

AMERICAN YOUTH SOCCER ORGANIZATION
EST. 1964
KICKSTART U6
soccer starts here



AMERICAN YOUTH
SOCCER ORGANIZATION

CHILD DEVELOPMENT SERIES

1 Theme: "Exploration" **2**

Curriculum: FMS Light, SEL
 Model: 3v3, 4v4 Jamboree
 Duration: 1 session x 8 weeks
 Education: 1 hour

4 **3**



AYSO National Office
 TEL (800) 872-2976
 FAX (310) 525-1155
www.AYSO.org



Accredited By:



Copyright © 2025 by American Youth Soccer Organization
 All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Risk Manager," at the address below.

AYSO National Office
 19700 South Vermont Avenue, Suite 103
 Torrance, CA 90502
 800-872-2976

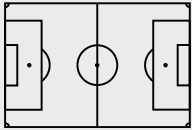
CONTENTS

WELCOME TO KICKSTART 6U!	4
THANK YOU FOR VOLUNTEERING!	4
AYSO	5
THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SOCCER CLUB	5
AYSO VISION	5
AYSO MISSION	5
AYSO SIX PHILOSOPHIES	6
DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI)	6
KIDS ZONE®	7
THE CHILD IN FRONT OF YOU	8
DEVELOPMENTAL ABILITY	8
A TIME OF EXPLORATION	9
FUNDAMENTAL MOTOR SKILLS	10
SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)	11
EARLY SPECIALIZATION	11
PARENT ENGAGEMENT	12
ROLES	14
THE ENVIRONMENT	15
THE SANDLOT	15
KICKSTART 6U OVERVIEW	15
STRUCTURE	18
PLAYING AREAS	18
EQUIPMENT	19
JAMBOREE FORMAT	19
ACTIVATION GAMES AND GROUP FORMATION	20
GAME MODIFICATIONS AND BASIC RULES	22
COACHING MOMENTS SECONDS	23
PRESENTING POINTS	23
MODIFYING ACTIVITIES TO GAIN SUCCESS	24
ON FIELD TIPS	24
WORKING WITH YOUR OWN CHILD	25
6U SKILLS	27
DRIBBLING	27
INSTEP KICK (LACES)	29
8-WEEK 6U KICKSTART CURRICULUM	31
SEL THEMES AND ACTIVITIES	32
6U ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES	41
APPENDIX D: BLANK 6U SESSION PLAN	55
ACTIVATION GAMES	56
APPENDIX E: ASPEN INSTITUTE SEL	67
PROJECT PLAY SEL CHECKLIST	67
PROJECT PLAY SEL FUTURE LESSON PLANS	69
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	77

WELCOME TO 6U **KICKSTART**

KEEPING IT **C**ENTERED ON **K**IDS!

FROM THE **FIELD**



“Our National Coaching Program is expertly designed, tested and accredited by the National Council for Accreditation of Coaching Education. We have a proven method for player and child development and I am proud of our contribution to the game in the USA.”

John Ouellette, AYSO Hall of Fame and Former National Coach

THANK YOU!

The American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) welcomes you to the colorful world of youth soccer.

AYSO is a place where every child plays in an atmosphere of good sportsmanship and positive coaching. In addition to the game’s technical, tactical and physical components, we fully recognize and prioritize the psychosocial needs of our children and work toward the fulfillment of those needs in all our programs. Staying truly child-centered makes AYSO a model for other youth sports groups and is a key to our position as a player development leader.

The programming, coaching methodology and soccer skills included in this manual have been carefully researched and are designed to welcome young children into the beautiful game in an age and developmentally appropriate play environment.

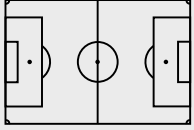
It’s time to ensure the environments we create are as imaginative, vibrant, free and full of wonder as the children they’re meant to inspire.

On behalf of the entire organization, thank you for joining the team!



AYSO

FROM THE **FIELD**



“We strive to galvanize the player development pathways of our youth soccer organizations. The common objective is to develop the next wave of youth players. In this collective effort, it is critical to promote a single message and common coaching methodology with respect to player development. AYSO’s National Coaching Program is in line and coherent with these efforts.”

Dave Chesler, Former U.S. Soccer Director of Coach Education

THE WORLD’S LARGEST SOCCER CLUB

Founded in Torrance, CA in 1964, AYSO is a distinguished cornerstone of U.S. Soccer and with approximately 50,000 teams across *all* age groups; AYSO is the world’s largest soccer club!

Success can be measured in many ways, from the careers of professional players who got their start playing AYSO to the thousands of coaches (youth, high school, collegiate and professional) who developed their passion and understanding of the game in AYSO. Regardless of perspective, AYSO’s contribution to the US game’s success is founded upon its unique **Vision, Mission** and **Six Philosophies**.

AYSO VISION

To provide world-class youth soccer programs that enrich children’s lives.

AYSO MISSION

To develop and deliver quality youth soccer programs in a fun, family environment based on the AYSO philosophies.

KEEP IN MIND



Any player development or instruction should always include a comprehensive understanding and practical application of our core values.

AYSO SIX PHILOSOPHIES

EVERYONE PLAYS®

Our goal is for kids to play soccer—so we mandate that every player on every team must play at least half of every game.

BALANCED TEAMS

Each year we form new teams as evenly balanced as possible—because it is fair and more fun when teams of equal ability play.

OPEN REGISTRATION

Our program is open to all children who want to register and play soccer. Interest and enthusiasm are the only criteria for playing.

POSITIVE COACHING

Encouragement of player effort provides for greater enjoyment by the players and ultimately leads to better-skilled and better-motivated players.

GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

We strive to create a safe, fair, fun and positive environment based on mutual respect, rather than a win-at-all-costs attitude, and our program is designed to instill good sportsmanship in every facet of AYSO.

PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

We believe that all players should be able to develop their soccer skills and knowledge to the best of their abilities, both individually and as members of a team, in order to maximize their enjoyment of the game.

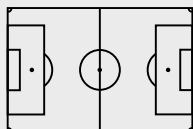
KEEP IN
MIND



AYSO Six Philosophies:

- Everyone Plays®
- Balanced Teams
- Open Registration
- Positive Coaching
- Good Sportsmanship
- Player Development

FROM THE **FIELD**



“It is better to win ten times 1-0 than to win once 10-0.”

Vahid Halilhodžić, Bosnian Coach and Former Professional Player

DIVERSITY. EQUITY. INCLUSION.

AYSO commits fully to its founders’ legacy of diversity, equity and inclusion. Providing fun and enriching soccer programs is what we do. We welcome everyone regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, social-economic position, ability or disability. Differences are respected and embraced. AYSO is proud to be at the heart of communities where all feel that they belong.

KIDS ZONE®

KEEP IT FRIENDLY

KEEP IN MIND



Sideline critics who scream instructions at players or criticize referees or coaches slow down the learning process and make it less fun for everyone. Consider every time you prepare to kick the ball you receive numerous screams of direction? Scary, confusing and annoying!

In AYSO, fans (yes, including parents) are asked to be cheerleaders, **not critics or sideline coaches!** Kids Zone® is a unique program that includes a Parent Pledge that moms and dads sign to commit to *positive, encouraging* behavior when they're watching the matches.

Soccer is a *player's* game! Players learn the game by trying new things, making mistakes and trying again.

Negative, even violent, behavior of players, coaches and parents involved in youth sports has become almost epidemic in this country. Kids Zone® is a proactive effort to counteract this trend and involves the following elements to help execute the program:

1. **The Sign.** A large sideline poster lists positive behavior standards and can be posted at the entrance of participating fields. Parents and spectators who will abide by these standards are welcome.
2. **The Pledge.** AYSO requests all parents to sign a pledge that holds them to the Kids Zone® standards.

KEEP IN MIND



Help create a safe and encouraging environment for you and your team by implementing Kids Zone®.

To learn more or visit ayso.org/kidszone

ALERT!
You are entering an
AYSO kids zone

By entering this kids zone, you agree to the following:

- Kids are #1
- Fun – not winning – is everything
- Fans only cheer, and only coaches coach
- No yelling in anger
- Respect the volunteer referees
- No swearing
- No smoking
- Leave no trash behind
- Set a proper example for our children

If you can agree to the above, we welcome you.
AYSO – it's for the kids!

THE CHILD IN FRONT OF YOU

Prior to stepping into the imaginative domain of our children, it is important to get to know them and their world to maximize the experience for all involved.

DEVELOPMENTAL ABILITY

Each child is unique, and Program Leaders must show deep respect for each child's individual stage of development and ability. In general, 5 and 6-year-old players present the following developmental characteristics:

Psychosocial:

- May fear the unknown.
- Experience rapid and unpredictable mood changes.
- Need attention, encouragement and praise.
- See world only from their perspective.
- Likely have difficulty sharing (hence the need for a ball per player).
- May verbalize team, but do not understand group play.
- Get bored easy and do not like to repeat.
- Lack judgment regarding their own safety and abilities.
- Enjoy stories, and questions.

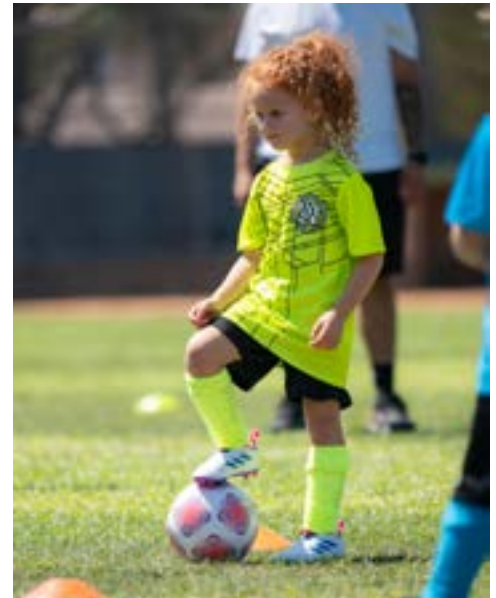
PHYSICAL

- *Motor skills are continuing to develop: can run, start, stop, jump, and skip.
- Have lots of energy, although in bursts; tire quickly; recover quickly.
- Can't sit still for long.

SKILLS

- Instep kick
- Dribbling

However, please keep in mind that chronological age can be a very limited indicator of developmental ability, especially in educational or programmatic contexts. Applying an individualized approach allows for more accurate assessments and better support tailored to each person's unique strengths, needs, and pace of development.



A TIME OF EXPLORATION

The following chart *generalizes* age characteristics of children ages 5 through 6 years of age. (Note: All children are unique and often chronological age can conflict with developmental age; therefore, individual application should always be considered.)

**KEEP
IN
MIND**



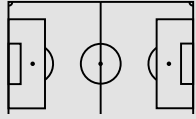
Our players are *not* mini-adults; therefore, our sessions must be adapted to life through their eyes, their interests and most important, their capabilities.

AGE APPROPRIATE CHARACTERISTICS AND ENVIRONMENTS FOR 5 AND 6 YEARS	
5	<p>Environments should be based on fun games, adventures, storytelling and colorful landscapes. Talk in their terms and language.</p> <p>Animate! Paint vivid pictures! Demonstrate! Keep sessions moving or boredom will quickly creep in. Fundamental motor skills (balance, walking, running, jumping, etc.) should be highlighted and combined with ball familiarity.</p>
6	<p>Players must maximize their contact with the ball, and most activities should be individual (ball per player).</p> <p>Players need to develop ball familiarity and PLAY!</p> <p>Players at this age are egocentric and for the first time have to build relationships with other players. Give different responsibilities to players in order to develop a sense of team (cone helpers, break captains, time keepers, etc.).</p>

THE CHILD IN FRONT OF YOU



FROM THE FIELD



“Fundamental movement skills (FMS) are considered to be the building blocks that lead to specialized movement sequences required for adequate participation in many organized and non-organized physical activities for children, adolescents and adults.”

*Lubans DR, Morgan PJ, Cliff DP, Barnett LM, Okely AD
Fundamental Movement Skills in Children and Adolescents, 2010*

FUNDAMENTAL MOTOR SKILLS

Our Kickstart 6U program is designed to advance the development of Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS), recognizing that modern children may not acquire these skills solely through free play. As physical demands in sport continue to evolve, we can no longer assume that children are naturally equipped to perform the movements required for success. To prepare them for soccer-specific technical actions—and to help prevent frustration and failure—children must be intentionally guided and encouraged to strengthen their physical abilities through structured development.

Generally speaking, Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS) can be grouped into the following categories:

- Locomotor (running, hopping, skipping, etc.)
- Non-locomotor (balancing and twisting, etc.)
- Object Control (catching and throwing, kicking, etc.)

Children should be exposed to a wide base of FMS in their early years to provide a solid foundation for future physical activities and sports. If this important window of opportunity for the development of Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS) is missed, success in athletics may be hindered.

While watching young children play soccer can be undeniably charming, it’s important to recognize that this alone is not sufficient for their physical and developmental growth. To truly support their physical and cognitive development, our programming must include intentional, motor skill development. These building blocks are essential for long-term success and enjoyment in sport.

FMS HIERARCHY





SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING (SEL)

Social and emotional skills can be grouped into three interrelated categories:

1. Cognitive regulation
2. Emotional competencies
3. Social and interpersonal skills

To truly enrich children’s lives, we must prioritize the whole child and life lessons presented through our sessions, i.e., leadership, persistence, sportsmanship, etc. For each activity, there are numerous opportunities to enhance the lesson by focusing on SEL opportunities in addition to the physical, technical or tactical.

Ultimately, can we help develop self-awareness and self-management skills to support life success? Use social awareness and interpersonal skills to establish and nurture healthy relationships? Support decision-making and responsible behaviors in sport, home and school.

This effort is a delicate thread that should be woven throughout our sessions.

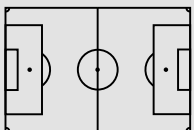
Source: The Aspen Institute Project Play, Calls for Coaches, Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports.

EARLY SPECIALIZATION

Soccer concepts must be carefully and gradually introduced to young players. Specialization in a single sport can limit a child’s development of a wide base of Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS).

