "official size and weight" or "FIFA Approved". Even if a ball is the official weight, some balls are heavier and harder than others. Do not get a ball that is too heavy or too hard (some seamless balls are especially hard). Some balls are so hard that it is painful to kick them. If you have a choice, a shiny, waterproof surface is best because it won't absorb water and will last longer. To games, each player must wear a jersey or shirt, shorts (we don't object to long pants if it is cold; note that the FIFA rules say that if thermal undershorts are worn they must be the same main color as the shorts), shin guards, stockings or socks that entirely cover the shin guards, and footwear.
- f. Goalkeepers must wear colors that distinguish them from the other players and from the referees. They wear either a special goalkeeper jersey, a mesh training vest (also called a practice vest or pinnie) or a T-shirt.

**Practice Attendance.** You really can't punish a child in a recreational league for not coming to practice because it's usually the parent's fault. However, it is fair to tell them that because soccer is a team sport those who come to practice the most might play the most and might get first preference for the positions they prefer to play. This is because they will have more experience playing as a team. Try to motivate players to come to your practices by making them fun, educational, and memorable.

**Team Names & Cheers.** Team names are countries. Young children also like a cheer that they can do before or after the game or at halftime. If your team's name has a "rhythmic" spelling, you can spell it (e.g., M-A-G-I-C, GO Magic!). The best one I've heard is "Play Hard, Play Fair, Have FUN". Players usually gather round while doing their cheer.

**Playing Time.** We strive for at least 50% play time for every player.

**When You Can Substitute.** For ages 8 and above you can use unlimited substitution at these times: after a goal kick is called for either team, after a goal by either team, after a throw-in is called for your team (not the other team), at halftime, and at an injury time-out if the other team replaces a player (but you can only sub as many players as they do). You usually cannot sub on corners, or free kicks. Except at half-time or between quarters, substitutions may only occur with the Referee's permission (you can get his attention by yelling "sub"). Players entering and leaving the field should only do so at the center court line. The rules technically say that a player must leave the field first before his sub can enter the field. Many referees don't enforce this in youth games because there are so many substitutions occurring. However, if the Ref says "call them off first", this is what he means. Often, midfielders are subbed the most because they run the most.



**Goalkeepers.** (a.k.a. Goalie, Keeper or GK). Goalies will be used for ages 8 and up. Except for a "Throw-In", the goalie is the only player on the field who can legally use their hands and then only in certain circumstances. The goalie must wear a shirt or jersey that is recognizably different from all other players (goalkeepers often wear special jerseys with padded elbows). If your goalkeeper has a strong leg, let him or her take goal kicks. If he or she has speed, encourage the goalie to play aggressively and if you "Push Up" your Fullbacks on the attack, encourage coming out to the edge of the Penalty Box or beyond to play like a "Second Sweeper". If the goalie picks up the ball and no opponents are close, encourage him or her to drop the ball and dribble it out, then kick it. (Once the goalie drops the ball or is out of the Penalty Box, the goalie can play like a field player but can't touch the ball). Encourage the goalie to play aggressively and to take chances; everyone will have much more fun if you do and more kids will want to play goal. In the past goalkeepers have run up field to take a corner kick and goals have never been given up a goal as a result (obviously, only do this if your Goalie has speed). Goalkeepers tend to get blamed for goals when most of the time it isn't their fault (if the other defenders are doing a great job there won't be any shots on goal). You should tell your goalkeeper before the game that the other team is expected to score goals and that it isn't his or her fault if they score. Do not let anyone else (players or parents) blame the goalkeeper. In fact, after the game you should have the rest of the team thank the goalkeeper, even if he or she did make mistakes. If your team is under age 11, you should encourage everyone to take a try at playing goalkeeper. You may find several players who have an aptitude for the position. At the very least, it will give all the players respect for how tough the position is and they will be less likely to blame the goalkeeper when goals are scored. However, do not make a child play goalkeeper if he or she does not want to.

