

WSC GUIDELINES FOR ALL COACHES

SECTION 1- AGE SPECIFIC GUIDELINES FOR ALL AGES

U6 Very young players from 5 to 8 years of age love to play. Therefore, all practices should be based on fun games. Players must spend the maximum time possible in contact with the ball and experiment by themselves. For the first time the player has to build a relationship with other players. Give different responsibilities to the players in order to develop a sense of team. Basic motor skills like walking, running or jumping have to be combined with ball handling and ball control.

U7 U8 BASIC U9 Pre-pubescent players from age 9 to 12 years have a special ability to learn. Therefore, this is the right age to work on specific soccer techniques and skills. Developing good technique is essential at this age. 1v1 and 2v1 attacking and defending situations are important to develop individual skills as well as the passing techniques to develop the necessary team game. Use small-sided games to develop basic attacking and defensive principles. Other important aspects of tactical training are possession, combination play, transition and finishing in the final third, as well as zonal defending. Players will rotate in two or three different positions to avoid early specialization. Speed, coordination, balance and agility are the main physical aspects to improve at this stage.

U10 U11 U12 INTERMEDIATE U13 At this stage, training sessions are orientated more toward tactics and the player will practice in bigger spaces. Players must practice all different types of techniques at this stage. Strength and endurance should be part of the fitness training. Coaching methods have to consider and preserve players' health since they will be experiencing many changes due to puberty at this stage. Warm-ups and cool downs are essential as is dynamic flexibility.

VOCABULARY -- back, up, turn, man on, wide, support, square, through, 1-2, tuck in, prep touch.

COACHES NOTES: Coaches should be focusing on technique two-three times more than tactics. Technique is on how to do something. Tactics is when to do something, why to do something, and strategy.

Our youth coaches must focus on developing skill as a priority over winning. Skill development will allow our players to find success through years. Winning at youth level will not ensure winning in the future. If players don't have techniques mastered in older years, the team tactics will not be able to be carried out.

SECTION 2 – PRACTICE TIPS

In the past year I have had the pleasure to observe and teach several coaching clinics as well as attend several workshops on coaching soccer. Through all of those experiences I have been able to observe around 50 coaches. Following are commonly asked questions that the soccer coaches had after they had taken a Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association "G/Y" course.

So, what I do with my U12 team may not be appropriate for a U8 team?

Correct. As children grow and mature they go through developmental stages that affect what they are capable of doing physically, mentally, and socially. For instance, young children (for this example around 10) may lack the physical ability to lock their ankle; a skill that is necessary to accurately strike a ball. There is nothing that can be done to remedy this but let nature take its course and allow the kids to grow up. As a result, children under the age of 10 should not be subjected to a lot of passing activities. Socially, young children are not geared to interact with a large number of other individuals. Where do you young kids spend most of their time, at home! Look at kids in the sandbox, they can be right next to each other doing the exact same activity but they do not work together. Children are very egocentric; they see the world only from their perspective. As a result, young children are not going to pass the ball very well. As children get older they learn to interact with more people more efficiently, making teamwork a possibility. Children can work in pairs around age eight, groups of four around age 10, and groups of four to six around age 12. Mentally, soccer requires players to make hundreds of split second decision throughout a game. Young children, until they reach a certain developmental stage, lack the ability to "look ahead" and see what is happening. The point of all this information is that young children do not have the mental, social, or physical abilities that adults have (a soccer play will not peak till around the age of 27).

A common mistake that many coaches make is to not take into account how children differ from adults, thereby training children as if they are miniature adults. The after affect is usually disastrous. When designing practices coaches should take into considerations the different age characteristics. Activities should be picked that fit the developmental needs of the children, rather than trying to make the children participate in activities that are developmentally inappropriate for them.

What are developmentally appropriate exercises?