If children concentrate only on playing soccer, they are likely to develop foot-eye coordination through dribbling and kicking but may not develop comparable hand-eye coordination typically learned through throwing and catching in sports such as baseball or basketball. Children require a comprehensive range of physical ability for more advanced athletic skills and sports; therefore, the more sports and activities they experience the better.

FROM THE **FIELD**



“Specialization, in fact, may potentially limit overall motor skill development, which has implications for long-term physical activity patterns upon retirement from competitive sport”

*Wiersma, L.D., Pediatric Exercise Science,
Risks and Benefits of Youth Sport Specialization: Perspectives and Recommendations*

PARENT ENGAGEMENT

A priority of the program is to engage and encourage parent participation!

Before the sessions start, the very first engagement should be between the Program Leader(s) and parents to explain the overall focus of the program, structure of program sessions, role of the parent, and set realistic expectations for their child’s participation.

Program Leaders should (at minimum) cover the following topics in this parent orientation:

1. Discuss the importance of developing Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS) for future success in soccer and sports:

FMS	Transferred to Soccer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Balancing before twisting and rotating. • Rolling a ball before underarm throwing a ball. • Stopping a rolling ball before catching a ball. • Jumping before skipping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Standing on one foot is necessary for kicking or controlling a ball. • Underarm throwing facilitates passing, facing a target, knowing release points, following through and recognizing ball flight. • Twisting and rotating is necessary for dribbling and passing an opponent.

2. Review the Session Format:

Sessions follow a six-week program that meets once per week. There is a defined sequence to the sessions but if a longer program-period is required, sessions may be repeated. Modifications and add-ons are provided for variety and intensity.

- Explanation of the Fundamental Motor Skills (FMS) objective and group formation (Program Leader/Activity Leader).
- FMS Activity 1 (locomotor and non-locomotor).
- Game-like activity 2.
- 3v3, 4v4 games (**explain the modifications, i.e., 4 goals, new balls, etc.**)
- Water/rest breaks!

3. What children will need at each session:

- Soccer shoes or appropriate athletic footwear.
- Shin guards, covered by soccer socks
- Size 3 soccer ball (labeled with initials or last name).
- Water bottle (labeled).

4. Parent Participation:

Be enthusiastic and encouraging. Explain that at this age, children often need the emotional support of a parent as they begin to explore new activities and meet new people. This is why the program is designed as a “Parent and Me” program where parents participate along with their child. Encourage parents to:

- Help the Program Leader organize and create an atmosphere of fun for the children.
- Monitor their player for signs of fatigue, stress, overheating or conditions that compromise their safety – our #1 priority!
- Help their child understand the activity and guide them along as needed.
- Help paint the picture and tell the story of the activity.
- Let them experiment and make mistakes.
- Be patient and tolerant; make them confident learners.
- **Thank their child for letting them be part of their soccer world.**

5. Remind parents to avoid:

- Over directing, coaching, correcting their child.
- Comparing children. Remind them that children develop at their own pace.
- Criticizing a child's effort or tell them they aren't working hard enough. Positive encourage is the key.
- Taking it too seriously. It's just a game. Let them Play!

Conclusion

Thank the parents for joining the AYSO family and volunteering to participate with their child in AYSO's age-specific child development program.

Share with them that after the season, their child will be well on their way to developing appropriate skills needed for participating in any sport and the parents will have taken their first steps toward enriching the lives of children in their own community.

Finally, inform the parents that AYSO offers age certification and training for every level and role in the organization if they are curious about furthering their journey along with their child.



ROLES

Pick a Position and get in the Game

How many of us have been willing to step up to help but found the roles too challenging or the training too extraneous? Look no further, we've got you covered. Kickstart roles are inclusive, easy, fun and provide camaraderie and gradual development to supporting your child's athletic journey.

Program Leaders

Kickstart sessions are led by a Program Leader who will introduce and explain the game/activity that will relate to a certain fundamental motor skill or technical skill, i.e., balancing or dribbling, etc.

Activity Leaders

Ideally, each group will then have an Activity Leader who will help facilitate the session for an individual group, along with parents. The Program Leader should circulate around the groups providing guidance and help as needed.

(Alternatively, if there are no suitable or willing Activity Leaders, the Kickstart Program Leader should introduce the activity and then circulate around the groups providing guidance as needed to parents and players.)

Parents

Child with a Parent/Guardian provides the best possible dynamic for these youngest participants. Each child must have a parent (or other adult) available on the field to help guide them within each activity.

Game Managers

For the matches/games, 'game managers' play the roles of coach, referee, and facilitator. Different parents should rotate weekly in this role providing gradual involvement and development. **Tips:**

- The game manager will guide the players on the field, track time and carry extra balls to enact the "new ball" rule.
- If possible, try to manage from the sidelines but step onto the field as needed. The minimum is one game manager on the field, but each team may have one game manager each for a total of two on the field.
- Stay close enough to support players but provide enough space stay out of the way.
- The game manager is there to support all players, regardless of team affiliation to ensure that players can learn and have fun.



THE ENVIRONMENT

THE SANDLOT...WHY LESS STRUCTURE JUST MAKES SENSE!

Today's youth sports are increasingly structured and adult-driven, which ultimately drains available resources. The solution: change the game! Like pickleball to tennis and flag-football to football, we must adapt the environments and redefine what makes soccer—soccer.

The streets, parks, and backyards have produced some of the world's most dazzling talents. When we step back and give kids the freedom to play, we're not just building better athletes, we're nurturing healthier, happier, more creative human beings.

So, let's make room for the game to breathe. Let's bring back the joy of free play and give the players what they are crying out for: freedom. And with that freedom comes a host of powerful benefits:

Physical Health, Naturally

Running, dodging, kicking, and sprinting in player-led activity gets kids moving in ways that are fun and self-motivating. It builds cardiovascular endurance, coordination, and motor skills without ever feeling like a training session. Physical activity is more likely to become a natural part of the child's lifestyle, if the participation is self-directed.

Creativity Unleashed

With lesser rules or constant coaching, kids are free to invent. They try new moves, improvise passes, and solve problems on the fly. Every game is different, and every moment demands adaptability. This kind of spontaneous play nurtures the creative spark that turns good players into great ones.

Messi, Ronaldo, Neymar, Maradona, Cruyff, Ronaldinho honed their skills not in academies, but in the streets and sandlots, which nurture the kind of instinctive brilliance that can't be taught in a drill.



Social and Emotional Growth

Child-centric play is a social classroom. Kids learn to negotiate rules, resolve conflicts, and work as a team, all with less adult intervention. These interactions build empathy, cooperation, and emotional intelligence. They also sharpen executive function skills like planning, self-regulation, and quick decision-making.

Confidence and Independence

When kids play without adults directing every move, they take ownership. They learn from their mistakes, celebrate their successes, and build resilience. It's in these unsupervised moments that confidence and independence truly grow.

Accessible and Inclusive

All you need is a ball and a bit of space. AYSO welcomes everyone—regardless of skill level, background, or resources. And a more organic play environment is the most democratic form of the game, and often the most beautiful.

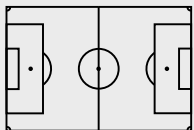
When kids are free to explore and have ownership they stay engaged longer. They play because they want to, not because they have to. And that intrinsic motivation is the foundation of lifelong passion and performance.

So, let's rethink the way we develop young players. Let's create more spaces where the game belongs to the kids. Where the ball is the teacher, and the field is a canvas for imagination.

Because sometimes, the best coaching is knowing when to step back—and let the game do the talking.



FROM THE **FIELD**



“Man, this is baseball. You gotta stop thinking. Just have fun! I mean, if you were having fun, you would’ve caught that ball.”

Sandlot.

Benny “The Jet” Rodriguez, The

6U KICKSTART OVERVIEW

The effective date of age determination shall be the player's age when the program commences.

AYSO 6U Kickstart has been designed for ages 5-6. However, a child's chronological age can often conflict with developmental age, so flexibility is usually required to accommodate this variable (i.e., early maturers or late maturers).

AYSO Kickstart consists of one day per week for 6-weeks. There is a definitive sequence to the sessions but if a longer program period is required, sessions can be repeated.

It is our developmental recommendation that Kickstart is run in Jamboree framework through 6U, replacing the traditional team-based league structure.

Each 6U Kickstart session includes:

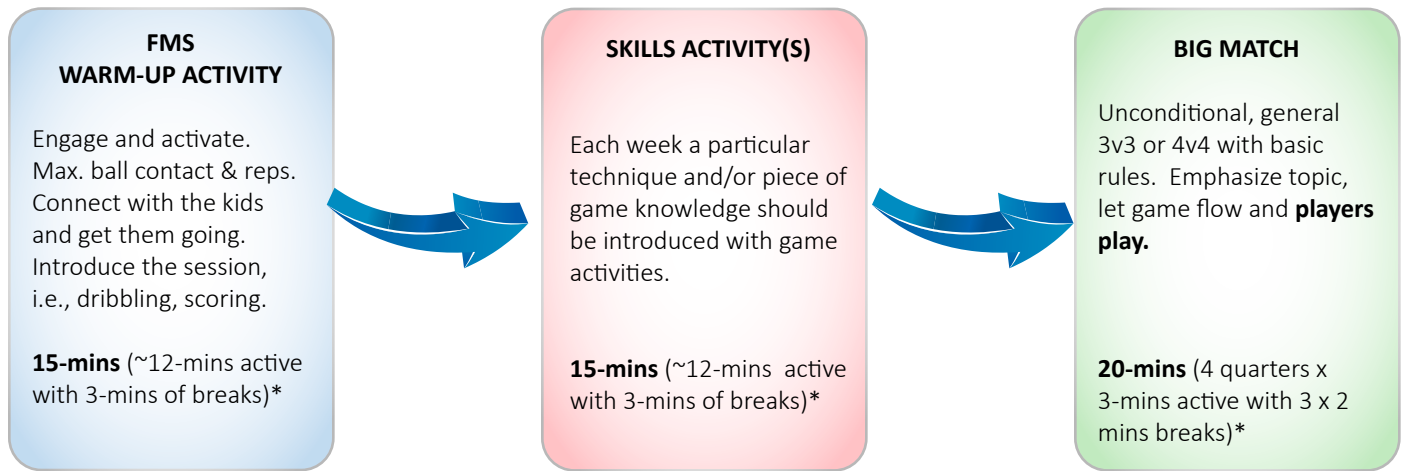
1. A Fundamental Motor Skill Activity, i.e., skipping.
2. A Game-Like Activity to build skill and/or game understanding, i.e., dribbling and direction.
3. 3v3 or 4v4 game.

Each session has a social and emotional learning theme, i.e., helping others.

SESSION STRUCTURE

Duration 1 hour maximum, includes organizing time and breaks.

Set up 12 minutes (explanation and group formation by Program Leader/Activity Leader for all helpers)



***Adjust play time and breaks as needed to suit your players, i.e., maturity level, weather, energy level. At most time...Less is more!**

SESSION STRUCTURE

PLAYING AREAS

Each individual activity has grid size recommendations which can fit within the game areas, which are:



3V3



4V4

EQUIPMENT

- Each player should bring a size 3 soccer ball, athletic footwear and shinguards (covered by socks).
- Ideally, each player should receive the same t-shirt or uniform since it's fun to get all dressed up for sports.
- 24-disc cones (4 x 6 multi-colored).
- 12 tall cones.
- 16 youth scrimmage vests (2 different colors) used to differentiate the newly formed teams each week.
- Four 4 x 6 goals (preferred) or four larger pop-up goals (tall cones can also be used).
- Other fun props to help add dimensions to the session, i.e., hoops, beanbags, beach balls, passing gates, etc. A Kickstart kit is available by emailing marketing@ayso.org

Additionally:

- Ball Pump.
- Extra pair of shin guards
- Extra soccer balls (players should bring a ball to every activity).
- Charged cell phone in case of emergency.
- Session plan.
- AYSO Player Registration Forms for each child – which includes the Emergency Treatment Authorization.
- Basic first-aid kit (be familiar with the contents and what's available if needed).
- Parents/Players should bring water to every session.



JAMBOREE FORMAT

A Jamboree is a fun, festival-style structure designed to introduce the sport without the pressure of competition or directive coaching. Teams are formed weekly on the day, promoting flexibility, interaction, and enjoyment over winning.

Groups can be initially formed by age but with flexibility to move a child as needed based on their developmental stage.

Key Features:

- Fun-Focused: Ideal for young players, emphasizing enjoyment and a positive first experience.
- Flexible Teams: Players are mixed regularly to encourage social interaction.
- Less Cost: Uniforms can be replaced by pinnies (**which can support registration delays with ordering**).
- No Standings: Scores may be kept, but the focus is not on winning.
- Skill Development: Encourages learning and practicing basic soccer skills in a low-pressure setting.
- Parental Involvement: Parents may participate, especially with younger children.
- Community Building: Fosters connections among players, families, and coaches.

ACTIVATION GAMES AND GROUP FORMATION

Kickstart sessions are based on a Jamboree format and usually include groups of young players of different ages, sizes, and abilities. Smart grouping helps keep sessions fun, safe, inclusive, and active, while staying true to the Kickstart model of free play, inclusion and exploration.

- Grouping is never about labeling players or separating “good” from “new.” It is about creating the right environment so every child can feel welcomed, move, play, and succeed.
- Kickstart Grouping Principles
- Flexible: Groups can change during or between sessions
- Quick: Transitions should be fast to keep energy high
- Positive: Avoid labels like beginner or advanced
- Inclusive: Every child belongs and feels successful
- Developmental: Grouping supports movement and confidence
- Play-Focused: Grouping should never interrupt the flow of play

If grouping feels invisible to players, you’re doing it right.

When to Group

Arrival Play (5–12 minutes)

Use arrival games to observe how players move, interact, and engage (see page 33). Once players are warmed up and comfortable, transition into smaller groups or stations.