**Small Sided Games & Formations.** At young ages it is much better to play small sided; the players get many more "touches" on the ball and it is much easier to teach them the important concepts such as "support", "first defender", to "shift and sag", and to spread out to get open for passes. In small sided games with 5 or less players per side, you shouldn't worry about "formations" or "positions" but should teach basic concepts, teamwork, passing, dribbling and basic tactics such as "sagging" and to mark up behind a man when the other team has a throw-in or is near our goal. To quote Bobby Howe, Director of Coaching Education for the U.S. Soccer Federation and author with Tony Waiters of two excellent books, the benefits of small sided play are:

*Fewer players on the field*

*Reduces the size of the "swarm;"*

*Creates more touches;*

*Does not allow players to "hide" or be excluded from the activity;*

*Presents realistic but simple soccer challenges;*

*Requires players to make simple but realistic soccer decisions.*

*Realistic Experience + Fun = Improvement In Play.*

If your team is younger than 10, you don't need to worry much about formations, but for ages 10 and older the formation you use can have a great deal to do with your team's success. Formations determine how many players you have at FB (Fullback), MF (Midfielder) and F (Forward). The purpose of having formations is to ensure "support", "depth", "width" and coverage on both offense and defense. Players are assigned a position

and along with it comes responsibilities. For example, a right side player (whether a RF, RMF or RFB) should not be too far over on the left side of the field. (Right and left are as you face the other team's goal). If he is, then he has left a hole that is not covered. Each player must do his job and trust his teammates to do theirs; that is what makes a good "team". There are many different formations, but in all (unless you are playing 3 vs 3 or 4 vs 4) you will have F's, MF's, FB's and a goalkeeper. You may hear about a 4-4-2, a 4-3-3, or a 1-3-3-3 formation. These numbers never include the goalkeeper but always start with the player closest to the goalkeeper. Thus, a 4-4-2 would be 4 FB's, 4 MF's and 2 F's, a 1-3-3-3 would be a "Sweeper", 3 FB's, 3 MF's and 3 F's, and a 3-1-3-3 would be 3 FB's, a "Stopper", 3 MF's and 3 F's. (These assume 11 players on the team. For smaller sized teams adjust accordingly).

The formation you choose should be based on:

1. The ability of your players
2. Your player's speed and endurance.
3. The number of substitutes you have
4. The length of the field
5. The other team's strengths and weaknesses

(If you play fewer than 11 on the field, the same principles still apply, but you will need to reduce the numbers accordingly).

The concepts of "Positions", "Support" and "Shift and Sag" teach teamwork and, when combined with a "Formation" and "Style Of Play", they provide the organization for your team's play, and collectively are called your "System of Play". Starting at U-8, you should teach your players the concepts of "Positions" (i.e., that there are "Forwards", "Midfielders", "Fullbacks" and a "Goalie"), "Support" (i.e., "First Defender/Second Defender" and "First Attacker/Second Attacker/Third Attacker") and to "Shift and Sag". These concepts are easily taught and, in essence, teach teamwork. They can make a huge difference in your team's play.

**Rewarding Or Punishing Performance.** Never punish or scold a child for lack of ability. All you can expect them to do is their best (e.g., Don't make those who lose a game run laps or do jumps). Tell everyone, including the un-athletic players, that you are proud of them if they are trying hard. You will have some athletic players and some un-athletic players. You should measure each player's performance by his or her personal improvement and effort, and not by comparing them to someone else. Try to motivate in a positive way that builds self-esteem. See "Incentives" below for ideas about rewarding practice and game attendance, hustle and effort.

**Measuring Success.** In recreational soccer, consider measuring success in these ways:

- a. Is everyone having fun? (If it's not fun, it's not good).
- b. Are they learning about teamwork?
- c. Are they learning something about soccer (i.e., are they improving?).
- d. Are they hustling, enthusiastic and doing their best?

