

## **U-8 and below practice examples**

The seven practices illustrated below provide some wonderful guidance and ideas to help new coaches who are often not sure what to do at practice. With the multiple games and skills described throughout you should be able to “pick and choose” and develop practices that are successful for your team! Good luck and have fun!

### **Practice 1- Skill: Basic Dribbling**

#### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

- Get in the habit of warming up properly:
- Stand back to back: pass ball through legs then overhead (switch directions)
- Stand back to back: pass ball side to side (switch directions)
- Toe touches on ball: one foot at a time (most touches in 20 seconds)
- Passing ball between feet (Tic Tocks)(most passes in 20 seconds) (do it twice and see who is the most improved in additional passes)

#### **Skill: Dribbling (10 Minutes)**

- Single most important skill for kids to learn. We will revisit dribbling in almost every practice. Encourage players to keep eyes up and to use both feet:
- Inside foot (used to change direction & maneuver)
- Outside foot (used to move around other players)
- Have kids dribble in and out of cones (arrange cones in circle)
- Have kids dribble with inside of foot only then with both inside and outside of foot (do this to show them the advantage of using both inside and outside)

#### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

- Try to have all players doing something all of the time. The key to kids learning is for them to touch the ball and to try things. (Don't expect to play all of the games, just do what is comfortable. All the games involve ball handling and that is what we are after here.)
- Soccer Snake: form two snakes and play follow the leader. Lead snake has to make lots of direction changes. Switch front kid to back of snake. Next in line becomes the leader, etc. Check every now and again to see which group is the closest together. (Variation: put parents on the field and have the players weave in and out of the parents)
- Toss Across: In a circle, players dribble slowly. Coach walks around and tosses a plastic cone (or ball) to the players. The players should catch the cones and toss them back to the coach. (This promotes head up dribbling.)
- Sharks and minnows: Have a line of minnows with balls on one side of the field. Have one player without a ball (Shark) on the other side of the field. The coach blows the whistle and the object is for the minnows to dribble past the shark without the shark getting their ball. If a shark gets a minnows ball, they are out and they become a shark on the next go around. Continue playing until there are only 1-3 players left.
- Pac Man: Make a large circle with cones. Every player gets a ball and starts inside the circle. Coach blows whistle and the players start to dribble. Players try to kick other players balls out of the circle while retaining control of their ball. If a player's ball is kicked out, have them leave the circle and do an exercise (10 toe taps on the ball or 10 between the foot passes etc... and then the player can enter back into the game) (Remember: don't eliminate players from the games - they are here to practice. Have them go out and back in. The players who go out first usually need the most practice so don't make them stand around while the more advanced kids work on their skills.)

- Pac Man variation: Game begins like the Pac Man above. The variation is that instead of kicking the other player's ball, the players should try to tag other players on some part of their body. If a player gets tagged, they must hold that part of their body and keep playing (ex: if a player gets tagged in the knee, the player must hold his knee with one hand and keep dribbling).

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES (scrimmages) : (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
- Keep the games fun and upbeat.
- Scores are great to make and "no big deal" to give up.
- Game should be played in quarters of 5-7 minutes (decide prior to game).
- Coaches shouldn't substitute during quarter unless a player is having difficulty.
- Coaches should rotate all players to all positions as much as possible each game.

Pick a parent to referee the scrimmage - an assistant coach is also acceptable if no parent is available.

### **Practice 2 - Skill: Basic Dribbling**

#### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

- Get in the habit of warming up properly:
- Stretch with ball
- Toe touches
- Push ball forward with sole of foot
- Pull ball backwards with sole of foot

#### **Skill: Throw Ins and Trapping (10 Minutes): APPLICABLE FOR U-8 AND UP ONLY!!!**

Throw Ins: Throw forward toward opponents goal.

- Player uses two hands throwing ball over head (if done properly, no spin should be on the ball) (don't worry about spin too much at this age).
- Both feet must be on the ground as the player throws the ball in.
- Throw to one of your players who is open. Teach players to get open by moving up and down the field.

Receiving: Trap the ball and break towards opponent's goal.