Best Grouping Options for Kickstart

1. Age-Based Grouping: Use when mixed ages are present.

- Younger players benefit from smaller groups and more space
- Older players can handle slightly larger groups and longer games
- Focus on developmental readiness, not exact age

Quick tools: birthdays, count-offs, simple lines

2. Size-Based Grouping (Safety First): Use for activities with chasing or light contact.

- Builds confidence for smaller players
- Prevents physical dominance
- Reduces injury risk

Always use neutral group names like Group 1 or Station A.

3. Movement Ability Grouping (ABC): Use when abilities vary widely.

Observe during play:

- Agility: changing direction and reacting
- Balance: body control and stability
- Coordination: moving while using the ball

Group players so activities feel challenging but achievable.

Group Size Guidelines

- Ages 3–4: 4-6 players
- Ages 5–6: 5-8 players

Smaller groups mean more touches, more movement, and more fun.

Simple Grouping Tools That Work

- Count-off numbers (can be difficult with youngers)
- Colored pinnies (can have child preferences)
- Birthday or month groups
- Partner method for younger players
- Friends
- Animals (lions, tigers, panthers, etc.)
- Station rotation with cones or markers

Rotate methods to keep things fresh and fair.

Coaching Reminders

- Keep transitions under 30 seconds
- Move immediately into the next activity
- Praise effort, movement, and teamwork
- Adjust groups if something isn't working
- Fun and engagement matter more than perfection

The Big Takeaway

Grouping in Kickstart is a support tool, not the focus of the session. When grouping helps players feel confident, active, and excited to play, it is working.

GAME MODIFICATIONS AND BASIC RULES (FOR THE BIG MATCH)

What do kids want to do most in soccer? Score! Then why only have two goals?

- Four goal games (one on each corner approximately 12 yards apart) can increase scoring FUN and help with directional awareness. Each team attacks two goals and defends two goals.

What causes the game to slow down and become boring? Balls going out of play and restarts.

- Use “new balls” where the game managers carry a couple of balls to keep the game flowing rather than organized restarts (which can take a lot of time). See Basic Rules. Restarts:New Balls: To ensure a flow to the games, and to keep each player involved, the game manager on the field will carry an extra ball or two to facilitate all restarts (after a goal has been scored or is out of play). When the ball goes out of bounds off one team, the game manager will roll a ball to the new team.

Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls “live”. Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds. This is also a great way to gradually engage parents.

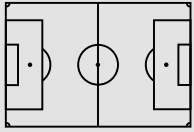
Stop. Drop. Roll:

1. Stop the play and position the players accordingly.
 2. Drop the opponent back the required amount of space.
 3. Roll the ball (don't toss it in the air) to the correct team/player who needs to be (re) involved.
- Restarts Opponents Distance: On all restarts except for kickoffs or goal kicks where the opponent should drop off to the midline, the opponent should be a minimum distance of 3 yards away from the restart. 'Game managers may need to guide players to drop off away from the play.
 - By backing the opponent away and using the “new ball” restart, game managers can provide the ball to a player who has been unable to get many touches on the ball.
 - Progression of teaching rules: There are no corner kicks (just use new ball for the team that should be in possession).
 - After a goal has been scored, celebrate, and allow the team that conceded to kick-off by their own goal.
 - Game managers should draw back the opponent to midfield (do the same for 'goal kicks').



COACHING ~~MOMENTS~~ SECONDS

FROM THE **FIELD**



“Success should be measured by the demonstrated & documented improvement of each individual (not results). The role of a youth trainer is to improve the skills & habits of each & every footballer in his or her charge. Ironically, if the club does improve each player, the team results improve.”

Johan Cruyff

I HEAR...

I SEE...

I DO...

PRESENTING INSTRUCTION OR POINTS

Avoid lengthy speeches! Keep instructions for activities as simple and quick as possible and limited to one point at a time. Where possible, explain in images and provide visual analogies (much easier for kids to grasp). Instructions or pointers should be:

I FORGET

I REMEMBER

I UNDERSTAND

- Concise (broken down, simple, small pieces of information).
- Accurate.
- Relevant (to a coaching principle or objective).
- **Demonstrated** (whenever possible)!

LET THEM PLAY AND THE GAME TEACH!



KEEP IN
MIND



Positive Coaching! Regardless of your personal approach or delivery, **Positive Instruction and Encouragement (P.I.E.)** should *always* be used to instruct and motivate your players. They will respond better to you and it will help keep AYSO a developmentally rich and positive environment. **Everything is better with a piece of pie!**

MODIFYING ACTIVITIES TO ENSURE SUCCESS

Modify activities to gain success, variety or to add new challenges. If an activity or game is not working as planned, consider manipulating SPEED, SPACE or OPPOSITION to change the environment. At this age, it is very important that the participants feel successful. Consider is your group mostly 3-year-olds? 4-year-olds? Early maturers or late maturers?

SPACE: Changing the physical SPACE available to players (increasing/decreasing size of playing area makes an activity easier or more challenging). At all times, consider the physical exertion.

SPEED: Varying the SPEED of the play (adding time constraints or number of touches changes the playing environment). “Can we now do this at HYPER-SPEED?”

OPPOSITION: At this age group, there is not much in the way of OPPOSITION but slight modifications to numbers (up or down) or to the role/limitation of players can alter the challenge, i.e., opposition/players are bunnies and can only hop to make it easier for those with the ball, etc.

ON FIELD TIPS

Preparation

Complete Plans are provided for each session. Prior to each session, Program Leaders should review the session plan, the FMS developmental objectives and activities as well as any possible modifications if necessary. Note any special points/comments to emphasize, including SEL theme.

Appearance - Look the Part

Appropriate attire is expected when conducting Kickstart sessions. Wearing athletic apparel and footwear go a long way toward comforting the children and instilling confidence in the parents that the Program Leader is prepared and able.

Eyes and facial expressions play a key role in communicating effectively with both children and their parents. Sunglasses are discouraged, unless required by medical prescription. Consider removing sunglasses and kneeling down to be at their eye level when speaking with young children.

Energy and Demeanor

Capture the player’s attention and concentration with high energy (unless a calming demeanor is required, i.e., control). This age group needs to be entertained, so create colorful images, vivid landscapes to stimulate imaginations...and get into character for the activity!

Organization

Set up the session area in advance of players and parents arriving. Upon their arrival, they should see a planned and organized environment, which will immediately set the tone for the session as well as further confidence with the parents. When organizing the area:

- Make sure the area is safe (playing surface, physical considerations, sprinklers, etc.).
- Plan for a smooth transition from one exercise to another.
- Minimize the number of cones that have to be picked up or reset.
- Have a place for equipment and breaks.

KEEP IN
MIND



All players should be encouraged to defend and attack! Or in the case of our 6U Kickstart players, wherever the ball is...and that's just fine!

WORKING WITH YOUR OWN CHILD

A large percentage of you will be lacing up sneakers to work with your own children and this section outlines some perspective and tips to maximize the opportunity...for you, and more importantly for your child.

But I've Never Coached or Played Soccer Before!

It's okay if you never played soccer or don't know much about it! By reading this manual and gradually getting more involved, you will gather all the valuable tools to succeed. This program is less about soccer and more about exploring the wonderful world of sport through your child's eyes. Learn alongside your child.

No pressure! Do not misinterpret the role you're supposed to play. Go out to enjoy! As well as your child's experience, you should also have fun in the experience.

You're not alone! Most other parents are in the same boat. Don't hesitate to ask questions or share ideas.

If you can create a safe and fun environment for your child, encourage self-expression and normalize mistakes (learning), you are well on your way!

Fun, exercise and the chance to play soccer is what it's all about, particularly at the younger ages.



KEEP IN
MIND



In the blink of an eye, they are grown up and beyond our daily reach. Therefore, what an incredible opportunity to spend time in "their" world as "their" coach!

What's My Role?

Maintain realistic expectations! It's a game, a sport, a pastime. As you are likely aware, the odds are against your child making the pros; therefore, make sure your own adult expectations do not stray too far from those of your child.

Soccer, perhaps more than any other sport, requires little teaching at the early ages. The game itself is genuinely the best teacher. In fact, your role in these early stages is simply to give children the opportunity to discover the game's joys in a safe and nurturing environment.

What you're really doing is very similar to taking your child and his or her friends to the playground. You're supervising soccer playtime while allowing the children to explore the fun on their own terms.

Once you comprehend the expectations, you'll find all aspects of the role less daunting, including the dynamics of working your own child.

Am I Doing Okay?

Avoid comparing your child's ability to others. Every child is unique with unique qualities, ability and challenges. Some children are early maturers and some are late maturers, but they all get there in the end. Being out there in itself is a huge win!

Don't be afraid to praise your child and acknowledge their strengths and accomplishments at every opportunity.

The (Long) Car Ride Home

Not too relevant today but worth sharing a very important insight for tomorrow!

Please be very mindful of the car ride home, where we often feel compelled to discuss performance, results, and other parental observations made from the comfort of our folding chairs. We suggest you refrain from discussing the practice or game unless the child brings it up. If the topic does arise, be proactive in responding with unconditional support, growth, and positivity.

"You looked like you were having fun out there!"

"I loved how you hustled and supported your teammates."

"What was your favorite moment of the game?"

"That was a tough one, but I'm proud of how you kept going."

"I'm proud of you just for being out there."

"I love you and I love watching you play, no matter the score."

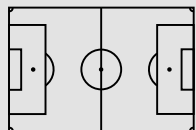
"Win or lose, you're always my favorite player."

"Where shall we eat?"

Trust me, your child knows exactly how they played!

6U SKILLS

FROM THE **FIELD**



“Teach skill every day! Create training environments where players are challenged and can use those skills in making quick decisions of how, why, and where to use them. Ask players to work on their own self improvement.”

George Kuntz, Head Coach, Men’s Soccer, Cal State Fullerton, CA

DRIBBLING

Dribbling is using the feet to maintain possession of the ball, on the ground, under control, while moving to achieve Penetration. The two primary reasons to use dribbling skill are:

- Move the ball into a better position on the field.
- Retain possession of the ball.

The most important element of dribbling is developing a “feel” or “touch” for the ball with the feet...BOTH OF THEM. The key is then to keep the ball close by touching it softly.



General Pointers

- Knees slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Arms relaxed and used for balance and protection.
- Touch the ball softly using all major surfaces of the foot.
- Keep the ball close and under control.
- Touch the ball every step or so (ball should never be more than one step away).
- Head up as much as possible (to see the field as well as ball by utilizing peripheral vision).

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/tech1](https://www.aysou.com/video/tech1)

Common Errors & Corrections

Error	Correction
Ball is played too far ahead & player loses control of the ball.	Move slower and touch ball slower.
Player dribbles the ball into trouble or out of play.	Move slower, touch ball softer, look up.
Player re-positions entire body behind ball before touching.	Use motion of foot to direct ball instead of re-positioning.

Stopping the Ball:

6U players should be able to stop the ball by putting their foot on top of it.

- Balance on planted foot (foot on ground), while keeping playing foot (foot on the ball) firmly on top of the ball.
- Step past the ball with plant foot before stepping on it, keeping in mind the speed at which the ball is rolling.

Turning with the Ball:

Learning to change direction while dribbling is critical in soccer and should also be introduced at this level.

- Use motion of foot to direct the ball.
- Accelerate after changing direction.

INSTEP KICK (LACES)

The instep kick is used to kick the ball and, as players get older, for long passes and shots on goal (as seen on right).

Instructions:

Prepare Plant Leg (Supporting, Non-Kicking Foot)

- Place support foot next to the ball pointed in general direction of target (distance from ball will depend on height of the player).
- Bend knee slightly.
- All weight should be on plant foot.
- Use arms out to sides for balance.

Prepare Striking (Kicking) Leg

- Bend knee (cock lower leg).
- Withdraw leg straight back at hip.
- Lock ankle back and down, toes pointed down.

Striking Movement

- Body should be over the ball, moving forward.
- Keep eyes on ball.
- Set plant knee over ball (eye-knee-ball in line).
- Move thigh of striking leg forward (whip action).
- Strike the center of the ball on the instep (“laces” of the shoes).
- Follow through—move leg straight through toward target.
- Pull leg straight through while maintaining balance.
- Lower body as leg rises.
- Keep ankle locked, follow through and lift knee.
- Step out of the kick.

General Pointers:

- Body should be over the ball (forward).
- Eyes on ball.
- Support foot next to ball pointed in general direction of target.
- Lock ankle back and down, toes pointed down.
- Strike the center of the ball on the instep (“laces” of the shoes).
- Follow through—move leg straight through toward target.

Practice:

- Planting their foot in the proper place.
- Swinging their leg and foot straight back and forth, ensuring proper body and leg movement.
- Have each player stand with plant foot in proper position and strike lightly until they begin to hit the ball solidly (properly).

Common Errors & Corrections

Error	Correction
Planted foot is too far in front, behind or away from ball and/or not pointed in general direction of target.	Review proper technique with player(s).
Knee(s) are locked, not bent.	Review proper technique with player(s).
Ankle is not locked and toes are not pointed.	Lock ankle, point toes.
Ball is stabbed or jabbed.	Encourage player to follow through.
Leg is swung across the body instead of toward the target.	Encourage player to withdraw leg straight back and follow through straight toward target.



To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/tech2](https://www.aysou.com/video/tech2)

8-WEEK 6U KICKSTART CURRICULUM



This section provides all the session plans needed to successfully run an AYSO 6U Kickstart Soccer Program.

Activities are presented into a comprehensive 6-week curriculum and individually to provide specific guidelines. Click each graphic for an animation of each activity. There are also a variety of alternative activities (FMS and soccer-like games) to mix and match as preferred.

Be creative with the names of the games and modify them to suit your group. **(Is your group mostly 5-year-olds? 6-year-olds? Early maturers or late maturers?)** Use creativity and personality; paint in vivid images to effectively communicate with players in a language in which they can understand. If an activity is not working as intended, modify (increase/decrease) the Speed, Space, and Opposition to maximize success.

Remember, all children are unique so adapt accordingly to achieve success.

Despite all of the facilitating/teaching techniques that can be utilized, nothing will ever teach Kickstart players more effectively than just letting them play.

It's time to have FUN!