**Incentives.** Tangible incentives aren't required, but kids love them and can be good if used in the right way. For example, in recreational soccer, you can use them to reward practice and game attendance and hustle. You can also use them to reward team effort such as the team that wins a practice game. (Rewarding individual effort doesn't work as well unless your players all have about the same ability because a few kids will probably win all the time and some will never win). A few years ago, a mother

of a player bought some gold iron-on fabric and cut out stars that were given for practice, game attendance, and hustle. The kids loved it. Later, they started buying small iron-on soccer ball patches. These come in 4 colors and the players iron them on their jerseys. A tip: if you give out rewards, don't give out more than 2 per player per practice and 2 per player per game, otherwise they lose their value and the kids aren't as excited to get them. Another idea is to do like teachers do and give a special reward for perfect practice and game attendance. For example, a computer printed attendance certificate.

**Be A Good Role Model.** To a large degree, your players and parents will follow your lead. Be a good sport and don't yell at the referees or the other team. After the game, seek out the referees and shake their hand and thank them, even if they made some bad calls.

### **Things You Are Not Allowed To Do:**

- a. Some divisional coaches may not come on the field (or step on the lines) during the game except with the referee's permission.
- b. There should be no yelling or conversation between a coach and the other team during the game.
- c. Coaches and spectators must stand on the sidelines and cannot stand behind the end lines (See "Coaching During Games" in this section).

### **Things You Should And Things You Should Not Do:**

- a. Positive encouragement and instruction of your players from the sidelines (the coach's box) is allowed. Negative criticism, hostility, abuse or anger is not appropriate. You are a role model and must set the example of good sportsmanship and insist upon it from your team.
- b. Cheering when the other team makes a mistake is bad. Cheering when the other team makes a great play is good.
- c. Never criticize the referee. It is a tough job. If a mistake is made that can be appealed, talk to the referee and then the Director of Referees after the game. Remember, you are the role model and must set the standard for behavior.
- d. You should stay 2 steps back from the sideline during games so you don't block the Assistant Referee's view of the line.
- e. Don't run up the score. It's not good for either team if the game is a mismatch, but sometimes it happens. If your team gets 5 goals ahead, you should be a good sport and do one of the following:
  - o Put your weakest scorers up front (use this as an opportunity to let them practice another position).
  - o Try someone new in goal and at fullback
  - o Pull a player off the field and "play short". If it is still a mismatch, pull off another player.
  - o Tell your players they must complete 5 consecutive passes before shooting.
  - o Tell them they can only take shots from outside the Penalty Box (i.e., practice chip shots, lofted shots at the top of the goal or power shots).

**Coaching During Games.** Some books will tell you that during games you should let the players play and not give instructions. That may work for older or select teams, but it isn't very practical for youth recreational teams that only practice once a week. Most leagues allow coaching from the sidelines (although sometimes only by one coach who must stay in a designated area). If the objectives are to

have fun and to teach the boys and girls how to play, then coaching during the game can help achieve those objectives. There are many things that you can teach in a game that are difficult to teach in practice, especially if you only practice one time a week (a "shifting and sagging" defense is one). You should look at games as another teaching opportunity. In fact, we will allow you to use 2 coaches during the game, one for offense and one for defense to teach your players how to "shift and sag", and to help them learn positions. This is hugely beneficial because one coach cannot watch both ends of the field at the same time. Be sure to not get in the other team's way and remember: you have to coach from the side lines, not the "end zones". (To be courteous, you might ask the other coach if it is okay with him). Can you yell? Yes, it is necessary to yell instructions to the players so they can hear you across the field. Don't yell negative or general comments such as: "You guys stink" or "Hustle". Yell specific instructions such as "John, push up", or "Matt, cover the center" or "Don't get thrown over" (or "punted over" or "goal kicked over"), or "Mark up behind a man" (on the other teams throw-ins, goal kicks, and free kicks) or, on the other team's corner kicks, "Mark a man goal side". Try not to show frustration or irritation and try not to single out anyone for criticism unless they aren't hustling and then you might ask "John, are you sick?" If he says "No", ask "Are you tired?" If he says "No", say "Then hustle". However, do make coaching comments to correct errors. For example, if a player's passes are coming off the ground, you can say "Matt, strike the ball higher". Or, if they turn over a throw-in because their foot came off the ground you can say "Patrick, drag your toe".