Developmentally appropriate exercises take into consideration the different age specific characteristics of children. Developmentally appropriate exercises fit the specific needs of the specific age group, rather than choosing an activity and making the players try to fit into the activity. The characteristics of different aged children, and what implications

those have on our coaching are talked about at the Wisconsin Youth Soccer Association clinics (G, E, and D). Developmentally appropriate activities also have implications for the game (whatever we do in practice should prepare them for soccer; we do not run laps during a soccer game therefore players should NEVER run a lap as a warm-up or for any other reason). When picking activities think about what the actual game of soccer is like. Players are moving around constantly, because everyone is moving the environment is constantly changing which requires players to be constantly making decisions. Because of this reason and many more it has been decided by the soccer experts that **practice games** are much more effective at teaching kids how to play soccer, even when dealing with techniques like how to pass the ball. Many coaches choose to do drills that involve players standing in lines waiting to have a turn. Drills do not have implications for soccer nor are they developmentally appropriate for children 16 and under. Any child under the age of 16 should NEVER be asked to stand in a line and wait a turn. There are practice games that can be used to teach any technique or tactical concept that the game of soccer has.

What should I have my players do at the beginning of practice, they always show up and want to kick the ball into the net?

There are a couple of different things you could have your players do at the beginning of practice. For kids U14 and below as they show up have them start small-sided games. When you show up set up a small field; as soon as the first two kids show up have them play 1v1. As kids come add them to the game up to 3v3 or 4v4. Once there is a 3v3 or 4v4 game going have additional kids that come start up another small-sided game. Kids love to play soccer so why not let them do it? It is important though to just let the kids play, there should be NO COACHING. You may start to notice that kids will want to come to practice earlier and earlier because they know they will get to play and have fun. Another benefit of this is that when you decide you want to start practice the kids should already be partially warmed up and mentally prepared to play soccer.

Older children may not be able to show up to practice and just play without risking injury. Those children should be encouraged to pass the ball (preferably while moving) or juggle the ball.

Is it okay to do activities in soccer practice that don't use balls. I have heard that soccer players should constantly be "with a ball" at every practice?

It's okay for some of our activities to not have balls. Take into consideration the Simon Says game. Young children have a tough time focusing on more than one task at the same time. If we start them off by asking them to focus on the ball and listen to what we are telling them to do they may not succeed. We can ease them into the activity by doing one round where they do not have a ball and then add a ball for the other rounds.

Also, we want to spend time not only developing their soccer abilities but their body awareness as well. Young children need to become acquainted with their body and how it works. That is why some of the activities ask the children to hop like a frog or crawl like a crab. While they are fun for the children they are also providing an opportunity for children to move in different ways and learn how to use their body. The warm-up games Simon Says, I Can Do This Can You, and Ball Retrieval are great games for teaching body awareness. In all of these games we can ask the children to do different body movements that will improve their body awareness.

How big should I make my coaching grids when I am having the players play a practice game?

This is a great question; unfortunately, there is not one definite answer. How big the grids need to be largely depends on the children and their abilities. The more space there is in a grid, the easier the activity should be for the children. Also, the number of children that show up to practice will influence the grid size. The best way to pick a grid size is to have an approximate idea of big the area needs to be; but to be flexible and willing to change the grid size after the activity starts. For example, look at a warm-up game that has everyone dribbling with a ball in an area. We want the kids to have enough space so that they are successful, but if the space is too big then the activity is not as challenging. With a small space the children have to keep their heads up to avoid dribbling into other players. A smaller space also requires the players to stay closer together so they have to interact with each other more often, which will demand the players change their direction and speed. Observe how the players are doing and then adjust the size if necessary. This same principle would apply to all practice activities (no 5v5 full field scrimmages).

What should I do if I am doing an activity and I have leftover children (for lack of a better term)?

This happens quite a bit. You want to do an activity in pairs and you have an odd number of players. The best way to solve this is to LET THE KIDS FIGURE IT OUT! In today's society kids are told everything to do; how about giving them some responsibility? Nearly all activities that can be done in pairs would still work fine if there was an extra person, see if the kids can figure it out. If larger numbers are involved, say you want to play four versus four and you have nine, what about just playing five versus four. In the game of soccer there will be plenty of times where a team will have a numerical superiority (a lot of teams play with four defenders, four midfielders, and four attackers, if both teams play that system then the forwards are outnumbered by two extra people). Another option would be to have one person play offense the whole time. If possible, we want to avoid having children sitting out of an activity doing nothing.