SEL THEMES & ACTIVITIES (5-6 YEARS)

Suggested themes and simple guided questions/chats that can be done during break, before an activity or after. The goal is to simply draw awareness to the skill. Expectation and application will increase gradually through the next few programming years and models. Adapt as needed.

Self-Awareness

1. Identify and manage emotions and behaviors (happy, sad, excited, fun, etc)

GQ. How do you feel about being here today?

GQ. Can anyone share feelings about the last activity?

2. Share needs and wants, strengths and challenges

GQ. What makes you a super soccer player?

GQ. What do you find hard about playing soccer?

Social Awareness

3. Recognize that other people feel differently about similar situations (playing GK, being the tagger)

GQ. Who likes being the chaser? Why? Who doesn't like being the chaser? Why?

4. Describe positive qualities in others

GQ. What's so cool about your best buddy?

GQ. Can you name one thing you have in common with all your teammates?

Interpersonal Skills

5. Demonstrate appropriate social behavior on and off the field

GQ. What could we do if a teammate falls down?

GQ. What could we say to mom or dad about bringing us to soccer today?

6. Identify ways to act/play with others

GQ. What should we do when Coach is explaining something?

GQ. Who can stay calm when they are getting too excited or angry? How?

Responsible Decision Making

7. Applying decision making skills within social situations

GQ. Why is it important to take turns?

GQ. Why is it important to play by the rules?

8. Identify roles that help our family

GQ. Who can share a way they help at home (tidy up toys, ask for help, tell people how you feel)?

Source: Adapted from Chicago Fire Soccer in Community SEL Learning Progressions

Session #:1 _____ Region: _____



Age: 6U

Date: _____

EVERYONE PLAYS BALANCED TEAMS OPEN REGISTRATION GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP POSITIVE COACHING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

SEL Theme: Identify and Manage Emotions SEL GQ: *How do you feel about being here today?*

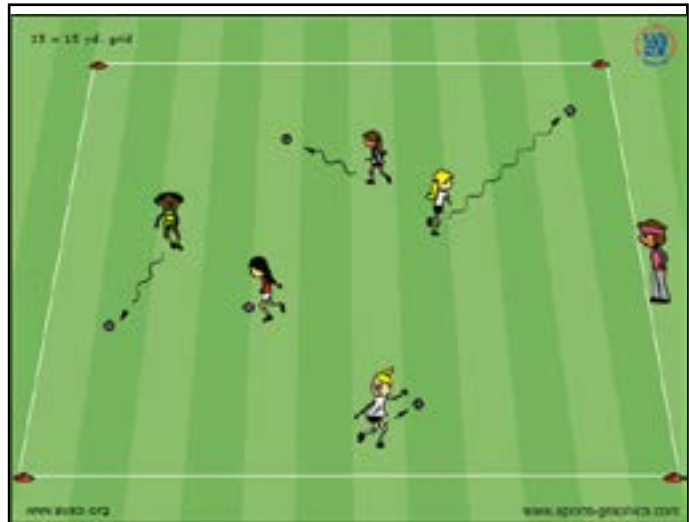
Rob the Nest (Running)

- All players are standing in a corner square.
- The Leader yells “Rob The Nest” and all players must run to the center of the grid, collect a bean bag (egg), place it on their head and return to the cone as quickly as possible, dropping the bean bag into their nest.
- They return to the center to get another egg.
- When all the eggs have been collected the player who has collected the most wins.
- >Add more bean bags to the center and enlarge the grid.
- >Once all eggs are taken from the center, players can steal from each other’s nests (watch time on this as it can be very tiring).
- >Replace the bean bags with balls and have players dribble the ball



LA Freeway (Dribbling)

- Players dribble around and through the grid.
- They react to the directions given by the LAPD (the Leader): “Green” is go, “Yellow” is slow down, “Red” is stop with foot on the ball for 3 seconds, “Crash” all players must fall to the ground, and “Runaway Speeder” the coach runs in the grid and kicks the balls out of the grid.
- If their ball is kicked out, they bring it back into the area, stand with the ball above their head with their legs apart in a stationary position to make a tunnel.
- The player can get back into the game when a teammate dribbles their ball through their legs (tunnel).
- > Limit players to only use L foot, R foot.
- Use different cars for different speeds, i.e., Ferrari = super speed, mini-van = super slow, etc.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - “New Ball” restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls “live”. Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don’t worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.



Session #:2 _____ Region: _____



Age: 6U

Date: _____

EVERYONE PLAYS BALANCED TEAMS OPEN REGISTRATION GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP POSITIVE COACHING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

SEL Theme: Share Needs, Wants, Strengths and Challenges SEL GQ: *What makes you a super soccer player?*

Hunters and Hunted (Running, twisting, pivoting, dodging)

- Players tuck tails into back shorts & line up on opposite sidelines.
- On Leader command, hunters chase hunted & try to grab tails.
- Hunted use twists, pivots and dodging to escape hunter.
- If hunter catches hunted, they throw the tail to the ground and chas another player.
- If caught, the hunted runs outside grid, around the flag (tree), back \into grid (woods) to retrieve their tail and join in again.
- Play for 1 minute, then break for 30 seconds. Continue a few rounds.
- Change hunters and hunted.
- > Players dribble a ball.



Any Goal (Scoring)

- Leader rolls numerous balls onto field (at least one per player and ideally a few extra).
- Players look to collect a ball and score in any of the goals.
- Have parents behind goals to re-distribute balls and keep the game flowing.
- Purpose is for players to understand the aim of soccer is to score goals!
- >Once the balls are in the goals, reset and begin again, but now the players must try and score in a different goal.
- >Add a set period of time and keep score.
- >Add corner goals.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - "New Ball" restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls "live". Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don't worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.



The Big Race (Running)

- The Leader calls, "Start Your Engines" after which he will yell "Go!"
- The players must run out and around their opposite cone and back to the starting line.
- The first player back is the winner of the big race.
- >Race in teams of two or three players.
- >Have the player's race individually against the clock (time trials).
- >At mid-point, players must perform an additional FMS, i.e., balance on one leg for 3 seconds.
- >Have players skip or gallop.
- >Add a ball for players to dribble.



Sharks and Minnows (Dribbling)

- The minnows have a tail in the back of their shorts.
- The shark (Leader) moves around the grid catching minnows by pulling out their tails.
- The minnows try to avoid the shark but when a minnow has lost its tail, it must leave the grid (the pond).
- To re-enter the pond, the minnows must perform a FMS, i.e., balance on one leg for 5 seconds, perform 5 ball bounces, etc.
- >If caught, minnows become baby sharks.
- >Conduct the activity without a ball first and then introduce a ball.
- >Limit players to only use L foot, R foot, outside of R or L, or use inside of both feet.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - "New Ball" restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls "live". Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don't worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.





SEL Theme: Describe Positive Qualities in Other SEL GQ: *Name 1 thing you have in common with all the slippery snakes?*

Slippery Snake (Dribbling)

- All players form a snake-like line; each player has a ball at their feet and must dribble their ball to follow the lead player (the head of the snake).
- When the Leader yells “Shed Your Skin” the player at the end of the snake dribbles forward and becomes the front of the snake.
- >Limit players to only use L foot, R foot, outside of R or L, or use inside of both feet.
- >Ensure that all players become the head of the snake at one time or another.
- >Have the players add their favorite soccer fake (move) when they are the head of the snake for others to copy.
- >Add FMS commands: Stop, balance on left leg, etc., Go!



Big Bad Bear (Dribbling)

- The Leader is the “Big Bad Bear” and must try to capture the players as they dribble around the area. (Bears must always be growling.)
- The “Big Bad Bear” cannot capture the players if they can dribble into and hide in one of the caves.
- The players can only stay in a cave for 10 seconds and must go to the other cave to avoid capture.
- If a player is captured, they become a “Wee Bad Bear” and help the “Big Bad Bear” capture the remaining players.
- Last player to be captured is the winner.
- >Only 1 player in cave at a time.
- >While in the cave, players must perform a FMS, i.e., balance on one leg for 5 seconds, etc., before they exit.
- >All Bears must hold hands (or a scrimmage vest) while trying to capture the remaining players.
- >Play without the balls.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - “New Ball” restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls “live”. Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don’t worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.





**Coach Says
(Running, dodging, twisting/pivoting)**

- Players start on end-line with ball at their feet.
- The Coach provides various commands: TAKE ONE (TWO, THREE, ETC.) STEPS FORWARD, *BALANCE ON RIGHT/LEFT LEG, also add: SIT ON BALL, ONE FOOT ON BALL, SPEED UP, SLOW DOWN, ELBOW ON BALL, EAR, PICK BALL UP AND BOUNCE, JUMP OVER BALL, etc.
- Balancing on each leg should be a main focus.
- However, players only react if the direction is preceded by "Coach Says."
- >Change the command from "Coach Says."



**The 4 Seasons
(Dribbling)**

- Place a player with a ball in each of the corner squares.
- Label each of the small squares spring, summer, fall and winter (or a similar picture for the kids to visualize, i.e., numbers, colors, characters from a movie, etc).
- Each small square will have at least one player who will be randomly dribbling within the grid.
- The Leader will shout a "season" and all players will dribble as fast as they can to that square.
- The player who was playing in the square that was called must dribble to any one of the three squares that are now empty. First player to the new square wins.



**The Big Match
(3v3 or 4v4 Game)**

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - "New Ball" restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls "live". Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don't worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.





**Fetch Fido
(Dribbling)**

- Each player takes name of their favorite pet, i.e., Fido (or animal).
- Players hold ball in hands and one at a time hand their ball to Leader.
- Leader tosses ball from group in any direction within grid (dog park).
- Leader then instructs the players to bring the ball back in a variety of ways, being sure to incorporate numerous body movements. (Instruction to the players should not be too specific to encourage problem solving and creativity in the way they accomplish the task.)
- Players bring ball back to Leader as instructed as quickly as possible
- >Bring it back as fast as you can (do not specify how).
- >Dribble the ball back.
- >Bring it back using head and right hand only. Bring it back hopping.
- >Same challenges but performed in pairs.
- >As players are retrieving the ball, the Leader changes location so they must look up to find the Leader as they work with the ball.



**I'm Here!
(Teamwork)**

- Players move through the grid from gate to gate.
- Upon arrival at a new gate, teammate shouts, "Im here!" for their teammate to pass to.
- After each goal, the pair high five each other, and then move onto another set of empty gates to score.
- Each pair counts how many goals they score in a set period of time.



**The Big Match
(3v3 or 4v4 Game)**

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - "New Ball" restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls "live". Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don't worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.



Session #:7 _____ Region: _____



Age: 6U

Date: _____

EVERYONE PLAYS BALANCED TEAMS OPEN REGISTRATION GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP POSITIVE COACHING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

SEL Theme: Responsible Decision Making SEL GQ: *Why is it important to play by the rules?*

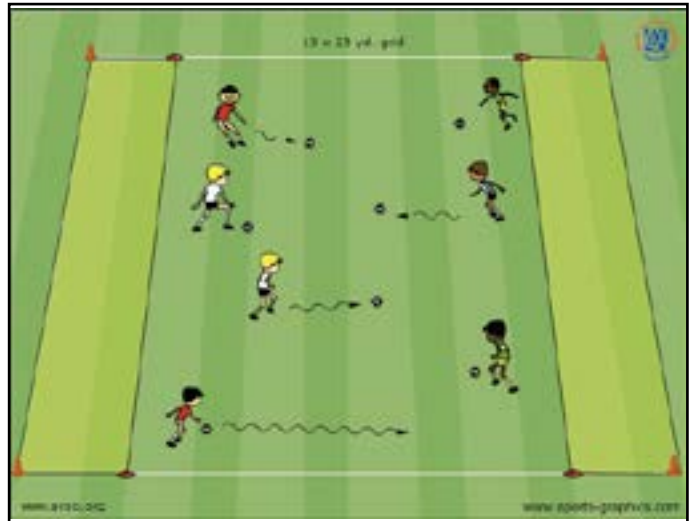
Cats and Dogs (Dribbling)

- Player one and two stand back to back, level with the middle cones.
- One of the players is the “cat” and the other the “dog.”
- When the Leader calls out “dog,” the dog turns and chases the cat to the opposite end line.
- Dogs bark and cats meow!
- Rotate roles.
- > Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.
- >Chasing players to chase without a ball, making the players with the ball dribble faster to get to the end line.
- >Players face away, and have to perform a turn, i.e., drag back, prior to running.
- >Players face start from sitting or lying down.



End Zone Dribblers (Dribbling)

- Players dribble end zone to end zone, controlling ball and stopping it in the other zone. Turn, repeat.
- Change speed: slow, half-pace, full-pace.
- Change direction: players dribble diagonally across grid.
- Turns: players must perform a fake or feint in central area before reaching end zone.
- >Players in pairs, ball per pair. Players must perform 4 passes in end zone before the other player dribbles to other end.
- >Add time challenge.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - “New Ball” restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls “live”. Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don’t worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.



Session #:8 _____ Region: _____



Age: 6U

Date: _____

EVERYONE PLAYS BALANCED TEAMS OPEN REGISTRATION GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP POSITIVE COACHING PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

SEL Theme: Identify Ways to Help our Family SEL GQ: *Who can share how they help at home?*

Treasure Hunt (Skipping, hopping)

- Lay out orange cones only.
- Start players at one corner cone.
- Upon start, players “skip” around the grid (prioritize technique).
- Object of game is to collect as many cones (gold coins) as possible.
- Once all cones have been picked up, the player with the most cones is the winner.
- > Add the blue (or other) color cones.
- > When the players come upon a different colored cone, they have to “hop” over it before picking it up. These special cones are worth 100 points each.



Through the Gate (Passing)

- 20x20 grid. 2 players play against each other and share a ball.
- They place 2 cones anywhere from 2-8 yards apart. They choose! Players pass back & forth to each other.
- Ball must never stop, must always stay on ground, & must go thru the 2 cones w/out touching them.
- Whenever an error occurs, other person receives a point. Keep score.
- Because the ball must never stop, players have to play 1-2 touch. The closer the 2 cones are the closer the pairs are probably going to be. The farther apart they are, the more they will have to move laterally.