**At the End of the Game.** At the end of the game, players and coaches usually line up facing each other on the halfway line, walk past each other and "high five" hand and say "good game". Coaches are usually last in line and shake hands. It is also a nice gesture (and sets a good example) for the coach to seek out the referee and assistant referees and thank them. Parents usually take turns providing refreshments after games.

**Keeping Children & Parents Under Control.** Two of the most difficult things you might have to learn are how to deal with disruptive players and disruptive parents. You won't have all the answers, but here are some lessons others have learned:

**Be a coach and an authority figure, not a "buddy".** Occasionally, you will see a coach who is a natural leader. Some are not and have found that it works best to be an authority figure; firm, but nice. (Don't be a mean coach be nice).

**Do not tolerate rude or disrespectful behavior from players.** You shouldn't have to and, if you do, you will probably regret it. It advantageous to tell the parents and players from the very start what is expected. If a player continually show **rude or disrespectful behavior** and doesn't improve with parent participation could result in league dismissal with league coordinator's approval. Six good rules are (these may have to be adjusted for children age 6 or younger):

- a. Everyone must follow all directions given by the coaches and assistant coaches
- b. Everyone must hustle and do their best
- c. "When I talk you must be still and listen"
- d. I expect everyone to be a good sport whether we win or lose (this includes parents)
- e. "No cursing or name calling".
- f. Disruptive or disrespectful behavior will not be tolerated.

**Buy a whistle and use it to get attention.**

**Safety Rules.** Certain rules must apply regardless of age:

- a. "Keep your hands to yourself" (You cannot allow anyone to get hurt)
- b. "Do not kick the ball in the air unless I tell you it is okay" (otherwise you will have kids getting hit in the back of the head or the face by flying balls)
- c. Dangerous behavior will not be allowed or tolerated.

**Dealing with disruptive players (U-8 & older).** (The following only applies to players ages 8 and older). It cannot be emphasized enough how important it is to "nip in the bud" bad or disrespectful behavior. This is a lesson learned the hard way. Here is a policy for dealing with it. If you allow it to continue, it will get worse and create a situation that is unfair to the other players and unpleasant for everyone involved. A disruptive child gives you an appreciation of what a school teacher faces when dealing with a child who disrupts the classroom. Teachers are trained to deal with this, but volunteer soccer coaches usually aren't. I hope you never have this problem, but if you do, this policy may be of help:

Talk to the child and explain what he is doing that is unacceptable and why, and ask him to stop it.

If he persists, ask him to do 10 "knee jumps" (he stands still and jumps, raising his knees to waist height. This is quick and less disruptive than laps).

If he still persists, ask him to go to the sideline until he is ready to obey the rules. Take him over to the side and speak to him privately and explain to him that he is disrupting practice (or doing something unsafe) and that his behavior won't be tolerated and that if it happens again he will sit out until his parents arrive and then talk to his parents.

If he still persists, ask him to sit on the sideline until his parents arrive at which time talk to the parents.

If he still persists at any future practice, or if the parents don't support the need for discipline, give the parents the choice of attending each practice so they are present to observe and enforce discipline, or ask them to resign from the team and file a written report with the league administrator.

**Warning:** Never say anything mean to a child. Also, be very careful about touching a child. There are cases where parents became upset and threatened to sue because a coach patted their child on the head or grabbed him by the arm.

**Dealing with disruptive parents.** This is a dilemma. Depending on the circumstances, ask your league coordinator for advice and support. Do the following:

- a. "Positive encouragement is good; negative comments are bad."
- b. "Cheering is good, but do not yell at your child or anyone else's child during the game. It can be distracting and what you tell them may be different from what the coaches are saying. If you would like to be an assistant coach, please call me, I would love your help."
- c. "Be careful not to say anything that might be taken the wrong way or hurt someone's feelings. Remember: this is for fun and these are children."
- d. "Be a good role model and a good sport."

