

# THE NOVICE COACH

AN INTRODUCTION TO COACHING YOUTH SOCCER





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## AN INTRODUCTION TO COACHING YOUTH SOCCER

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# WELCOME

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Congratulations on accepting the challenge of coaching a youth soccer team. Perhaps you have played or coached soccer before, maybe not. Regardless of your experience in the game, this primer is a great resource to get you started with the rewarding experience of coaching soccer.

Here you will find plenty of information to get you going for your first season. The information contained in this primer supplements the DVD, *The Novice Coach - An Introduction to Coaching Youth Soccer*. You will receive an elementary education on coaching philosophy, and develop a better understanding of how children learn and develop both as people and as soccer players. You'll also notice the contacts at the national, regional and, most importantly, the state level so that you can participate in the coaching education program. From North Carolina Youth Soccer Association you will receive more information on coaching children—and, through NCYSA, you should attend a state youth coaching course! There are coaches and administrators at every level of the game ready to guide and assist you. Please do not hesitate to contact these soccer experts so you can tap into their experience and knowledge.

As a youth soccer coach you have an opportunity to help children develop their values and ethics as well as their ball skills, physical fitness and sense of Fair Play. Your actions and words will echo with these youngsters for years to come. Many of them will not recall years from now where this positive influence came into their lives, but it was you. Enjoy your time with the players. Instill in them a love for the game. Whatever the future holds for their soccer careers it will grow from a love of the game.

## OUR EDUCATIONAL PHILOSOPHY

"The game within the child" is at the center of all beliefs, decisions, and actions taken by the child, coach and organization. Our goal is to unlock the game within children to reach their full soccer potential.

**PLAY-** Children come to play the game, not to work, not to listen to the coach lecture, and not to discuss the game. They come to PLAY, and playing equates to fun.

**THE GAME AS THE TEACHER-** players learn best by actually playing the game in an environment where they feel free to try new ideas.

**"ORGANIZED SPONTANEITY"**- Encouragement of free and unbridled play by modifying the playing environment to small-sided games and limiting the amount of input from the coach. Again, the game is the best teacher.



## **GENERAL COACHING/TALKING POINTS**

As coaches we are facilitators. We try to create the perfect environment for our youth soccer players to prosper. This means that we are guiding the players in the direction you have planned for them. The proper environment should encourage the players to start thinking independently, so the players start thinking about the game and that they take ownership. An implication of this approach is that the coach should ask questions to the players, instead of placing a demand. This coaching method is called "Guided Discovery". With guided discovery, the coach puts the players in learning situations in which they have to come up with the answers to the problems. Example of a guided question: "When dribbling the soccer ball, why is it best to keep the soccer ball close to you?"

## **CURRICULUM & METHODOLOGY**

Toe Valley Soccer believes in an age and developmentally appropriate educational curriculum of coaching education as the needs of U8 players and coaches are different than those of U12 players and coaches. Developmentally appropriate methodology includes addressing the psychomotor, cognitive and psychosocial implications of child development. See the Appendix for more information on the stages of development.

## **GOALS**

Your goal for the season is to promote an understanding of the game and the belief that soccer is a vehicle for character, intellectual, and motor development. The game should not be viewed in an adult sense, with competition as a means to an end, but in a child's view of joy and fun.

# **PLAY IS THE KEY WORD IN PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

## **COACHING RESPONSIBILITIES:**

- Be sincere
- Be honest
- Be up-to-date
- Be able to demonstrate (or get someone who can)
- Be able to manage
- Be reliable
- Be a positive role model
- Be organized
- Be knowledgeable

## **BEFORE YOUR FIRST TRAINING SESSION**

- Organize!
- Prepare for meeting the players and parents
- Set your practice schedule and contact your players
- Learn your local rules



- Gather resources, do your homework: *What should I do at the first practice?*
- Get acquainted. Not only should you learn the names, but also have the children exchange names. There are several name-learning games that work well with children.
- Set down team rules and expectations, with players and parents.
- Assess your players' general ability.
- Spark their interest with some fun games (as shown in the DVD "*The Novice Coach - An Introduction to Coaching Youth Soccer*")
- Play a game of soccer!