The Big Match (3v3 or 4v4 Game)

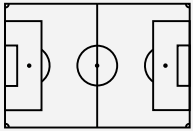
- 3v3 or 4v4 game, no goalkeepers.
- Very simple rules:
 - 2 or 4 goals
 - “New Ball” restarts after goal or out of play (opponents 3 yards away)
 - Use some willing parents to help the game managers keep the balls “live”. Or, have the parents supply the players to dribble in from the spot the ball went out of bounds.
 - No corners.
 - Don’t worry about enforcing strict rules, simply introduce them and keep the game flowing.



6U KICKSTART

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

FROM THE **FIELD**



“Players should have the freedom to express themselves, be creative, take risks and make mistakes! Learning from trial and error is a key to all development and it is crucial that the environment we create (as coaches) promotes this freedom.”

AYSO Player Development Team

This section will provide you with Age Appropriate training activities (*options*) recommended to help your 6U Kickstart players develop their skills. The activities are grouped according to the skill that they will most effectively help to teach. Despite all of the coaching techniques that can be utilized, nothing will ever teach 6U players more effectively than just letting them play.

KEEP IN MIND



The game itself
is the best
teacher!



Be creative with the names of the games and modify them to suit **your** players. Use your own creativity and personality; paint in vivid images to effectively communicate with your players in a language **they** can relate to. If an activity is **not** working as intended, modify (increase/decrease) the Speed, Space, and Opposition to maximize success. Let the players work through the adaptations to find success. Remember, all players are different (often regardless of age), so **adapt accordingly to the needs of your specific group.**

Have fun!

HUNTERS AND HUNTED

TECHNIQUE:

Physical Coordination
(Dribbling)

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 15 x 10 grid (woods), two flags (trees) 5 yards outside grid on either sideline, two teams (hunters and hunted), 2 sets of scrimmage vests (tails).

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/hunted](https://www.aysou.org/video/hunted)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Players tuck tails into back of shorts and line up on opposite sidelines.
- On coach command, hunters chase hunted and try to grab tails.
- If hunter catches hunted, they throw the tail to the ground and chase another player.
- If caught, the player runs outside grid, around the flag (tree), back into the grid (woods) to retrieve their tail and join in again.
- Play for one minute, then break for 30 seconds. Continue a few rounds.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Players dribble a ball.

COACHING POINTS

- Physical coordination.
- Follow directions and movement education.
- Creativity.

HUNTERS AND RABBITS

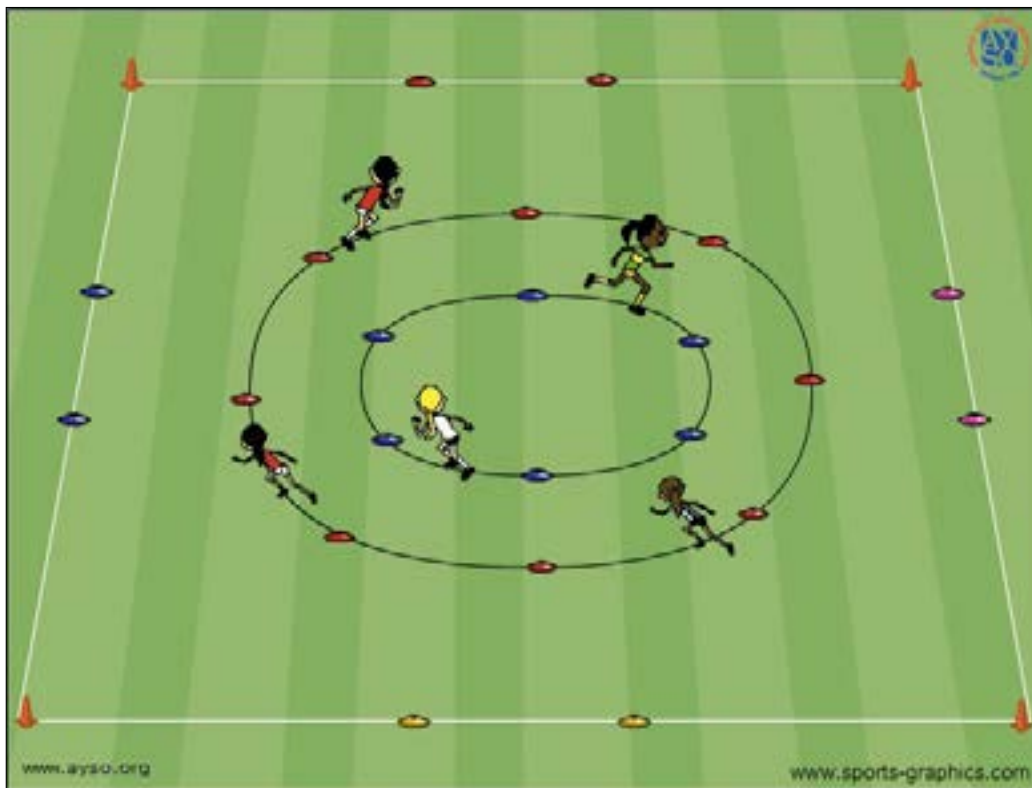
TECHNIQUE:

Physical Coordination

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 15 x 20 grid. Inside, mark a small circle in the middle of a larger one (like a bullseye). On the outer grid, mark four small gates of different colors (or names).

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysso.video/rabbits](https://www.aysso.org/video/rabbits)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Place some players in the middle circle (hunters) and some players in the outer circle (rabbits).
- Rabbits run clockwise around their circle, hunters run clockwise around theirs.
- The coach calls out the color (name) of a gate and the rabbits need to make it through that gate before the hunters tag them.
- If they are tagged by a hunter, they switch roles.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Vary the running style around the circle, i.e., heel kicks, high thighs, side steps, etc.
- Players start in sitting or lying position.
- Players with ball, i.e., bounce in hands, toe taps, etc., *until* coach calls the gate, then they drop ball and run.
- Players can dribble their ball to start; leave it and run; or take it with them.

COACHING POINTS

- Physical coordination.
- Follow directions and movement education.

FETCH FIDO

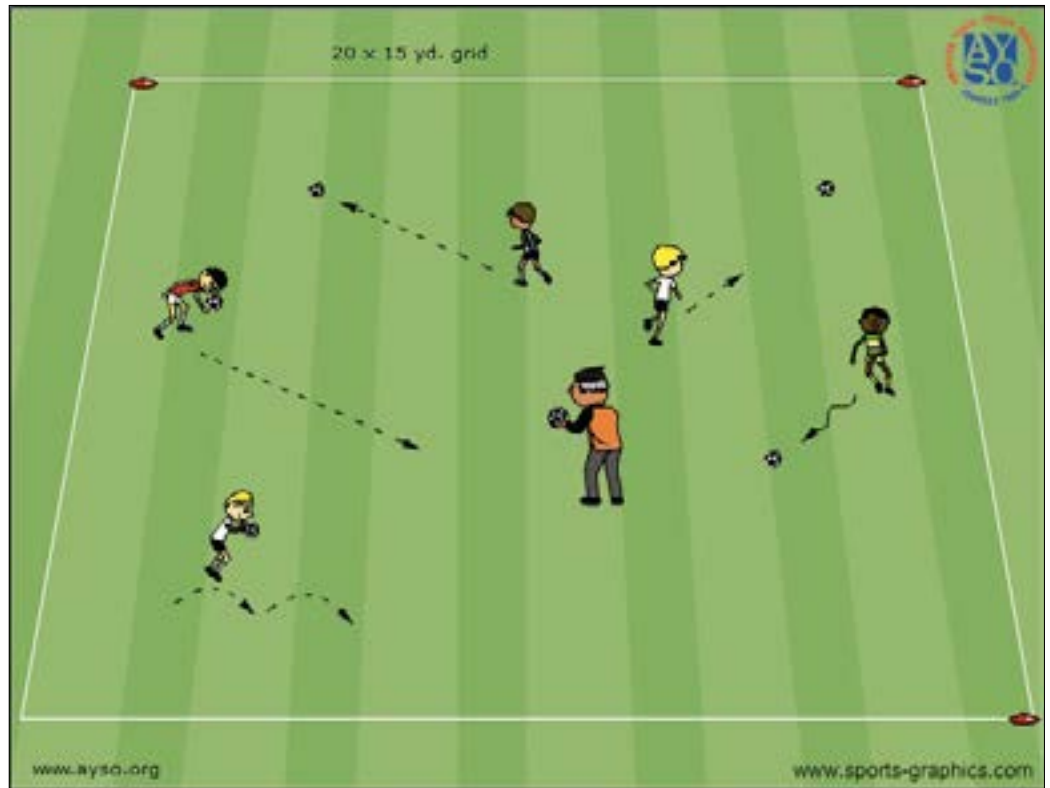
TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling (Physical Coordination)

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 15 x 20 grid, one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/fido](https://www.aysou.org/video/fido)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Each player takes the name of their favorite dog, i.e., Fido (pet or favorite animal).
- Players hold their ball in hands and one at a time hand their ball to the coach.
- The coach then tosses the ball away from the group in any direction within grid (dog park).
- The coach then instructs the players to bring the ball back in a variety of ways, being sure to incorporate numerous body movements. (Instruction to the players should not be too specific to encourage problem solving and creativity in the way they accomplish the task.)
- Players bring their ball back to the coach as instructed as quickly as possible.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Bring it back as fast as you can (do not specify how).
- Dribble the ball back.
- Bring it back using elbows only.
- Bring it back using head and right hand only.
- Bring it back using knees only.
- Bring it back using hand + elbow + knee.
- Bring it back hopping.
- Same challenges but performed in pairs.
- As the players are retrieving the ball, the coach changes location so they must look up to find the coach as they work with the ball.

COACHING POINTS

- Physical coordination.
- Simple decision making.
- Follow directions and movement education.
- Creativity.

WELCOME TO SOCCER CITY

TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 20 x 20 grid, one cone per player approx. 15 yards away and one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/welcomecity



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Invite the players into a magical Soccer City, where the ball provides power. Before gaining entry, players must first get to the gates.
- Coach stands on one end line with back to the players who are spread along the opposite end line. A cone per player is placed behind you.
- Start players in straight line dribbling end line to end line.
- Start with two instructions: Green light=Go! Red light=Stop! (by placing foot on top of ball).
- Upon shout of “Green light” the players must dribble toward the opposite end line.
- Before the coach turns around he yells “One, Two, Three, Red Light” and then turns around. At that point each player must have stopped the ball with the sole of their foot. Any player seen moving is sent back to the end line to start again. The coach turns his back again. Repeat. The first player to pick up a cone (key to the city) wins.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees should be slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.

SOCCER CITY

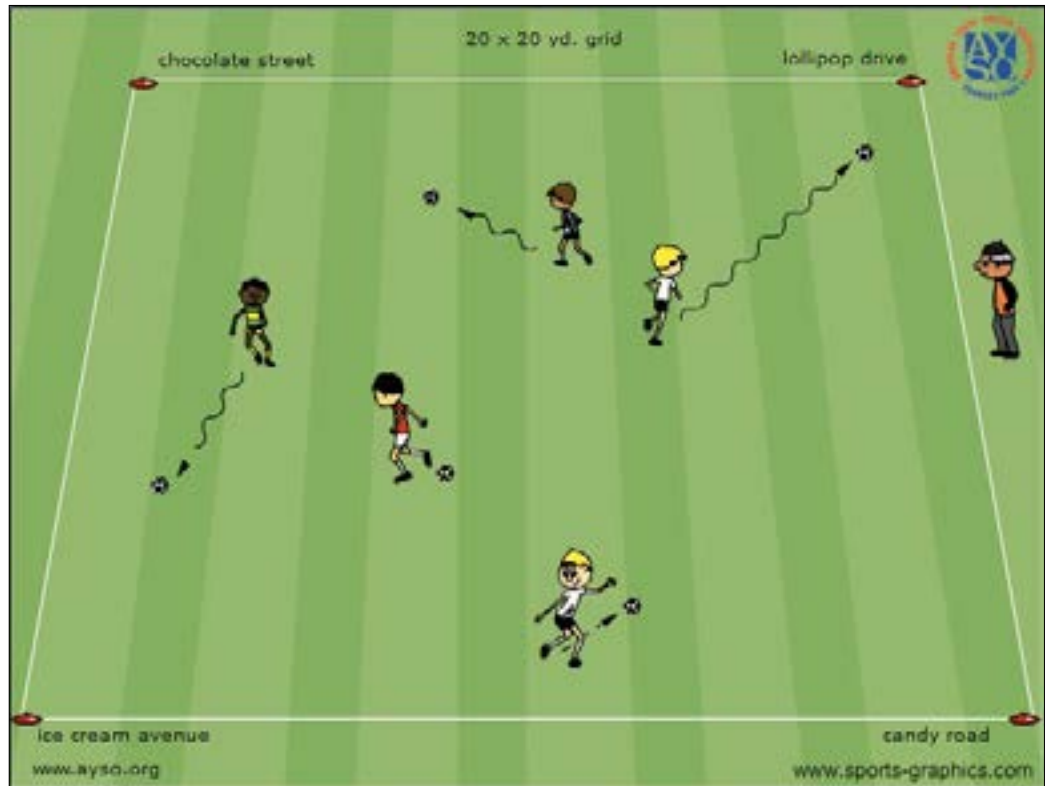
TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 20 x 20 grid, one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/city



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Now the players are through the gates and inside Soccer City, players must abide by the city rules.
- Players explore Soccer City by driving in various directions throughout the city limits.
- Introduce three speeds (and sounds) to drive at: bike speed=slow; truck speed=medium; sports car=fast. Players should react to these speeds upon specific command.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.
- Introduce engine revving: tap ball back and forth with inside of feet (tick-tock).
- Introduce Bye-Bye (drag back turn): Player stops ball by planting standing foot next to ball, placing kicking foot on top of ball, dragging ball back across body and changing direction. Encourage use of drag back turn, i.e., stopping ball from going out of Soccer City.
- Introduce special destinations (one per corner): ice cream avenue, candy road, chocolate street, lollipop drive. Upon your command, players must change their direction and drive to that location (at different speeds).