- e. "Do not yell at the referees or say anything bad to or about the other team. Never boo the other team or cheer when they make a mistake."

**The Importance Of Warming Up and Stretching Before Playing.** At age 10 and older, children become more susceptible to muscle pulls. When you move up to U-11, you should have your team stretch before playing. You should have them do two things:

- a. Warm Up their muscles by light activities such as jogging or slowly dribbling a ball around the field. (Warming up with a ball is the ideal way if it is practical to do so).
- b. Stretch the following muscles: front of thigh, back of thigh (hamstring), inside of thigh and calf. Most injuries are to the hamstring and inside of thigh muscles. Each stretch should be done slowly and held for 15-20 seconds and repeated 2 -3 times. Be sure they do not "over stretch". Stretching should not be painful.
- c. Many coaches skip the "warm up" and go straight to stretching. This is a mistake. The light warm up is important because it "warms up" the muscles, which makes them stretch easier and less likely to tear. If you think about it, this makes sense. (Have you ever noticed how all the horses are warmed up before a race?) Many experts also promote post game stretching because it will improve flexibility.

**Always Remember:** You are doing this for fun and to help kids. Be a "nice" coach who your players will remember fondly.

## **Special Notes on How to Coach Four to Seven Years of Age**

With this age group do not try to teach too much in one practice; their attention spans are too short and they won't have fun. Small-sided games are fun. They keep all the players involved and active, and they are "self-teaching". Players learn by simply playing the games. The games are designed to teach different skills and concepts. Simply select the games that teach the things you want your team to learn.

There are only 7 things you should be concerned about when coaching four and five years of age.

1. Make it fun and try to have fun yourself. Whether your players continue to play soccer will depend on whether it's fun. Coaching U-6 is the most fun you will ever have as a soccer coach because you really don't have to know or do much except have fun and keep your players from getting hurt.
2. Lots of touches and a ball for every player at practice. It is very important that every player at practice has a ball. Each child should have a ball with their name on it and it is a good idea to ask those who have extra balls to bring them to practice and for the coach to bring several extras (several parents will always forget to bring a ball). Your practices will be much more efficient and effective if every child has a ball to practice with. Your objective should be at least 100 touches per child per practice and for each child to be doing something with a ball for at least 50% of the practice (as opposed to watching, listening to instructions or standing in line).
3. Have your players dribble and kick the ball a lot so they get used to using their feet.
4. Don't let anyone get hurt.
5. Teach the following concepts and rules.
  - a. Not using hands (except the Goalie – although there is no goalie at the lower levels) and not tripping, holding, pushing or hitting other players (it is good to "fight" for the ball, but not to use hands to hit or push).



- b. The concept of a "field" that has lines (or is outlined by cones) that you should stay inside.
- c. The concept of "our goal" (the one our Goalie is in) and "their goal" (the one the other team's Goalie is in) and that when we have the ball we should go toward "their goal" (to "attack" it) and when the other team has the ball we should "defend" our goal by kicking the ball away from it. Demonstrate what this means in a slow and patient way and repeat it in several practices. Also, scrimmaging other teams can be helpful.
- d. The concepts of "attacking" and "defending" and how we try to kick the ball into the other team's goal and how we try to kick it away from our goal.
- e. The very basic idea of "positions" and that some players play in different areas of the field and don't just run all over the field (e.g., that there is a "Goalie", "Defenders" and "Scorers").

How to do a simple Throw-In (if your team is expected to inbound the ball by using a Throw-In.)

Start teaching your players to use the inside of the foot and the "instep" of the foot (i.e., the top of the foot where the shoelaces are) to kick the ball and discourage them from kicking it with their toes. The natural tendency will be for beginners to use the toe to kick the ball. In soccer, the toe is only used to "poke" the ball (on defense as a way to "dispossess" the ball from the ball handler or on offense as a way to take a short shot near goal). The toe is an inferior surface for kicking the ball because it is too small. It is easier to kick the ball accurately for long distances by using larger surfaces such as the top (instep) of the foot or the inside or outside of the foot. The instep can be used to kick both low "power" drives or for "lofted drives". Don't expect U-6 players to become great at kicking the ball. Just try to get them to start kicking with the proper areas of the foot.

