

First and foremost---THANK YOU for your willingness to coach! We hope that you will find it a rewarding experience. We have put together these resources in hopes of supporting and encouraging you in your coaching experience. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the Coaches Liaison Committee.

This is a wonderful age to coach and kids are so eager to learn. As a coach, you have the unique opportunity to teach good sportsmanship, how to win with kindness and how to lose graciously. Setting a good example is important as a coach as your example will influence how the players on your team respond to what is happening on the field. Above all, be positive and make it fun. No child can hear, "Good job!" or "Nice work!" too many times. This is the age when kids begin to develop a love of the game and you have a unique opportunity to influence this in a positive way.

Although the game is always the best teacher, practices will play an integral part in teaching your players about soccer. The length and frequency of practices will vary depending on the age of the players. Players as young as U6 can easily handle an hour of a well-planned practice. At U9 or U10, an hour and a quarter to an hour and a half is appropriate. For these age groups, it is nice to do 2 practices a week from the time you receive your roster until games start. This will allow instruction on most of the basic tenets of a game before your team actually has a game. After games start (usually about 3 weeks after you have received your roster), one practice a week is sufficient for these age groups.

Preparation is key to a successful practice. There are five basic areas which can be included in a practice session: warm up, stretching, technical skills, tactical skills, and application. These are more fully explained in the Drills & Coaching Points portion of the manual. It is tempting to try to teach too many skills during one practice. An effective approach is to teach one skill (referred to as the technical portion of the practice) and one strategy (referred to as the tactical portion of the practice) per practice. Then, have a game or activity at the end of practice to reinforce what has been taught—the application. For example, if a coach were to run a practice with an emphasis on dribbling and goal kicks, here is what that practice may look like (for instructions on the specific activities listed below, please look in the Drills & Coaching Points portion of this manual):

Warm Up Game

Linking Tag

Stretches

Technical Portion

Cone Dribbling

Stop That Ball

Dribbling Across the Square

Tactical Portion

Goal Kicks

When do goal kicks happen?

When does our team get a goal kick? The other team?

Where does the ball go for a goal kick?

Where does each position line up for a goal kick?

Who will take a goal kick on our team?

Application

Allow players to scrimmage for last part of practice, making sure to remind the players about the dribbling skills they learned and have them line up to take goal kicks as was taught when ball is hit over endline by offensive team.

Always arrive early to practice and set up the practice area. Having the activities of the practice written out can be extremely helpful. Make sure to make enough notes on your practice sheet so that you can remember each drill!

There are no set timeframes for each activity. If your players seem to have picked up a skill quickly, that leaves more time for another activity in your plan (e.g. maybe a longer scrimmage). If a skill is taking a bit longer to learn, another activity can be removed. Always be watching to make sure the players aren't getting bored and beginning to be sloppy in their practice or disruptive to other players. If this is beginning to happen, move to the next planned activity.

As the coach, you will need to be always assessing your team. There will be times when your team perfectly exhibits a skill in practice, but at game time, the skill seems to have disappeared. If this happens, don't be afraid to take another practice to reteach that skill. The repetition will only help to solidify the skill. If your team is nicely demonstrating the skills you've taught thus far, choose the next skill you would like to see them possess and structure your next practice around that skill.

It is always a good idea to have in mind one or two extra games that you know your team enjoys. Sometimes, even the most well-prepared practices just don't go according to plan. It happens to all coaches. Having a fun game to substitute in for a practice that isn't going well is a great strategy to turn a less-than-fun practice into one of the favorite practices of the season. You can always rework the practice and teach the given skills during the next session.

Games, of course, are the most fun part of the season! At this age, all players should be playing all positions. This allow for better overall development of each player. In order to be an effective forward, a player has to experience the game as a defender. The opposite is also true—in order to be an effective defender, a player has to experience the game as a forward. As the players get older, specializing in a position becomes more common. This typically happens at the U10 and above age levels. However, it is worthy to note that, at any age, a player who is willing and able to play many positions is an incredibly valuable asset and this ability to be versatile may be helpful in securing a place on a competition or high school team.