## THE PLAYERS

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### GENERAL OBSERVATIONS OF PLAYERS FROM THE AGES OF FOUR TO TWELVE

Children of the same age may differ a good deal in motor skill development. A child's physical skills develop in a particular sequence: first they learn to crawl, then to walk, and then to run, jump and hop, in that order. There is a developmental sequence in learning a single technique too. As players practice a particular technique such as shooting they use their bodies more effectively each time and reach a higher level of development in that technique.

Children progress through motor development sequences at their own rate. Players of the same age may be at different development levels because of differences in motor ability and in the amount of time they have practiced the technique. The important thing is that each player shows continued progress.

Children of the same age will differ in physiological development (bone growth and muscular strength). Stars within youth soccer are often more advanced physiologically than others their own age.

They are loaded with energy and yet must be given rest periods. Compared to other periods in a child's life these are the slow years in physical growth, making it the best time to learn new techniques.

Children in the U6 and U8 age groups like to play with others but side by side, rather than together – "Me first..." rather than "Let's both do this..." It's a difficult time to teach tactics. Indeed the focus should be on teaching ball skills and Fair Play. Their training sessions should be mostly technical repetitions, psychologically friendly and positive, have simple combinations with decision making activities. Individual basic skills with an emphasis on keeping ball possession are crucial activities along with lots of balance and coordination exercises. Much of the training time should be free play with trial and error, discovery and experimentation. Their games should be 3- to 4-a-side without leagues or standings. They may participate in festivals, but not tournaments. Weekends should be



many fun and competitive games. They gain technical skills and game insight by playing in simplified soccer situations.

Children in the U10 and U12 age groups should have training sessions with a focus on teaching ball skills and Fair Play. They are now capable of learning more combinations on offense and defense. The training atmosphere must be psychologically positive with correction. Individual basic skills with an emphasis on keeping ball possession are crucial activities. Much of the practice time should be free play with trial and error, discovery and experimentation. They need training time sharpening advanced competitive skills against match opponents; this means practice games. Weekends should be fun and competitive games. They gain technical skills and game insight by playing in simplified soccer situations. Tactically work on the roles of attack and defense and the basic principles of play. Exercises should focus on endurance, rhythmic movement, flexibility and running mechanics. The coach guides them on the application of where it all fits into the game and the parts of the field. Selection (try-outs) should not begin until the U13 age group. Overall there must be less emphasis on the match result and more emphasis on the players' performances.

- Children have not yet learned the skills of compromise and team play. Expect frequent argument. Do not interfere with their arguments, as it is a part of their learning process. Team games call for social and mental skills that they are just starting to develop.
- They have not learned to accept mistakes – their own or others.
- You should not expect the children to play a team game the way adults would. You should bend the rules to fit their physical and mental maturity. Fewer players result in more touches with the ball and equipment should be suitable to their age and size resulting in better play.
- They lack the ability to make quick decisions.
- Adult reactions to their efforts are often mistaken and become a blow to their self-confidence. They are in need of understanding and encouragement.
- Overuse injuries, burnout and high attrition rates are associated with high-intensity children's programs that fail to stress skill development and learning enjoyment.

**SPECIFIC TO THE U10-U12 PLAYER:**

- A systematic approach to problem solving appears at this stage; the game of soccer must present the ability to think creatively and solve problems while moving.
- The children are developing a conscience, morality and a scale of values.
- Whether a child enters puberty early or late has important psychological implications.
- The players are beginning to think in abstract terms and can address simple tactical situations.
- They are beginning to develop abilities to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences.



# THE PARENTS

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Parents must not lose sight of why youth participate in sport. Studies show that the most popular reason for playing youth sports was **'to have fun'**. The next most popular reasons for playing sport were to learn new skills, to be with friends and to experience the thrill of competition. Although the children do identify winning as a reason for playing sport it is not one of the most popular reasons. Many parents erroneously believe that winning is the number one reason that children want to play sports. Parents who become preoccupied with winning and losing place an unreasonable amount of pressure on their child and risk turning their child off to youth soccer.

An effective sport parent should also understand his or her role and the expectations associated with being a soccer parent. The primary role of the parent in youth soccer is to provide support for their children. At these young ages, parents need to provide encouragement, and help the child understand the lessons that soccer can teach.