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees should be slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.
- Change direction and move into space.

CAR THIEF

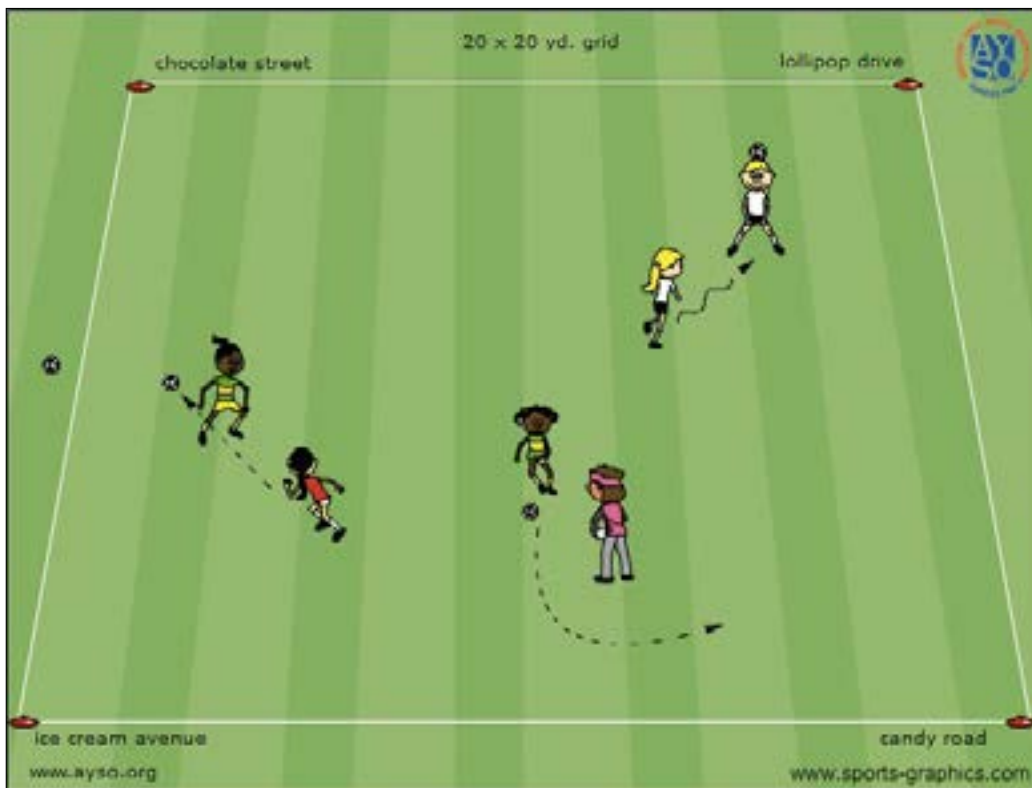
TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 20 x 20 grid, one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/thief](https://www.aysou.org/video/thief)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Car thieves have been spotted in Soccer City.
- Players should explore Soccer City by driving in various directions.
- Introduce three speeds (and sounds) to drive at: bike speed=slow; truck speed=medium; Sports Car=fast. Players should react to these speeds upon specific command.
- Coach starts as car thief and tries to steal the player's car (by kicking their soccer ball out of Soccer City).
- If a player's ball is kicked out, that player must run to collect their ball, return and place the ball on their head with legs apart (tunnel), until a teammate passes their ball through their tunnel. When unfrozen, they can drop ball and continue dribbling.
- Encourage players to drive/dribble to space away from thief, using different speeds they can select themselves.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.
- Once thief catches up to a player, if the player performs a drag back turn (Bye-Bye), the Car Thief freezes for five seconds and lets them go free.
- Let player(s) have chance at being the thief.
- If a player is caught, rather than open their legs to be unfrozen, they become a thief as well.

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.
- Change direction and move into space.

FOUR SEASONS

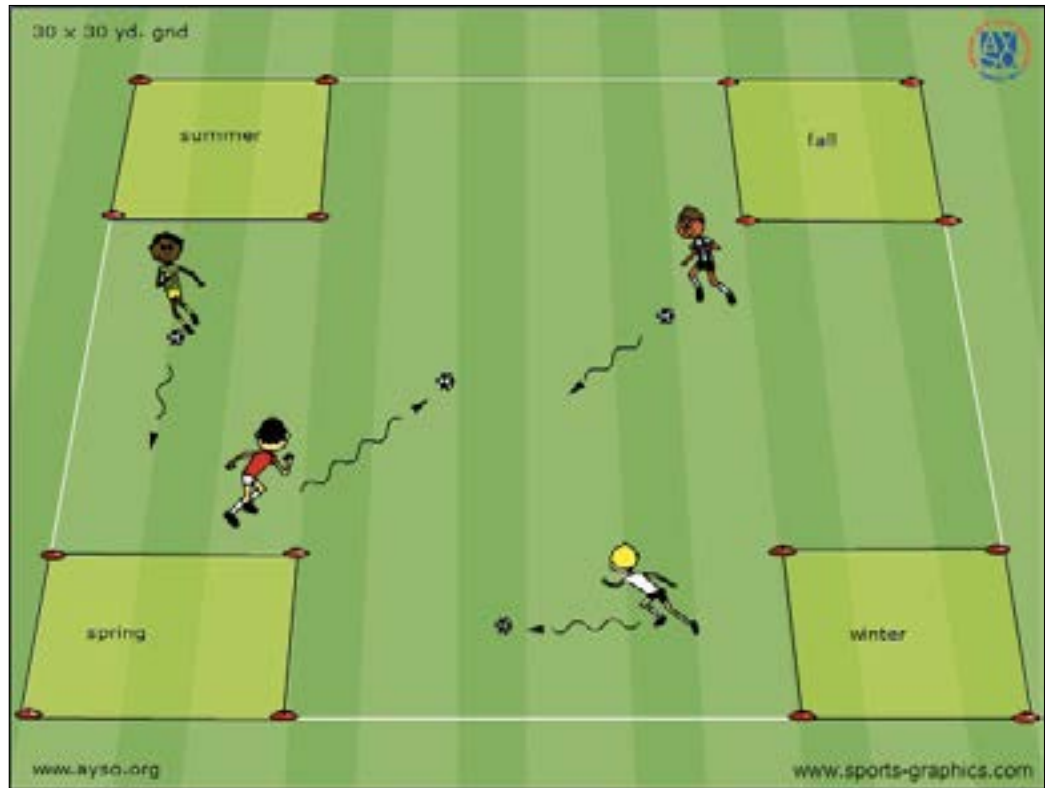
TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 30 x 30 grid, with a five x five yard square in each corner. 12 cones and 1 ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/fourseasons



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Place a player with a ball in each of the corner squares.
- Label each of the small squares spring, summer, fall and winter (or a similar picture for the kids to visualize, i.e., numbers, colors, characters from a movie, etc).
- Each small square will have at least one player who will be randomly dribbling within the grid.
- The coach will shout a “season” and all players will dribble as fast as they can to that square.
- The player who was playing in the square that was called must dribble to any one of the three squares that are now empty. First player to the new square wins.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.
- Paint pictures and animate: once players get to the specific grid, they must act out a behavior linked to that name, i.e., for spring they must stretch their arms as high to the sky as possible, for fall, they must droop over like a wilting tree, etc.

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees should be slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.

CATS AND DOGS

TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 20 x 20 grid, with two lines of six cones approximately five yards apart in middle, one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/cats](https://www.aysou.org/video/cats)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Player one and two stand back to back, level with the middle cones.
- One of the players is the “cat” and the other the “dog.”
- When the coach calls out “dog,” the dog turns and chases the cat to the opposite end line.
- Dogs bark and cats meow!
- Rotate roles.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot; outside of foot, inside of foot dribbling.
- Chasing players to chase without a ball, making the players with the ball dribble faster to get to the end line.
- Players face away, and have to perform a turn, i.e., drag back, prior to running.
- Players face start from sitting or lying down.

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees should be slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.
- Quick turn and explode away from dog.
- Keep body in between defender and ball to protect it.

JUNGLE PALS

TECHNIQUE:

Dribbling

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 15 x 10 yard field with two small goals, two teams, coach has balls.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/jungle



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Players line up on opposite end lines, either side of the goals.
- Players are given the name of a jungle animal (each team has a matching animal).
- Coach sends in a ball and calls a character who enters field to play 1 v 1. Coach distributes ball to one player to start the dribbling (vary next time round, this also prevents 50-50 challenges upon entry).
- Characters score by “dribbling” the ball over the goal line (not shooting) and stopping the ball with the sole of their foot.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Two/three characters per time.
- Add two more goals on sidelines, providing more options to score.
- Introduce fakes and feints (with points for trying a fake).

COACHING POINTS

- Use all major surfaces of both feet.
- Knees slightly bent and body leaning slightly over the ball for balance.
- Players should play with their head up, enabling them to see the field as well as the ball by utilizing peripheral vision as their ability progresses.
- Ball should be kept close using soft touches.
- Players should attempt to touch the ball every other step (or so).
- Ball should never be more than a step or two away.
- Change direction and move into space.

MAGIC MARBLE

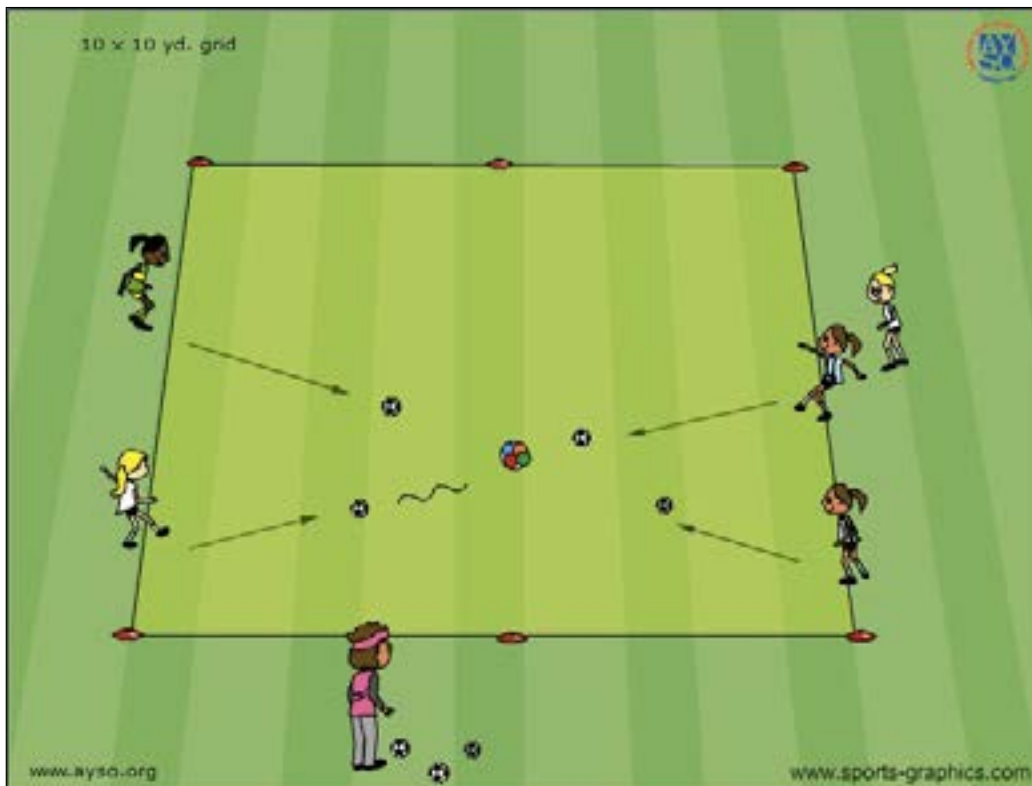
TECHNIQUE:

Instep Kick

Equipment/

Organization: Mark a 10 x 10 grid, one ball per player, one colored ball or beach ball (marble).

To see this activity in action visit:
[aysou.video/marble](https://www.aysou.org/video/marble)



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Two teams line up opposite each other (pending numbers have 2 players pair up).
- Each player has a ball.
- Players pass their ball to strike a central “Magic Marble” which only the coach may touch.
- After passing, players may retrieve any ball, except the “Magic Marble” and continue passing.
- Each team tries to knock the Magic Marble over their opponent’s line.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot kicks.
- Vary distance pending success.
- Chance of Glory: select a player to get a free shot. Move on quickly, rotate player.

COACHING POINTS

- Body should be over the ball (forward).
- Eyes on ball.
- Support foot next to ball pointed in general direction of target.
- Lock ankle back and down, toes pointed down.
- Strike the center of the ball on the instep (“laces” of the shoes).
- Follow through—move leg straight through toward target.