Why is there so much imagination used in the activities? For example, in Crabs on the Beach the players pretend to run across a beach while avoiding the crabs (players who are on all fours).

The imagination effect is just to make practice more fun for the kids. Telling them to run from one line to another is not all that exciting. However, if you throw in a beach, ocean, and some crabs the activity is more exciting.

In the past I have always had my players pass the ball back and forth to each other while standing still to teach them how to pass the ball; now, you are telling me that they should never be standing still. How will the kids learn how to pass the ball if they don't learn the skill standing still first?

This again is a very good question. Earlier, we talked about how whatever we do in practice should look like what happens in the game. The game places certain demands on the players; it requires them to do certain things in order to succeed. Therefore, everything we do in practice should prepare the players to meet those demands. In the game of soccer, players do not statically (without motion) pass the ball back and forth. Just because a player can pass the while standing still does not mean that they can pass the ball while moving. To strike a ball while moving players must get a feel for where to put their plant foot based on how fast the ball is moving. While standing still though and striking a stationary ball, players do not have to make that judgment; they can just put their ball right next to ball because it is not moving. When the ball is moving though they have to put their plant foot in front of the ball because the ball will continue to roll forward in the amount of time it takes someone to withdraw their leg and then snap it forward. The players must learn to time their kicks so that the ball is right next to their foot when they make contact. As a result, players should be asked to always be moving while they are passing. When kids start to learn to pass at the age of eight they should be moving all the time, they should never just stand across from each other and pass the ball back and forth.

Should I use exercises over and over or should I have different exercises each day?

I think a combination is good. If there was an exercise the children liked it would be perfectly fine to do it more than once during the season; however, I wouldn't do something every day. There are a lot of practice games that have been made that require them to use the same soccer skills but in a different setting. Changing the setting (what they have to do, do they have to dribble to avoid being tagged by an evil monster or are they dribbling to get from one side on an area to another, either way they are still dribbling) can make practice more enjoyable for the players. Also, practice games usually have problems that have to be solved. For example, in sharks and minnows the minnows have to dribble from one sideline to another without being tagged

by a shark that is in the middle. It is interesting to see how the children choose to solve the problem of, "What is the best way to get across the area without being tagged?" I have seen some kids wait back while their teammates charge forward; the sharks go after those players and then the players that waited back take off and get across the area while the sharks are distracted. There are ways to "beat" or do better at many of the practice games that require creative problem solving to figure them out. Different games require different problems to be solved. Isn't that what soccer is anyway, one big problem. How can we, my team, get this ball past 10 other people and then shoot it so that it goes past the goalie into the goal? Practice games, unlike drills, require players to think on the fly and solve problems, a complex skill that will be required when they play "real" soccer.

Do these practice games you talk about do a good job of teaching kids how to play soccer or are they more of a once in while thing to let the kids have fun?

In actuality, practice games do a better job of teaching soccer than any other method. Practice games usually have very advanced soccer skills hidden in them. For example, in Pac Men all the players are running around in an area. Two players dribble a ball into the area and try to pass the ball (below the knees) off of the players who are running around. When hit, a player then has to go get a ball and join the Pac Men. Kids actually love this game, but take a moment to think of the skill required. For the people who start without a ball, they are running, jumping, dodging, and doing all sorts of stuff to avoid being hit (sport specific fitness and body awareness). In the meantime they must also be constantly looking all around to see where the Pac Men are so they will see a ball coming when it is passed (field vision). The players with the ball have to dribble around in the area (many touches on the ball which will improve their dribbling ability) and then pass the ball off of people (they have to pass the ball while they are moving). Because they are hitting targets that are moving, they must dribble and keep their head up at the same time to see targets to shoot at (drills that require players to slalom in-between cones force players to look down so they can see the cones). In addition, the players with the balls must pass a ball so that it hits a moving target (learning how hard lead someone who is making a run). The Pac Men must also use deception so that the people running around don't know that they are about to have a ball passed off of them (using ball fakes to make people jump and then passing the ball off of them right when they hit the ground). The list goes on and on. A simple practice game like this requires so much from the players in terms of soccer ability yet the activity is extremely enjoyable.

What are elimination games?