Parents of Young Soccer Players Should ...

- Listen to their children's views about playing soccer
- Provide unconditional love during both successes and failures
- Help children understand that the definition of a good performance is giving one's best effort
- Encourage the players to be self-reliant and to accept responsibility for their decisions and actions
- Encourage non-sport interests
- Allow their children to set their own standards of excellence
- Provide encouragement and hopeful optimism when needed by the youngster
- Emphasize enjoyment above all!

## HOW PARENTS CAN HELP!

Parents of players play an active part in the enjoyment their children have in youth soccer. Encouragement to try new things is step one. Many parents during matches and sometimes-even training sessions yell out to the kids what to do and when to do it. They cheer when things go right and sometimes cry out in anguish when they don't. In all they are trying to be positive and help the kids. However, this is can be a distraction for the players and it may also inhibit their development. It is crucially important that the players learn and take responsibility to communicate among themselves during a match. If parents and coaches are regularly yelling out instructions to the players during a match then they become silent. The important asset of talking amongst teammates never



develops. Unfortunately the player is distracted by all of the adults yelling from the touchline. Now the child has to make a choice, either play the game or listen to the parents.

The match environment simply becomes more complex each year as there are new rules to learn, more players on the field, new tactics to learn and more space to cover. So the lesson is clear. If parents want to help the kids play their best they need to be quiet while watching the game. Just sit back and let the children play!

## TEAM MANAGEMENT

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### PARENT – COACH MEETING

The following list includes key points for you to remember when you meet with the players' parents at the beginning of the season:

- Introduce yourself and your assistant coaches.
- Be prompt and organized in starting.
- Have refreshments if possible.
- State your experience and qualifications, even if you have none, and your reasons for becoming a coach.
- Explain your philosophy and team objectives.
- Review your methods of coaching. Describe a typical practice.
- Discuss what is expected of parents and solicit their assistance.
- Collect parent contact information (postal address, phone numbers, E-mail addresses, etc.) and especially emergency contact information.
- Ask the parents to let you know if there is any particular medical condition about their child you should know.
- Distribute information on the club and the practice/game schedule.
- Discuss and perhaps give the adults a handout on the rules for their conduct at games.
- Leave plenty of time so parents can ask you any questions or voice any concerns that they may have.

### SIDELINE ETHICS

Define appropriate sideline behavior. This would be for players, spectators and the staff.

Don't allow yourself or spectators to verbally abuse the players or the officials.

**REMEMBER: A COACH IS RESPONSIBLE FOR HIS/HER SIDELINE!**

Some things to discuss early in the seasonal year are:

- Encourage parents to cheer for all players, not just the "good ones." Know the difference between cheering and "oh my goodness, what are you doing out there?"
- Discourage coaching by spectators from the sidelines, as this will confuse players.
- Referees, especially young ones, are doing a difficult job. Let them do it.
- Criticism of officials usually results in the children learning the wrong lesson from the adults.
- Be a positive role model and set the standard of good sportsmanship.
- Do not negatively question or argue with officials.





- Do not engage in unsporting communication with opponents or their spectators.
- Maintain integrity. Your demeanor on and off the field will say a lot about you for a long time.
- Know and keep the rules and regulations of the local, state and national organizations.
- Always work within the spirit of the Laws of the Game. Do not "bend the rules" to your advantage.
- Regardless of the outcome of matches, wins and losses and trophy presentations, your actions as coach will always be how people remember you.

## PREVENTION AND CARE OF INJURIES

Your primary role is to provide a safe and healthy environment for the children. You can do this by following this simple checklist for basic safety. Be sure to devote part of your team's first training and practice to basic rules. Here are the most important:

- Shin guards are mandatory equipment. Players must wear shin guards under their socks.
- Do not allow kids to play soccer while wearing jewelry or watches.
- Goals must be anchored to prevent them being blown or pulled over.
- Absolutely no swinging or climbing on goals. Never allow kids to move a portable goal.
- Keep warm-up areas clear of gear bags and other items players might trip over.
- Keep benches at least five yards away from sidelines.
- Insist that kids bring filled water bottles to every game and practice.
- Use corners flags made with flexible rods.
- Check fields before you play. Look for broken glass, storm drains, raised sprinkler heads, holes, protruding bolts, hooks or nails on goal posts or crossbars - anything that can cause injury.