SOCCER GOLF

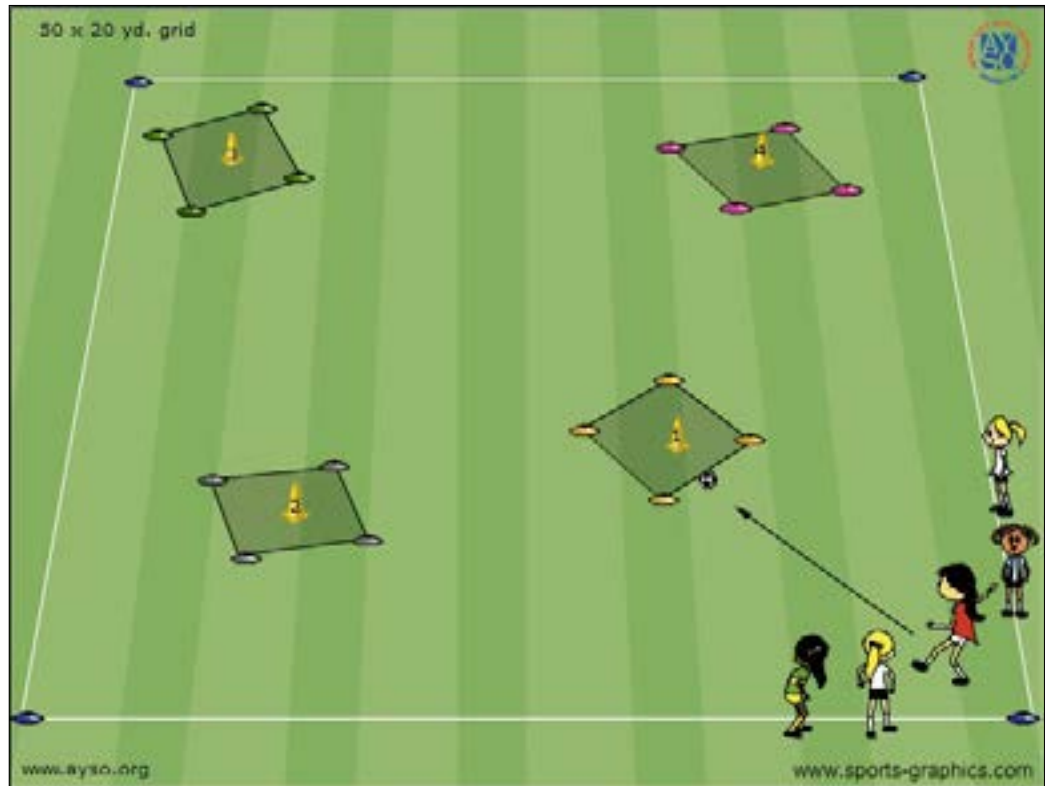
TECHNIQUE:

Instep Kick

Equipment/

Organization: Mark 50 x 20 playing area (course). Set up approx. four holes with four cones (5 x 5 yards) marking each green with a tall cone in center (marks pin). Vary the distances per hole, one ball per player.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/golf



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Players drive/kick their ball to the hole.
- Ball only needs to stop on green to score.
- Count kicks per player to reach the green.
- Have players count their score to see who gets the lowest “round.”

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot drives/kicks.
- As skill develops, vary the distances of holes and the size of the greens.
- Take two points off for actually hitting the tall cone/pin.
- Stagger player’s tee offs at different holes (with assistant coach or parent help).

COACHING POINTS

- Body should be over the ball (forward).
- Eyes on ball.
- Support foot next to ball pointed in general direction of target.
- Lock ankle back and down, toes pointed down.
- Strike the center of the ball on the instep (“laces” of the shoes).
- Follow through—move leg straight through toward target.
- Prioritize weight of strike.

METEOR STORM

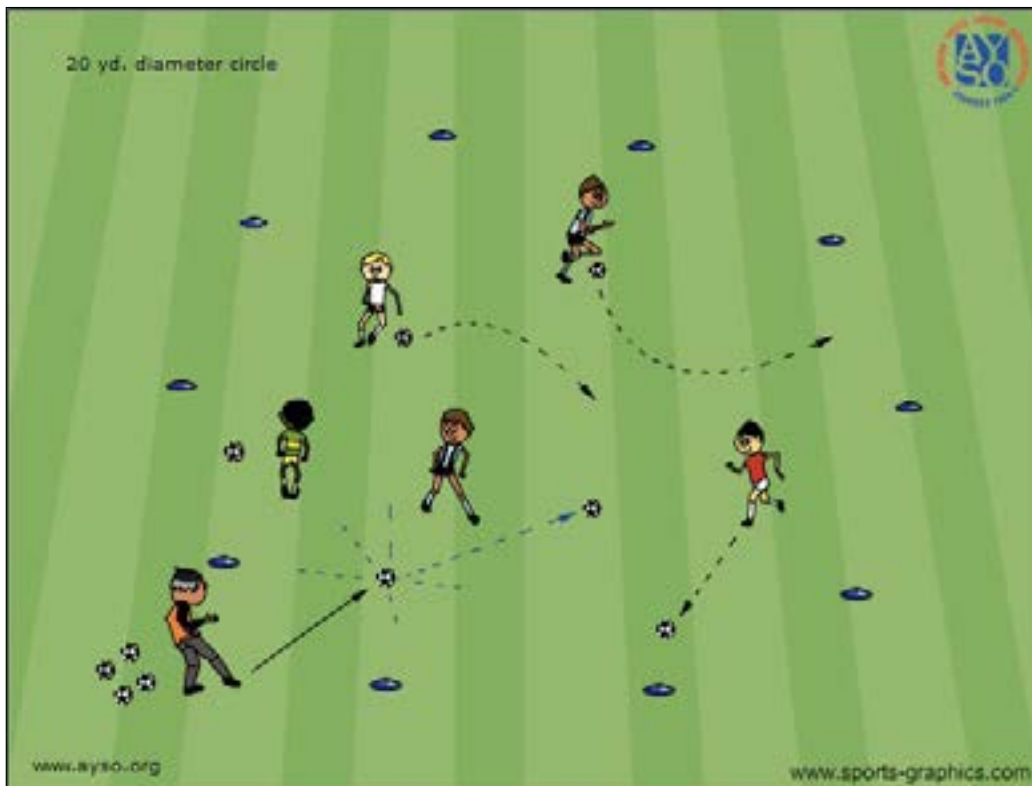
TECHNIQUE:

Instep Kick (Dribbling)

Equipment/

Organization: Set out circle 20 yards in diameter, one ball per player, coach on outside with spare balls.

To see this activity in action visit:
aysou.video/storm



HOW THE GAME IS PLAYED

- Players are flying (dribbling) in their space ships through a meteor field.
- Coach, using instep kick, “carefully” passes ball (meteor) into the circle and attempts to hit the player’s ball or legs (below the knee).
- If a player is hit, they join the coach on the outside of the circle and use their ball to hit the remaining players using an instep kick.
- The last player to be hit by a meteor starts the next round.

VARIATIONS/PROGRESSIONS

- Left foot, right foot.
- Vary distance of the meteor shooters.

COACHING POINTS

- Body should be over the ball (forward).
- Eyes on ball.
- Support foot next to ball pointed in general direction of target.
- Lock ankle back and down, toes pointed down.
- Strike the center of the ball on the instep (“laces” of the shoes).
- Follow through—move leg straight through toward target.
- Prioritize weight of strike.
- Keep ball low!

APPENDIX D:

BLANK KICKSTART SESSION PLAN

In addition to completed Session Plans, enclosed is a blank training plan for creating a Kickstart 6U session. However, it is important to stay within the general framework and flow as previously referenced. Remember, there is a hierarchy to Fundamental Motor Skills, i.e., walking before running, jumping before skipping, etc. Each group will be unique so modify activities as needed to make them easier or more challenging in order for everyone to feel successful.

Also, it is always good to reinforce the lessons from the previous session, i.e., “Does everyone remember last week, when we were being chased through the jungle by the crazy monkeys? Can anyone show me how we used our arms to help us run faster?”

If mixing and matching activities, remember to pick an SEL theme to introduce.

- 1. FMS Warm-up:** Start with a simple activity to get the children warmed up AND focus on their Fundamental Motor Skills, i.e., running, balancing, twisting.
- 2. Activity:** This activity should introduce soccer as the common thread but still prioritize FMS.
- 3. 3v3/4v4 Game:** This segment replicates the match environment (direction, team, targets, competition, simple rules, etc.).

Session #: _____ Region: _____



Age: 6U

Date: _____

EVERYONE PLAYS

BALANCED TEAMS

OPEN REGISTRATION

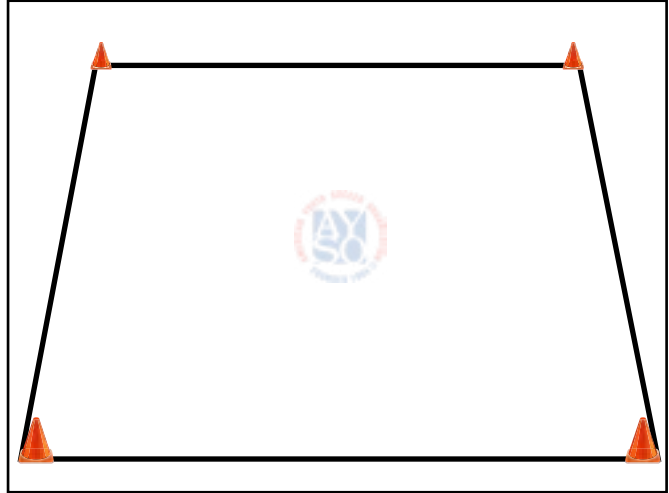
GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP

POSITIVE COACHING

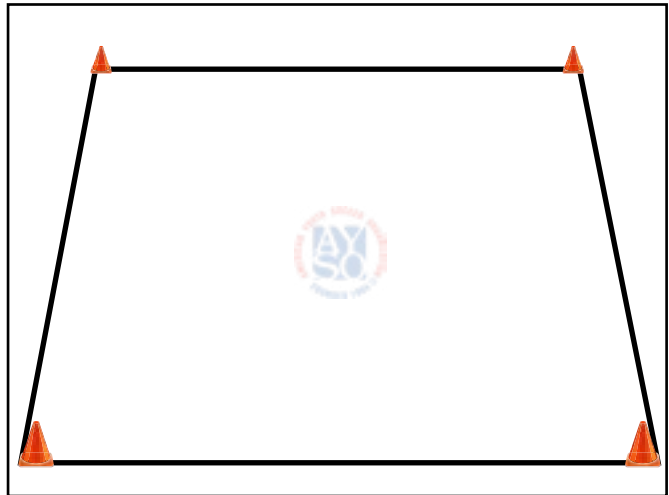
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

SEL Theme: _____ SEL Activity: _____

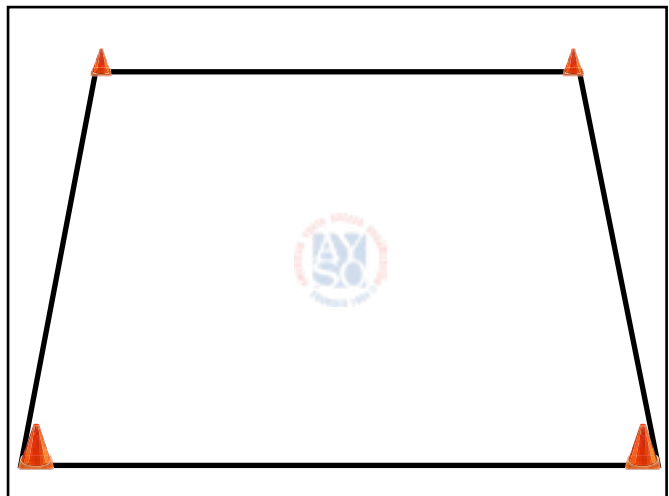
1. FMS Activity



2. Game-like Activity



**3. 3v3/4v4
Game**



ACTIVATION ARRIVAL GAMES

RED LIGHT / GREEN LIGHT

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Coach creates 40 x 40 ft. grid (or uses as much space as possible) and at each end (North / South) creates an end zone defined by spots / cones / lines 5 ft off each end line. Players line up on one end line facing opposing end line and are asked to follow coach instructions without the ball. Players need to make their way to the opposite end zone.

PROGRESSION

- Coach uses red & green colored objects (spots, cones, pinnies) to represent the action needed. This non-verbal instruction will see the players getting their head up and eyes open while appropriately reacting to each instruction.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Dribbling, Ball Control / Possession, Shooting.

ARRIVAL ACTIVITIES

FREEZE TAG

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Each child dribbles a ball in a given space. Coach is "it" and tries to tag players.

PROGRESSION

- If tagged, children put their ball in soccer position and cannot move until they receive a high five from a teammate
- If tagged, children put their ball in soccer position and cannot move until a ball passed through their legs
- Coach adds a 5 x 5 ft. coned area. This space becomes a safe zone for only one player at a time to stop in to prevent being tagged. If a child is in the zone and a teammate enters, they must leave.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Change of Speed, Accelerating away from pressure.

SHOOTING ACTIVITIES

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Children pair up, one ball per pair. Child without the ball jogs throughout the playspace, child with the ball dribbles throughout the playspace. On coach's whistle, partner shoots the ball across the space to their partner, striking the ball with their laces and keeping the ball on the ground. **Keep safety in mind here.** Limit the number of balls in play in cases where players struggle with controlling their shots or where space is limited.

PROGRESSION

- Each child has a ball dribbling in 1/2 the playspace. Coach is standing at midfield with goals on the end line opposite the children. When their name is called players pass their ball to Coach who lays the ball off for them to score on goal.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Striking the ball with laces, shooting on target, shooting a moving ball.

ARRIVAL ACTIVITIES

HUNGRY HIPPOS

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Teams are split so that each group has their own goal (depending on numbers of children and goals). Balls are gathered in the middle of the play space. One at a time children run out, turn with the ball and score it on their goal. Once the ball crosses the black PUGG strap, the next player may run out to get a ball. Teams count the number of balls in their goal once all the balls have been scored.

PROGRESSION

- Teams compete to see if they can beat their record from previous rounds.
- Coach instructs a specific turn that must be used to gather the balls (inside chop, outside hook, drag back, Cruyff, etc.)

SKILL SETS COVERED

Turning, Shooting.

NUMBERS GAME

AGES: 4

(6+ if 50/50 ball Enforced)

DESCRIPTION

Group is split in half, each team standing next to their own goal which is on the opposite end of their opponents. Each child on both teams is assigned their own number by Coach (same numbers should be assigned on both teams). Two balls are placed in the center of the playspace. Coach then calls out a number. The players assigned those numbers race to fetch a ball and score it in their opponent's goal.

PROGRESSION

- Players must turn and score the ball in their own goal.
- Only one ball is placed in the center, creating a 50/50 battle between the players called out.
- Two numbers are called out; giving teammates support to score the center ball.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Dribbling, Scoring (50/50 balls, Teamwork).

RELAY SHOOTING

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Set up 2 goals with cones 15–20 yards in front. Group is split into two teams, each team lined up next to a goal, each player with a ball. The first player in line from each team dribbles from the goalpost around the cone, shoots in the goal. Shooter then sprints to high five the next player in line on the post. **Keep safety in mind here**, reminding the players on the goalposts to keep their head up and be wary of missed shots.