Elimination games are activities where players are eliminated from the activity and asked to sit out. A common example is the game knockout. In knockout, every player

has a ball and is dribbling in a marked area. Everyone tries to kick everyone else's ball out without having their own kicked out. This game does a good job of working on shielding and dribbling away from defenders. When someone gets their ball knocked out of the area they are out of the game, they have to go outside the grid and watch. Ask yourself this, this game works on shielding, who's going to get their ball knocked out first, the players that are good at shielding and or the players that need more work? Because the players that need the most practice get eliminated first in elimination games, they have to either be modified or avoided. I prefer to modify them. Instead of having everyone get eliminated for good when their ball is kicked out, have them do a task once they get kicked out and then go back into the game. The players play to see who can get their ball kicked out the least instead of who is the last person to get their ball kicked out. Another option would be to have two different grids. Once a player gets eliminated from one activity they should get their ball and go into the other grid. Once they get eliminated from that grid have them go to the first one again. The grids can even be made different sizes as to provide different challenges for the players (the smaller grid should be more difficult to stay in because the players have less space to dribble in).

How long should my practices be and how long should each activity be?

How long your practices are will depend on what age group you are coaching. Under 6's should practice about 45 minutes, U8's about an hour, U10's about an hour and fifteen minutes, U12's and up about an hour and a half. No team should really practice for any longer than an hour and a half. It is important to stick pretty close to these numbers too. Kids can only exercise so long before they "check out" and just can't concentrate anymore. America has a nasty habit of buying into the "more is better" policy. If I practice with my team for an hour then with two hours of practice they'll be twice as good. Due to the limitations of kids though that idea just doesn't work.

With children U12 and down you should have between five and six activities, with each activity lasting around 10 minutes. Each activity should have several rounds, lasting between 20 and 60 seconds. For example, let's say we are playing Pac Man. Each round I may put different restrictions on the players. In the first round I may just let them play. In the second round I may have the Pac Men strike the ball with their left foot only. In the third round I would have them strike the ball with the outsides of their feet only. Placing restrictions on games can bring out a certain effect. As coaches though we must be careful when doing this. As mentioned a couple of times earlier we want what we do in practice to replicate what happens in the game. If we become too specific in our restrictions we can make practice fake. If the players are doing a dribbling exercise and I say they can only dribble with the outside of their right foot, what happens if they need to go to the left? It would be unnatural for them to do a 270 degree turn with the outside of their right foot when they could just cut the ball with the inside of their right

foot or the outside of the left foot. To keep this from happening, make sure when a restriction is placed on players they can still play soccer effectively. In dribbling exercises I would restrict them to right foot only, left foot only, soles of the feet, insides of the feet, or the outsides of the feet. I would have the same restrictions for passing exercises as well

SECTION 3 – TECHNICAL FOOT SKILLS

Big Toe- Inside of the foot touches back and forth between your big toes.

Sole Taps- Touch ball with the soles of both feet. Start stationary, moving backwards, moving forwards in space.

Chop- Chop the ball with the inside of the foot across body at an angle (45 degrees) while on the dribble.

Cut- Cut the ball with the outside of the foot away from body at an angle while on the dribble.

Step-Over- Right foot over (swing leg over out to in) and immediately touch with outside of right foot. Players must check shoulder before. Step-over. *Please show with both feet.

Step-Turn- (same foot turn), right foot over (swing leg over/ out to in) and turn with outside of right foot. *Please show with both feet, opposite direction.

Step-Turn- (opposite foot turn), left foot over (swing leg over/ out to in) and turn with inside of right foot. *Please show with both feet, opposite direction.

Matthews- While dribbling forward, chop ball inside of foot and then immediately touch with outside of same foot at an angle to accelerate. *A plant foot hop is natural.

Pull Back- Open up"- (ball placed outside right foot), use sole of right foot, pull ball back across body, (as ball is rolling back plant foot pivots out of the way), touch inside left foot (roughly 160 degrees), repeat opposite foot, opposite direction.

The V- (ball starts in front of left foot) pull back sole of right foot across body, touch at 45 degree angle away from body with inside of right foot, pull ball back left foot across

body, touch at 45 degree angle away from body with inside of left foot- repeat. *Players are moving ball in a V shape. Open hips.