In following the above, you have taken precaution to ensure a safe environment. However, there's no avoiding injury when it comes to playing sports. Again, be safe and prepared in the event of an injury to a player.

- Have a properly stocked first aid kit, including ice. Ask your physician, ambulance squad, or emergency medical facility to suggest a list of supplies for your medical kit. Check frequently that the kit is restocked.
- Tape several quarters inside the first aid kit, for telephone calls. Despite the prevalence of cell phones this practice is a good backup for an emergency.
- Take first aid courses, or better yet, advanced first aid.
- Prevent many injuries and sprains by teaching, and allowing time for warm-ups and cool-downs.
- Don't take chances; kids who are injured should be removed from the field. Injuries should never be "worked out" or "run off."
- Teach team parents the basics of RICE for minor injuries:



- o **Rest:** Stop all activity that would further aggravate the injury.
- o **Ice:** Use ice continuously for the first 15 minutes then 10 minutes on and 10 minutes off for the first 24 hours.
- o **Compression:** To prevent swelling wrap the injury with an elastic bandage.
- o **Elevation:** If possible raise the injured body part above heart level.

RICE should be employed for 24 to 48 hours depending on the severity of the injury.

- Discourage parents from seeking a player's early return from an injury, as returning too soon will often lead to re-injury.

### PREVENT DEHYDRATION

Adequate hydration is one of the simplest but most important things players need to feel and perform well. Kids dehydrate easier than adults.

- o Thirst is not a good indicator of the need for fluids. Often kids don't feel thirsty until after they are dehydrated.
- o Kids should drink fluids frequently, and in small amounts, during play - especially in hot or humid weather.
- o Water, sports drinks and diluted fruit juices are all good choices for fluid replacement during play.
- o Care should be taken that kids do not contaminate common drinking containers by putting their hands into water containers to scoop out ice or by passing around a common drinking bottle.
- o NEVER withhold fluids from kids; thirst won't make them tough, it will just endanger them. Do not tell kids to just "wet their whistle" or "take a sip!"

## TRAINING SESSIONS

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### GENERAL GUIDELINES FOR A TRAINING SESSION

- Begin action as soon as possible. Have the team begin working at the outset without an involved and complicated explanation.
- Remember you are coaching players, not skills.
- Involve as many of the players as possible and try to ensure that each one has a specific job.
- Demonstration position – select a suitable demonstration position. This is important and certain basics should be followed:
  - o Coach must see every player...do not begin to speak until all are in front and standing still...the players nearest you should crouch down.
  - o Immobilize all soccer balls...have all balls out of the players' reach as you speak...if coaching in the activity, get the ball yourself.
  - o Do not speak into a strong wind.



- o Players should not be asked to look into the sun at the coach...it is better that the sun is in the eyes of the coach.

### **ASSISTANT COACHES**

If you are fortunate enough to have other adults volunteer to assist you with the team then look for assistance with team management/administration and coaching. The assistant coach does not necessarily need to have experience as a player or coach to be helpful to you. Let the parents—your volunteer base—know this, and they'll then be more likely to assist you. An assistant coach could simply help with supervision, training and game organization, first aid, etc. Some adults will be more comfortable starting with these responsibilities and then ease themselves into helping you to actually coach the players. Whatever tasks you assign to your assistant be sure you communicate clearly and often. It is important that the coaches working with the players are on the same page. An assistant coach can be a real benefit to you, but only if you invest the effort to build a good working partnership.

### **EQUIPMENT**

The key motivator in soccer is the ball; use it as much as possible in your training sessions. If you are using equipment, try to make sure that your layout has visual impact. The set up and collecting of equipment should be done efficiently. Prepare your lesson plan thoroughly, bearing in mind the players' abilities, the facilities and the equipment at your disposal.

As you begin each activity during your training be sure you have all of the equipment where you need it to efficiently run that activity. Remove any unnecessary equipment from the training area. Involve the players in this process to a degree commensurate with their age. Players in all age groups can help pick up all of the cones or dribble all of the balls to one spot. However, U6 players most likely will not be able to use the cones to mark off a practice grid for you, but U10 players can do this.