- Receive the ball with feet or legs, causing the ball to stop at the player's feet, ready to be kicked.
- Receive the ball on the thigh (not knee), causing the ball to stop at the player's feet, ready to be kicked (this is a little more advanced for these kids, so some will get it and some will not - don't worry about it or spend too much time here).
- Receive the ball from the throw in and move toward opponent's goal.

### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

- **Throw In Practice:** Practice by throwing and receiving in pairs. One person is throwing while the other receives the throw and returns with a pass. Have the receiver control the ball and pass back to the thrower with their feet (after a few minutes switch roles).
- **Expand Throw in Practice:** split players into groups of three. Have one player throw in to a second player (forward) and have the third player (defender) try to get the ball. This simulates real game play.
- **Dribbling (revisited):** Have Parents form two lines facing sidelines with legs open. Players form two lines at one side of the parents. One player's line is on one side of the parents, the other line is on the other side of the parents. One player starts, dribble up to the first parent and passes the ball between the legs of the parents in both lines (ball goes through two sets of parent legs). Player from other line receives the ball and dribbles down to the next set of parents and passes the ball back through the legs of both sets of parents. Continue down the line. After the first set of kids get part way done, start the next set. Don't let the kids stand around watching.\*
- **Pac Man / Pac Man Variation** (see [Practice 1](#)) \*
- **Sharks and Minnows** (see [Practice 1](#)) \*

\*These drills are acceptable for below the U-8 level

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES: (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
- Keep the games fun and upbeat.
- Scores are great to make and "no big deal" to give up.
- Game should be played in quarters of 5-7 minutes (decide prior to game).
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Coaches should rotate all players to all positions as much as possible each game.

### **Practice 3 - Skill: Kicking and Shooting**

#### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

- Get in the habit of warming up properly:
- Stretch with ball
- Soccer Snake (change feet, inside/outside foot)
- Play Simon Says (Simon says pull ball backwards, dribble with left foot, do 5 toe tapes, etc.)

#### **Skill: Kicking and Shooting (10 Minutes)**

Just the basics here, not world cup. Form is more important than power or distance. If form is correct, all else will come with practice.

- Approach ball slightly from an angle
- Ankle and toes should be rigid
- Plant foot next to ball pointing toes in the direction that the player wants the ball to go
- Follow through (keep moving or you will lose half your power and distance)

### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

- Passing/Kicking: practice by having two players kick the ball back and forth between two cones. Practice solid passes/kicks and proper receiving (trap the ball) and then pass back. Always maintain control.
- Target Shooting: Setup a cone between a pair of players. Have players move around, opposite each other, and try to knock over the cone. Always maintain control of the ball.
- Shooting on goal: Coach rolls ball to player, who receives and controls the ball, then shoots on goal. Rotate goalies. Use two coaches and two lines to shoot on goal, alternate between coaches rolling out ball and keep this drill moving. Kids who are not playing are not learning (and probably doing something else...).
- Game Simulation: Instead of coaches rolling out the ball, have parents stand as defenders and have the kids dribble around them and shoot on goal. Rotate goalies. Have the parents lightly defend against players.
- Big Foot: Line up cones in two parallel lines approx. 10 yards apart. Divide kids into two teams. Kids line up behind the cones facing the other team who are behind the other cones. One side starts with the balls and kicks the balls across to the other team. The object is to get the balls past the other team. Other team should try to trap the ball. If a ball goes past the other team, leave it. When all the balls are gone, the team with the least balls through their line wins. (Coaches should return balls from between cones. This is for two reasons: first, kids should not be between the cones, they could get hurt. Second, because the kids love to shoot at the coach.)

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES: (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
- Keep the games fun and upbeat.
- Scores are great to make and "no big deal" to give up.
- Game should be played in quarters of 5-7 minutes (decide prior to game).
- Coaches shouldn't substitute during quarter unless a player is having difficulty.

Coaches should rotate all players to all positions as much as possible each game.

## **Practice 4 - Skill: Passing**

### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

Get in the habit of warming up properly:

- Stretch with ball
- Dribble through parent forest (parents give 1/2 resistance)
- Two team relay races around cones (change feet, inside/outside foot)
- Pass ball between feet and toe touches; see who gets the most touches

### **Skill: Passing (10 Minutes)**

General instruction in passing:

- Strike ball with inside foot for short accurate passes
- Reinforce proper striking power and distance
- Reinforce proper receiving skills
- Can pass between cones to focus passing

Encourage passing during games but do not over emphasize it. Many (most) children at this age are not cognitively capable of understanding the concepts of passing and true team play. Encourage this but don't force it. The kids will get it with time.

### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

- **Speed Passing:** Players stand 5 yards apart. Have them pass to each other, receive properly (trap and control) and then pass back. Let them practice then the first to do this 10 times is the winner. Try at 10 yards.
- **Ghost Busters:** Have 3 pairs of players in two lines passing to each other. Have other players run through the gauntlet without getting hit by the ball. Players should vary their speed to avoid getting hit. At first, players cannot aim at the runner. Then after a while, let the passers aim at the runners. Switch kids around.
- **Over the Edge:** Have all players (one ball each) behind one line of cones. Setup another line of cones (parallel to the first) 10 yards away. Have all players kick the ball to the other line then sprint and stop the ball before it goes over the line. Practice a little then play a game. Those who go over the line are knocked out, also the player furthest from the line is knocked out. Keep going until 1-3 kids are left. Try it at 15 yards. This game promotes control on fast breaks. Knowing how hard to kick a ball and not let it get away from you.
- **Parent Diamond:** four parents form a diamond. Parents stand with legs open. 1st player passes through parent one's legs to a player in the middle of the diamond. 1st player then moves to parent two and receives a pass from the player in the middle (through the parents' legs). 1st player then dribbles on to parent three and passes through parent three's legs to the player in the middle, etc. Get as many parent diamonds going as is necessary to keep any players from waiting more than a few moments.
- **Additional Games:** If you have additional time, go back to some of the previous games, Pac Man, Sharks and Minnows, Big Foot, etc.

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES: (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
- Keep the games fun and upbeat.
- Scores are great to make and "no big deal" to give up.
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### **Practice 6 - Skill: Reinforce Skills Learned**

### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

Choose your favorite warm-up activities such as:

- soccer snake,
- toe touches,
- back to back passing,
- Simon says,
- Pac Man, etc...

### **Skill: Reinforce skills learned this season (10 Minutes)**

Take this opportunity to reinforce or practice the skills your team learned this season:

- Basic Dribbling
- Throw-Ins and Trapping (U-8 AND ABOVE **ONLY!!!**)
- Kicking and Shooting
- Passing (short and long)
- Goal Tending

### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

Have players pick their favorite games:

- Races - single (dribbling) and pairs (passing)
- Soccer Snake
- Parent Diamond or Forest
- Target shooting at cones
- Shooting on Goal
- Ghost busters
- Pac Man (or variation)
- Speed Passing
- Sharks and Minnows

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES: (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
- Keep the games fun and upbeat.
- Scores are great to make and "no big deal" to give up.
- Game should be played in quarters of 5-7 minutes (decide prior to game).
- Coaches shouldn't substitute during quarter unless a player is having difficulty.

Coaches should rotate all players to all positions as much as possible each game.

### **Practice 7 - Skill: Reinforce Skills and Soccer fun with Parents**

### **Warm-up: (10 Minutes)**

Choose your favorite warm-up activities such as:

- soccer snake,
- toe touches,
- back to back passing,
- Simon says,
- Pac Man, etc...

### **Skill: Reinforce skills learned this season (10 Minutes)**

Take this opportunity to reinforce or practice the skills your team learned this season:

- Basic Dribbling
- Throw-Ins and Trapping
- Kicking and Shooting
- Passing (short and long)
- Goal Tending

### **Skill Games: (20 Minutes)**

Special rules so that the parents can compete.

- divide your team into two squads
- first squad plays against their parents
- switch - second squad plays against their parents
- play two 7 minute halves for this game (parents tire easily)
- play the width of the field (a "half court" game) - setup cones for goals. This will allow the field to be shared by the other team practicing on the field.
- coaches should participate against the players
- the kids love this - just have fun

### **BREAK: (5 Minutes)**

**Make sure players have a water/rest break** before the Soccer game starts. Plan for multiple water breaks each practice during hot weather.

### **GAMES: (30 Minutes)**

- Let the kids play and have fun.
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