Pull Back- Cruyff- pull ball back with sole of right foot (plant foot changes places with ball as it rolls back), touch ball 90 degrees with inside of right foot. *Progression- add in a touch with outside of plant foot. Repeat with opposite foot. *Please show with both feet, opposite direction.

Laterals- Inside chop right at angle across body, outside touch left, sole trap left, inside left, outside right, sole trap right- repeat. *Progression- remove sole trap and move.

Scissors- swing left foot inside and around the ball in a counter-clockwise direction, prep with top/outside of right foot and accelerate. *Please show with both feet, opposite direction.

L"= pull the ball back and then use the outside of that foot to push it out laterally.

Backwards L - pull the ball from front to back and when it is further back than your plant foot, tap it with the inside to go behind your plant leg and out to the side.

***U8** -- Practice big toe, sole taps, pull backs, step over, Matthews, laterals, and Scissors. Tons of practice in ball work. Work on all of these moves each week. Dribble cones. play 1v1, and shooting to goal.

u8 soccer is all about the players taking on opponents 1v1 and defending 1v1. Don't emphasize passing, it will naturally happen. You can teach passing when players are in the attacking corners; that is the time to cross it. Goal kicks should be a pass, too.

***U9 and U10** -- Players should continue to practice all u8 moves, and ballwork should be a major part of each practice. One player, one ball for a good portion of practice.

Simple passing combinations is ok.

Shielding should be taught.

Receiving a ball with different parts of the foot and different body parts should be practiced.

Team defending taught where first defender is player closest to ball (slow down attacker, and win ball if you can). Next defender tucks behind in case 1st defender was beat or there is a big dribble.

SECTION 4 – OFFENSIVE TERMS

Term	Age	Definition
Cross	8	Play the ball across the field toward the opponent's goal
Through	8	Look to split the defenders with a pass into space from a teammate making a run off the ball or send over the top of the defense.
Turn	8	Used to tell a teammate receiving the ball with back to opponent's goal that he can turn and go forward
Line	8	Play the ball to me down the touchline
One-two or Wall pass	8	Asks for a pass on the ground which will be returned with the first touch as the teammate who made the first pass makes a run past a defender
Carry	10	You have room to dribble forward; stay composed and play a high-percentage pass
Corner	10	Play the ball toward the corner
Far Post	10	Make a cross to the post of goal that is farthest from the ball's location
Have it / Shoot	10	Take a shot rather than looking to pass
Man on	10	Warns of immediate pressure from a blind side
Near Post	10	Cross the ball to the goal post nearest to the ball's location
Switch	10	Play the ball to the far side of the field in order to switch the point of attack to the "weak side"
Support	10	If you want to pass back I'm here
Time	10	You are not under pressure; get you head up and assess your options
Drop or support	10	Asks for a drop. i.e. a pass made directly behind the player on the ball
Go	10	Tells teammate to sprint forward and look for a return pass
Square	10	Indicates support in a position to one side of the player on the ball
Overlap	10	A player holds the ball
Check / Show to	12	Come back toward the teammate with the ball

Leave it / Let	12	Flick
Hold	14	Used by overlapping teammate to tell player on the ball not to release it until he has passed him

SECTION 4 – DEFENSIVE TERMS

Term	Age	Description
Goalside	8	Get between the opponent and our goal
Mark "#"	8	Used to tell teammate to mark a particular opponent
Mark up	8	Used to tell teammates to be sure they have taken responsibility for marking an opponent man-to-man, especially on free kicks and corners
No turn	8	Get tight to the opponent to keep him facing his own goal
Pressure	8	Asks 1st defender to reduce distance to force the 1st attacker's eyes down on the ball
Clear	10	Used by GK to instruct teammates to clear the ball immediately without attempting to control it
Help	10	Asks teammates to provide defensive support for an unsupported 1st defender
Contain	12	Tells teammate to delay the attacker until defensive support arrives so he can tackle
Double	12	Tells teammate to assist in double-teaming the first attacker (i.e. defender combine to win the ball)
Make a wall / Wall	12	Used by GK to tell teammates to line up between a dead ball and the goal before a free kick
Shift (right or left)	14	Moves the defensive formation to mirror the movement of the ball
Switch	14	Used to exchange marking assignments as opponents criss-cross
Take ball	14	Used to ask teammate to take 1st defender role so you can track you mark