Here's a short list of equipment you should consider obtaining to coach your team. TVSA will provide most of these for your use through the season.

- First aid kit
- Emergency ice
- Extra water
- Spare soccer balls
- Ball pump
- Junior size training bibs (at least two colors)
- Disc cones (having some of different colors can be useful)

### **HOW TO RUN A TRAINING SESSION**

A training session should focus on one theme!

1. Warm-up: without the ball at first to challenge their physical fitness growth; i.e., at this age the fitness focus is on balance, agility, fundamental eye/hand & eye/foot



coordination. Psychologically this needs to be FUN physical challenges - NOT - a calisthenics approach. Warm-ups should be interactive, engaging, geared towards the upcoming activities and most of all fun! This means, no lines and no long speeches from coaches. Choose activities during your warm-up that do not need long explanations, conduct activities that your players know. This eliminates waiting and idle time, idle time is counter-productive to a warm-up.

2. With the ball- simple challenges first and as their technique improves over time then increase the challenge of doing things with the ball. Activities done with the ball could be done with either the feet or hands.
3. Fun game-like activity that is done with the ball. Run two or three different activities now. Length of each activity depends on how much fun the kids are having and their attention span.
4. Finish with a Small-Sided match. If you have more children in attendance then set up a second match.

Throughout the session the coach allows the players to experiment and discover the ball skill being taught on their own. The coach should do some demonstration of the skill a few times during the session. Also during the session call out some of the key coaching points on how to execute the ball skill.

Praise loudly and positively when a player does the skill correctly — Positive Reinforcement! Encourage them to try to do new things with the ball throughout the soccer season. **It is VERY important for the training session that each player has a ball.**

### DESIGN OF A TRAINING SESSION

The training session will go from simple to complex activities.

Warm-up (1st activity)

2nd activity – alone, in pairs & in small groups

3rd activity – group activity on cooperation

4th activity – group activity on competition

5<sup>th</sup> activity – small-sided games

Cool-down

Whenever you put together a lesson plan for a training session ask yourself these questions:

- Are the activities fun?
- Are they organized?
- Are the players involved in the activities?
- Are creativity and decision making being used?
- Are the spaces used appropriate?



- Is the coach's feedback appropriate?
- Are there implications for the game?<sup>2</sup>

When you are writing out your lesson plan here are some of the items that should be included:

- Date
- Topic
- Training Objective
- Equipment Needs
- Outline of Activities
- Diagram of each Activity
- Coaching Points

One last note...avoid the three L's: Laps, Lines and Lectures! There's no more surefire way of boring the kids than the three L's. Kids at these ages are fit. They don't need to run laps. It's a waste of precious time when the kids could be combining fitness with skills. And as we've said before, every child should have a ball, then there's no need to wait in line for their turn. Use activities that have all the children active. And keep your comments and instructions brief. A lecture is the last thing a child wants when soccer time is supposed to be a fun time. A well-organized training session will leave no idle time for their minds to wander.

US Youth Soccer provides an archive of lesson plans for training sessions at their web site

[www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org).

### **THE STARTING 11**

1. BEGINNING – brief explanation (15 seconds or less) – show them, practice
2. ENCOURAGING – give individual and group praise
3. MODELING – use the children when possible to demonstrate good performance
4. OBSERVING – position yourself to see all of the group at one time
5. QUESTIONING – help the children solve the challenges
6. TEACHING – assist individuals and the group to improve performance
7. PROGRESSING – the activities should flow from simple to complex
8. PARTICIPATING – maximum involvement – cooperative and competitive fun activities
9. ORGANIZING – keep all spare equipment (balls, training bibs, cones) close for each activity. Adjust the size of the playing area when needed, even during the activities. Ensure proper supervision for safety and success.
10. PLAYING – let the children play! Avoid over-coaching
11. FINISHING – end on a positive note



# GAME DAY

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## PRE-GAME

- Tell parents that the kids should eat at least two hours before kickoff whenever possible.
- Be at the game site: Fifteen minutes prior to kickoff for U10 and U12 • Brief warm-up.
- Very short talk from the coach.
- Organize who will be on the field first.