## **Coaching U-8**

The 7 things listed above for U-6 also apply to U-8. However, there are some other things you can also start to teach:

- a. Dribbling and Shielding the ball may be the most important skill to teach.
- b. Terms and concepts such as these are important so you can communicate with your players and they can communicate with each other: Far Post, Near Post, goal side, control dribbling, speed dribbling, mark a man, clear the ball, cross the ball, center the ball, go to goal, danger zone, push up, defend deep, first defender/ second defender, first attacker/second attacker/third attacker, win the ball, shift and sag, where the "middle" of the field is, where the "center" of the field is, where the center of the goal is (you will use this as a guideline when teaching a zone defense), pass to yourself, pass to feet and pass to space. (Just like teaching a foreign language, it is good to teach or at least to expose children to concepts such as "mark a man", "pass to space" and "first defender" when young. These are not skills, but are a way of thinking about playing).
- c. Basic rules such as not using hands except on throw-ins or when you are a goalie.
- d. Encourage teamwork, passing, getting open for a pass, passing to space, constant movement when on offense (to support the attack by shifting or pushing up) and on defense (constant "shifting and sagging"), talking, and no straight legs (knees should always be slightly bent).
- e. Teach them what it means to "pivot" (they usually don't know)

- f. Definitely work on proper technique for inside-of-foot passing and receiving. These are 2 of the most important things you can teach and it is important to teach the correct technique early before they learn the wrong technique. (By age 11 improper passing techniques are hard to correct). Proper technique makes a great difference.
- g. Teach proper technique for a simple throw-in and start working on advanced throw-ins.
- h. If you play with only 4 or 5 per side, don't worry about formations; instead, stress "first attacker/second attacker", "first defender/second defender", "shift and sag", "go to goal", "don't get thrown over" and other similar concepts. Only if you play 6 or more per side will you need to worry about teaching the concept of positions and playing a position in a formation (See No. 11 of this section, above, titled "Small Sided Games and Formations").
- i. Some "Coaching Rules" such as "Don't get thrown over" (on your opponent's Throw-ins).
- j. You can easily teach U-8 to start marking up behind an opponent on the other team's throw-ins, goal kick, punts and free kicks and then stepping in front to steal the ball. (U-8 can catch on to this quickly, but you will have to keep reminding them).
- k. Start to teach a "Lofted Kick". This is important so your players can clear the ball when on defense. They can send lofted passes or take lofted shots when on offense. It is important to practice this and to try to teach it to your players starting at U-8.
- l. Continue to reinforce using the inside of the foot and the "instep" of the foot (i.e., the top of the foot where the shoelaces are) to kick the ball and discourage them from kicking it with their toes
- m. By U-8, soccer matches often start to become more competitive.

### Questions & Answers:

- a. *Do you need a goal or a lined field to have a good practice?* No. It's really not necessary. You can use cones to make goals. However, a real goal or a backstop is great.
- b. *Why not just scrimmage the entire practice?* There are 4 reasons why that isn't best for a Rec team:
  1. If you have a lot of players, they won't get enough touches on the ball. This is especially true for the less aggressive and less skilled players. If you split up and play "small sided" on a small field (e.g., 30-50 steps long and 25-40 steps wide, depending on age) it increases the number of touches, but there are still the problems described in 2 and 3 below. If you scrimmage, only do so for 10-15 minutes per practice and scrimmage without a goalie so your defenders are forced to defend.
  2. You can't practice specific techniques or tactics in a general scrimmage.
  3. Players tend to not try new things in a general scrimmage and scrimmaging can reinforce bad habits. They tend to do the same things they have always done, even if they are incorrect (i.e., scrimmaging reinforces bad technique and doesn't present the opportunity to teach correct technique).
  4. Some players are less enthusiastic on game day if they have scrimmaged a lot during the week. This may not be true with all players.