SECTION 5 – WARNING AND ANNOUNCEMENT TERMS

Warnings and Announcements		
Push up	8	Asks defensive players to move up the field to leave opponent in an offside position and/or support our attack
I got ball	10	I will take the 1st defender role
Keeper	10	GK uses this to call for the ball so teammates will get out of their way
Mine	10	Used by field players to call for the ball so teammates will get out of their way
No	10	Don't play the ball to me, because I'm too tightly marked and the pass would be intercepted
You	12	Tells teammate they are in a better position to play the ball than you are (used when two teammates are converging on a ball)
Easy	12	Stay composed; don't panic; don't boot the ball away. Slow down
Hold	14	slow down with the ball, so I can overlap

SECTION 6 – FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

COACHES FAQ's

- **I tried an activity in practice and it is way too easy, how do I change it?**
Make the space more confined, add more defensive pressure or bodies.
- **What if a soccer activity is way too hard? Add more space and remove players, or add a neutral player or two in order to help the offense be successful.**
- **Soccer diagrams are confusing with different lines, what do they mean?**
Dashed lines = pass, solid line = running. #s indicate the sequence of activity.
- **How long should practice be? Practice should be 60 min for U8, 1 hour 15 min for U10, U12 and U14 1.5 hours.**
- **What's the latest info on stretching?** Stretching for players U14 and older and should be done at the end of a practice. Dynamic movements and warm ups can start a practice.
- **Running laps, is that a good warm up?** No, change of direction running and dribbling would be better.
- **If I need a few minutes to set up an activity, what can I have players do?**
Refer to common drills they have done before -- 10 of each dribbling move, or speed dribble lines, partner passing with turn as you receive.

- **What do you say to team after a tough loss?** Very little. Teach kids how to handle loss with sportsmanship and class. Find a positive like effort or a particular play. Tell team you'll analyze stuff at practice.
- **What to say after a win?** Did you see some skills that have been worked on in practice show up in game, point that out. Let players tell you what they were proud of. The score shouldn't be their positive take away.
- **The ref was horrible and lost the game for us, what should I do?** Keep your mouth zipped about the calls, don't comment to kids or parents about refs; the refs are doing the best they can and you aren't coaching them. Show your players how to handle adversity. Respect the game and move on from inevitable bad calls. There will be several throughout the season, some for you and some against.

PLAYER FAQ's

- **What is near post?** The goal post closest to the ball.
- **What is far post?** The goal post farthest away from the ball.
- **What is offside?** An offensive player is beyond the ball and beyond the last defender while on the attacking half of the field. The rule is intended to prevent "cherry-picking".
- **What is "square pass?"** A pass to the left side or right side of a teammate.
- **What does an indirect/direct kick mean?** Indirect kicks mean 2 players must have touched the ball before it goes in the goal, a direct kick can go in directly. Indirect kicks are awarded for minor fouls, direct kicks are for pushing, striking, kicking, tripping, etc.
- **What is a proper throw-in?** Behind the head and then released in front of the head, while feet stay on the ground either on or behind the line.
- **Is a hand ball more than the hand?** Correct. Upper arm, lower arm, and hands unless the ball hits into one of them accidentally while in a natural position.
- **When would you shoot a PK?** a direct foul occurs inside the penalty box.
- **When can the keeper use/not use their hands/feet?** A keeper can always use their feet. They can use their hands if their hands are in the penalty box. They cannot use their hands if a teammate intentionally passed the ball back to their keeper. They can use their hands if a teammate heads or chests a ball to the keeper.
- **What is an overlap?** When a player waits with a ball while a teammate runs BEHIND them and in a forward direction. This helps unbalance a defense and gets more numbers into an attack.
- **Why don't we kick the ball with the front of the foot, it goes really far and I have trouble with the other method?** It isn't accurate, and as you get older

you will be able to bend shots and shoot with both power and accuracy by using laces and or the inside of your foot.