## GAME

- Sit back, relax and enjoy watching the kids play.
- Help officiate the match when needed.
- Make sure all of the kids' play at least 50% of the game.
- During the game is a good time to speak with the parents to explain to them what is happening in the game and for what you want them to cheer.
- Watch for what the players do well in the game and praise it...otherwise be quiet.
- During breaks make sure the players get water and take care of any injuries.

## POST-GAME

- Tend to any injuries.
- Ensure all of the kids drink plenty of water.
- Cool-down for ten minutes with the U10 or U12 age groups.
- Thank the players and send them home.

# RESOURCES

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## US YOUTH SOCCER BOOKS (AVAILABLE AT [USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG](http://USYOUTHSOCCER.ORG))

Coaching the U12 Player

Coaching Youth Soccer

Assistant Coach Series U6/U8/U10/U12

Official Coaching Manual

Small-Sided Games Manual

## RESOURCE MATERIAL — FREE BROCHURES (AVAILABLE FROM NCYSA).

Welcome to US Youth Soccer (English & Spanish)

Parent's Guide to US Youth Soccer (English & Spanish)

Principles of Conduct

Referees, Coaches, Parents - Role Models for Life

Handbook for Small Sided Games – Modified Rules for U6 to U12

Know Soccer and Its Rules

## **THE FOLLOWING COACHING COURSES, AND OTHERS, ARE AVAILABLE TO YOU FROM NCYSA:**

U6/U8 state youth course certificate

U10/U12 state youth course certificate

"E" License

"D" License



## CHILD-CENTERED COACHING

Richard Schmidt, a motor learning and motor development expert, developed a schema theory (1975, 2000), which suggests that children up to age 14 should experience a wide range of movement in early life to aid in solving future movement challenges.

Child centered coaching places a high priority on the total development of the young athlete. The early specialization of sport skills has a limiting effect on child development. Sport skills require specific motor patterns and a child should be exposed to a wide range of movement experiences early in life. A great basketball player doesn't necessarily have the skills to be a great baseball player at early ages.

When developing youth soccer players, apply the schema theory by presenting a wide range of movement activities and challenges during practices.

The three learning domains described below provide a conceptual framework to guide us in the design of developmentally appropriate games and practices.

### PYSCHOMOTOR (PHYSICAL)

Children grow at different rates. Balance, center of gravity, length of limbs, body mass, and gross and fine motor control all play a part in a child's ability to move effectively. Within the same age group, some are shorter or taller than others, some have better balance, and others fall down quite often. As a result, we cannot pass false judgement on a child whose development is a little slower than the rest of the team.

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

### COGNITIVE (THINKING AND LEARNING)

Knowledge gained from studying early learning theories can be used to help plan effective experiences for youth sport beginners. It is equally important to understand how a child thinks; how they perceive and understand their surroundings and the world. Experience and challenging the mind become the two most important characteristics of learning and future performance.

The authors have introduced the work of various cognitive theorists such as Jean Piaget, Eric Erikson, Lawrence Kohlberg, and Albert Bandura in an attempt to bridge the gap between theory and practice. If we understand how the child thinks, or their stages of development, then perhaps we can better understand the child.

### PSYCHOSOCIAL (PSYCHOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL)

It has already been mentioned that nothing good happens in isolation when learning sport skills.

We cannot teach dribbling without creating an interest and desire to dribble. Force-feeding skill development through drills does not work! There is a great tendency to underestimate the importance and role that emotion, feelings and motivation play during the youth soccer experience. Young children don't pass the ball to a teammate in the best position to receive it; they pass to their best friend. Why? Because most tactical decisions don't exist and they are most concerned with sharing the ball with a few of their best buddies. If we recognize this, then we can work within it and create activities in which players get to know each other better.



## PIAGET'S COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT THEORY

Jean Piaget (1806 – 1980) is credited with forging the single most comprehensive theory of intellectual development. He discovered early in life an interest for studying children and in particular how they responded to questions and how they reasoned answers. He determined that children think in entirely different ways than adults. He spent countless hours observing children's spontaneous activities. His attempt to learn from the children themselves. He primarily interviewed and observed children between the ages of four and twelve.