### Tips For Good Practices:

1. Kids love playing games and keeping score. **In practice, try to use games and not drills.**
2. Everyone should stay active and participate. Avoid lines.
3. Maximize "touches" on the ball. At least 100 touches per practice for each player.



4. Teach proper technique and emphasize games that practice technique or simulate play or playing situations.
5. Run games by keeping time (e.g., so they last 1, 3, or 5 minutes) or by keeping score (e.g., first to 3, 12, etc.).
6. Praise hustle, improvement and a good attitude. Measure each player's performance by his or her personal improvement and effort, and not by comparing them to someone else. Try to motivate in a positive way that builds self-esteem.
7. A good game must be easy and quick to set up and should be simple to explain and manage. If you are spending too much time on set up or instruction, simplify it.
8. If it's not fun, it's not a good game.
9. You must have at least one ball per player.
10. Avoid general scrimmaging for more than 10 minutes per hour. In general scrimmages players don't get enough touches on the ball, the weaker players tend to get the fewest touches and bad habits can be reinforced because players tend to do the same things they have always done. If you scrimmage, do so without a goalkeeper (see "Small Sided Scrimmage Without A Goalkeeper" game on Premium).
11. Adopt this philosophy: **Keep it simple, keep them active, keep it fun and at least 100 touches per player per practice.**

### **Things You Need For A Good Practice:**

1. **Small Soccer "Disk" Cones.** Disk cones are ideal for marking areas for small-sided games. You need 2 disk cones per player (e.g., 30 disk cones for 15 players). Disk cones look like an upside down bowl and come in fluorescent yellow and orange; orange is most visible on brown grass. Consider buying a strap to keep your disk cones on. It is only a few dollars and worth it. As an alternative, you can use strips of brightly colored cloth to mark the areas.
2. **A Way To Identify "Teams".** You can buy practice vests (also called "bibs") for about \$6 each, or there are several cheaper ways to identify teams during practice games. One cheap way is to cut the sleeves and bottoms off old t-shirts and use the tops as practice vests; you can spray paint them in different colors to make enough for several teams. Another cheap way is to buy a roll of pink plastic "flagging" at Home Depot (\$5.00 in the tool area near the surveying equipment), cut pieces & tie the ends to make a circle that will fit over players heads (around their necks). A third way is to buy a 3-pack of men's "Athletic T-shirts" (about \$6.00) in the x-large size. Cut off the top about 3 inches below the bottom of the sleeve and then cut the bottom into 3 cloth circles (just cut it straight across to make the circles). You will get 12 pieces for \$6.00. If you need different colors, spray some red or blue paint on them to give a "tie-dyed" look. The bottoms can also be used as field markers.
3. **A Ball for Every Player.** Ask each child to bring a ball to practice, but buy some extras to bring because some kids will forget. A nylon mesh laundry bag makes a great ball bag. Also, buy a ball pump to keep the balls inflated.
4. **Shin guards and Water.** Every player should wear shin guards and bring a plastic water bottle with their name on it. Always take extra water because some always forget.
5. **Assistants.** The more the better. Ask parents to help, even if it is just to pick up balls.
6. **A Whistle.** A cheap one will do. This will be hugely helpful in getting attention. Use the whistle to stop and start the practice games described herein.

7. **An Equipment Bag.** To keep your gear in. In it should be some Band-Aids or a small medical kit (about \$5). One of the 99¢ instant ice packs is good. (You squeeze these and they get cold. They are sold at drugstores).
8. **Do You Need a Goal or a Lined Field?** No. None of the SoccerHelp Practice Games require a goal or a lined field. However, a goal or a net backstop is handy if you are practicing shooting.
9. **A Watch With A Countdown Timer.** You can get by without this, but it makes it a lot easier to run timed games. Timex and Casio make models that are available at Target and Wal-Mart for about \$25.