Piaget recognized that children pass through "stages" of development at different rates (periods) and attached little importance to the ages associated with each stage. He did believe that children moved through these stages in the same order. He did not think that these stages are genetically determined. They represent increasingly comprehensive ways of thinking. He felt that children were constantly exploring, manipulating, and trying to make sense out of the environment and were actually constructing new ways to deal with it (Kohlberg, 1968).

Piaget developed a four-stage approach that is often referred to as The General Periods of Development. According to Piaget, development is not governed by internal maturation or external teachings; it is an "active construction process," in which children, through their own activities, build increasingly differentiated and comprehensive structures (Crain, 2000). For the purposes of youth soccer, parents and coaches have to provide an environment in which children can participate independently and with their peers at constructing their own soccer environment.

### STAGE SUMMARY

**Sensory Motor (0 -2):** Learning through senses and early development of language.

**Preoperational (2 – 7):** Early childhood, very egocentric, highly imaginative.

**Concrete Operational (7 – 11):** Development of rule structure, cooperative play and development of friendships.

**Formal Operational (11+):** Abstract thought and expanded social groups.





## PRINCIPLES OF COACHING

The principles of youth coaching are guidelines developed as a foundation or a sounding board to assess the appropriateness of an activity or training session. The following six principles are presented so that youth players receive a healthy and positive youth soccer experience.

### DEVELOPMENTALLY APPROPRIATE

This challenges the coach to examine the appropriateness of the activity. The requirements or demands of the activity should fall within the range of a players' abilities. Examples include: attempting to teach a wall-pass to U8's when they cannot think in advance of the ball or asking a U6 player to stay in a specific position when their spatial awareness is limited and possess a strong desire to chase the ball.

### DECISION MAKING

Are there opportunities for the players to make decisions? Decisions may be *spatial* (where do I run or pass), *temporal* (when do I pass or run), or *kinesthetic* (how do I handle the ball)? These need to be present in all activities for learning to occur. Effective learning is a result of being placed in efficient trials.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR THE GAME

The activities presented in a training session must in some way reflect the demands a player faces in the game. The younger the player the less clear this may seem, while the older the player (i.e. 10 or older), the more clear it will become. However, the implications for the game are even more important for the younger players. The coach at this level is providing the foundational movement and thinking skills that will enable the player to later solve more complex problems.

### SAFE AND APPROPRIATE TRAINING AREA

The area should be free of hazardous materials (e.g., glass, stones, branches, holes, etc.) and should be safe from traffic or other environmental dangers. The training Environment should be psychologically safe.

### CLEAR, CONCISE AND CORRECT INFORMATION

How instructions are given is crucial when dealing with young children. Too much information overwhelms them and too little information doesn't give them enough to get started. Provide enough information to get them started and then add new challenges.

### SIMPLE TO COMPLEX

Are the activities presented in a way that allows for ongoing modifications and new challenges to meet the players' interest and abilities?



# DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

An overview of the stages of a recreation soccer player:

Development Stage	Age	Objectives
<b>STAGE 1</b>	U4	<p>30 - 40 minutes x 1 time a week</p> <p>Introductory level with the objective to get children moving and keep them active. Major focus on developing the player's imagination.</p> <p>The physical curriculum includes learning basic fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, twisting, and hopping with an introduction to the soccer ball.</p>
<b>STAGE 2</b>	U6	<p>40 - 60 minutes x 1 time a week</p> <p>Developmental level focusing on one player with one ball that still incorporates the basic fundamental movements.</p> <p>An introduction to the basics of movement of the soccer ball (one ball, one player), dribbling and kicking through fun games using the player's imagination.</p>
<b>STAGE 3</b>	U8	<p>60 minutes x 2 times a week</p> <p>Skill development is introduced in this stage with a large emphasis on fun and should concentrate on developing agility, balance and coordination.</p> <p>The learning environment has a large quantity of decision making activities to empower the youth players and actively involve the players in their learning process.</p> <p>This stage also introduces working effectively with a teammate (two players and one ball), passing and decision making.</p>
<b>STAGE 4</b>	U10	<p>75 minutes x 2 times a week</p> <p>Developmental focus on the basic principles of play and establishing training ethics and discipline. This stage has an instructive, fun and challenging environment, which is essential for stimulating learning.</p> <p>This stage also introduces three or more players working together, solving a soccer problem.</p>