PROGRESSION

- Turning cones are replaced by a gate of tall cones. Players must perform an assigned number of toe taps, sole rolls, etc. in between tall cones before turning and shooting.
- Coach instructs a specific turn that must be used between the tall cones (inside chop, outside hook, drag back, Cruyff, etc.)
- Two balls per group. First child dribbles out to the cone (which is now 25+ yards away), turns and passes to the second child who is standing 5–10 yards away from the goal. After receiving the pass the second child turns and shoots. After passing, the first child replaces the second child's spot. The third child who has the other ball then dribbles out and repeats.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Turning, Dribbling, Shooting, Passing.

MISSISSIPPI GAME

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Players lined up next to a goal 15–20 yards from a ball. One child at a time runs out to the ball, turns and goes to goal. Meanwhile, the rest of the class times the child by counting, "One Mississippi, Two Mississippi..." Each round the children try and beat their previous time. (If high numbers, two/three children may go at a time)

PROGRESSION

- Coach adds tall cones in between the goal and the ball for players to dribble through. If a cone gets knocked over, two seconds are added to their time.
- Group is split into two teams, each team lined up next to a goal which is set up on opposite ends. Coach places two balls in the center. One at a time a team member will run out, turn and score a goal, racing the player on the other team to see who can finish first.
- Coach instructs a specific turn that must be used to retrieve the ball (inside chop, outside hook, drag back, Cruyff, etc.)

SKILL SETS COVERED

Turning, Dribbling, Shooting.

ARRIVAL ACTIVITIES

WORLD CUP

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Children pair up and choose a country. Coach sets up goals along the outskirts of the play space, enough so each pair has their own goal. One partner defends a goal (no hands), one in the center. All against all, central players compete for possession of the two soccer balls to score on a defended goal. Players rotate once a goal is scored as Coach immediately serves a new ball.

PROGRESSION

- Only one ball in play (be weary of aggressive play)
- "Defenders" become stationary wall passer for their teammate
- Last pair to score becomes wall players for the other pairs in the next round

SKILL SETS COVERED

Possessing 50/50 balls, Shooting, Wall Passes.

OVER THE BRIDGE

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Play space is divided in half with a line of upside down PUGG goals. Children are split into two even groups, one on each side of the goals. All of the balls are at the far end of one half. Players with the balls must dribble them to the "bridge" (PUGGS), find a teammate on the opposite side and pass them the ball. The receiving player must turn and score the ball in an upright goal.

PROGRESSION

- Switch roles of the players.
- Coach times how long it takes for all the balls to be scored, setting a record for the group to beat.
- Kids chip/flick the ball over the black strap of the upside down PUGG goals.
- Coach adds defensive pressure in goal.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Dribbling, Passing, Vision, Shooting.

ARRIVAL ACTIVITIES

BANANA GAME REMIX

AGES: 4

DESCRIPTION

Group is split into two even teams, each distinguished by a different pinnie color. All members of one team have a ball each. Within the playspace the children without a ball run around. The children with balls chase those without, changing their speed and direction in an effort to remain as close as possible to a member of the other team. On coach's whistle, children without the ball freeze, children with the ball take soccer position. Coach asks the team with balls to point to the child on the opposite team that they were chasing and to then try and make a pass to their feet.

PROGRESSION

- Passes must be made through target's straddled legs.
- Partners are assigned, making children work to keep close to one specific player.

SKILL SETS COVERED

Change of Speed, Change of Direction, Passing Accuracy.

CHECKLIST

First Practice

- Host a preseason meeting with parents to discuss your program philosophy, goals and intentions
- Ask every player which name they prefer and call them by that name
- Talk with youth athletes about how to seek out and connect with other adults they trust
- Co-create and set positive norms, rules and routines for practices and games

Planning Practice / Pregame

- Collaborate with other coaches to design effective practices
- Ensure the physical environment is free of safety concerns
- Set high expectations and clear limits on behavior
- Have players set goals and intentions regarding their physical, social, emotional and cognitive skill development
- Allow athletes to serve in leadership roles and maintain a rotation schedule so all players have the opportunity to lead

During Practice / Day of Game

- Start and end practices on time
- Participate in drills with players
- Practice positive interactions that are encouraged of players
- Adjust the structure of practice and activities to accommodate players' emotions
- Create community by adopting practices such as composing a team cheer, selecting a team name, logo or slogan, or incorporating team-building activities into games and practices
- Encourage high-fives or handshakes for greetings

After Practice / Postgame

- Give shoutouts for achievement, effort and improvement at the end of the practice: players to players, coach to players and players to coach
- Collect athlete feedback and incorporate into practices
- Talk with parents/caregivers about issues arising with their children
- Encourage parents and caregivers to reinforce these skills by talking about what they are, what they mean and what these behaviors can look like at home

Ongoing: Every Practice, Every Game

- Reinforce the norms, rules and routines
- Ensure all youth are included, with equitable access to activities, being sensitive to different learning styles
- Establish a code of conduct that prohibits bullying and establishes consequences
- Ask questions to get to know every youth, their families and their motivations
- Organize formal meetings with your players throughout the season in order to help them express their feelings, wants and needs
- Be cognizant of your own and others' perspectives
- Practice self-care, engage in reflection around your own social and emotional well-being
- Talk to every youth at every practice and during every game

Learn more at [as.pn/callsforcoaches](https://aspeninstitute.org/callsforcoaches)



Commissioned by the
Susan Crown Exchange

CALLS FOR COACHES

01

KNOW EVERY ATHLETE'S STORY

Build positive adult-youth relationships

02

ESTABLISH A SUPPORTIVE TEAM CULTURE

Create a safe space that supports social and emotional skill development

03

CELEBRATE EFFORT

Embody effective leadership strategies that emphasize effort, autonomy and learning

04

FOCUS ON THE SKILLS THAT MATTER

Prioritize and provide opportunities for direct skill building and practice

05

BE A ROLE MODEL

Model good character and decision-making

06

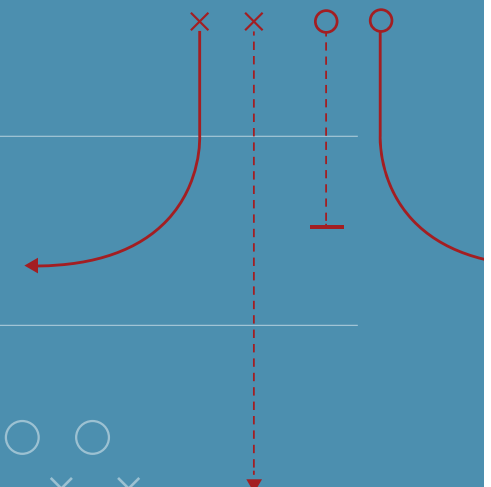
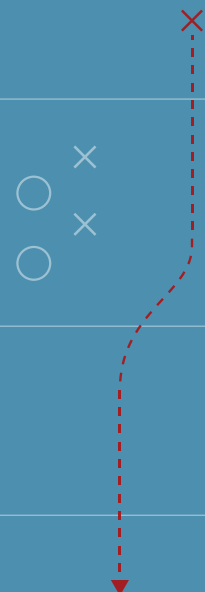
BE COACHABLE

Seek opportunities for support, training and professional development

07

JOIN FORCES

Engage with families, schools and other community organizations





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Relationship Building

Objectives

1. Learn everyone's preferred name.
2. Make sure everyone understands the program expectations (e.g. commitment, sportsmanship, relationships).
3. Explain your purpose in focusing on relationship building.

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Increasing prosocial behaviors
2. Teamwork

Facilitate a conversation with your team using these talking points

- We demonstrate respect by learning names and using preferred names.
- We want our teammates to get involved and really commit. That means show up to practice, work hard for self and team, and make their season a priority.
- Encourage each other and hold each other accountable. Challenge teammates to represent each and the team through their actions on and off the field.



Tune into Team Progress

Listen to how your players talk to each other and what names they are using. When you hear something that doesn't sound right, correct it. Remember: demonstrate what you want to see or hear. When you see or hear it, acknowledge it positively.

Summary (coaches deliver to the team)

Model respect by learning names, explain your commitment to the team as their coach, and how you plan to represent them on and off the field too.



CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Social Engagement

Objectives

1. Students will understand expectations for how to interact with officials.
2. Students will understand expectations for how to interact with each other.

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Understanding social cues and demonstrating basic conflict resolution strategies
2. Collaborating and working with others as part of a team

Facilitate a conversation with your team using these talking points

Officials are people, not objects of frustration. We will treat officials with decency and respect because without their willingness to do this job, we wouldn't have games. This means we will:

- React appropriately when calls don't go our way.
- Respectfully and calmly ask for clarification when you don't understand a call.
- ALWAYS express gratitude to the officials at the end of a match.

Teammates are people and will also make mistakes. We will treat our teammates with decency and respect because we care about them. This means that we will:

- Not get angry about mistakes but explain/show how to do something better.
- Encourage each other with our words, not tear each other down.
- Find ways to demonstrate positive sportsmanship and lead by example.

Opponents are people, and we will respect them as competitors. This means that we will:

- Use respectful language when talking to them or about them.
- Congratulate them when they win, encourage them after you win.
- Recognize game: when they make a good play, tell them. It's okay to tip the hat or high five an opponent. It doesn't show weakness.

Tune into Team Progress

What to look for:

- Count how many times your players say "nice play" or "good catch" to each other and opponents.
- Count how many times players handle themselves coolly and calmly when they miss a shot or strike out.

Remember: Highlight and acknowledge publicly when you see what you want to see. This reinforces the behavior for the other kids too.





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Recognizing Strengths

Objectives

1. Athletes will identify strengths in each other (1 athletic attribute and 1 personal attribute)
2. Athletes will self-identify strengths (1 athletic attribute and 1 personal attribute)
3. Athletes will set a goal based on improving their strengths

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Understanding and recognizing emotions in oneself and others.
2. Longer term goal-setting and planning.

Facilitate a conversation with your team using these talking points

- It's easy to be hard on ourselves and others, but we perform better when we recognize strengths in ourselves and others.
- After identifying strengths, have players discuss how their strengths make the team better.
- Have players identify one way they can continue improving their strengths.



Tune into Team Progress

Get familiar with your players' goals, whether you helped set them or they did it independently. You can help them determine how they will measure success towards their goal and help them track their success.



Summary to close

Good teammates continually look for ways to improve so they can help the team and build others up. We may not be good at everything yet but can commit to get better at something everyday. Don't be afraid to ask for help or advice from teammates and be humble when giving help or advice to your teammates.





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Respect for Others

Objectives

1. Players understand their roles as ambassadors of the team
2. Players understand types of questions they can ask in order to get to know other people

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Engaging in more complex conflict resolution and friendships.
2. Demonstrating empathy and perspective-taking.

Facilitate a conversation with your team using these talking points

- In the community, athletes represent your team. Within your program, you represent each other, your coach(es), and your sport. In both settings - represent to the best of your ability by showing respect for yourself and others.
- Respect can be hard at times, especially when you don't "get" the other person. Learn how to engage with your peers, coaches and other adults. Ask questions in order to better understand each other. When we understand how people think or reasons behind their actions, it is easier to be respectful of their feelings and actions.

Activity/Assignment

Before the next practice, have each player engage with any adult of their choosing, other than their coach, and "interview" them. These should be short one-on-one conversations, not in groups. *(Note: Their adult can be anyone they interact regularly with; a teacher, a parent, whoever brought them to practice that day, a friend's parent, even an older sibling.)*

- Ask your adult about their favorite thing about what they do.
- Ask your adult about the biggest challenge of being an adult.
- Ask your adult about how they stay motivated in spite of their challenges.
- Ask your own follow-up question.
- Be ready to talk about what you learned about your adult next week.

*Bonus assignment: Meet another kid you don't know and ask them the same questions.





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Empathy

Objectives

1. Students will understand their role as ambassadors and leaders
2. Students will analyze the effectiveness of showing respect and empathy and how they impact their relationships with others.

Skills and Competencies

1. Increasing prosocial behaviors.
2. Understanding and recognizing emotions in oneself and others.

Activity/Assignment Follow Up

- Ask for volunteers to summarize the conversations they had with their adults.
- Ask each of them how understanding their adult's challenges makes them feel about their adults. You may already have some well-informed players who are already well aware of the challenges that adults face. If you can do so delicately, ask them how they have adapted in order to be more supportive of the adults in their lives.
- Have the students discuss how they exhibit leadership through demonstrating respect and empathy for their adults.



Tune into Team Progress

What to look for (Big Picture): You want to see how kids are interacting with the adults in their lives. Get creative for how you check on this: watch how kids interact with other coaches, referees and families while leaving practice, ask them directly, etc.



Closing

When you can show empathy towards others, they are more likely to show empathy towards you. Often when we treat others how we wish to be treated, they do the same. Sometimes, they don't. However, part of your role as a leader is to stay true to your character and to those you represent, even when it might be hard.





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports: Responsible Decision Making

Objectives

1. Students will learn how to apply ethics to decision making

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Thinking flexibly and redirecting attention.
2. Understanding and recognizing more complex emotions and situations.

Discussion

Ask: *What are ethics?* (looking for: moral principles or something similar. Younger kids may not have an answer.)

Ask: *What is more important, winning a game or acting ethically?*

Scenario: The game is close and time is running out. The official blows the whistle and calls the ball out of bounds on the other team. (*This is a basketball scenario. Make applicable to your own sport.) However, you know with absolute certainty that you stepped out of bounds with the ball first. What is your ethical responsibility?

Tell the official	Don't tell the officials
Cons: Other team gets the ball, you might lose. Teammates might get mad at you.	Cons: Maybe none. Maybe the other team knows the truth and they get mad at you.
Pros: In the moment, maybe none. Official will show you appreciation. If your team thinks ethics are important, maybe they'll affirm your decision too.	Pros: You get the ball. Your team might win.
Long term: Your coach will know. How will they react?	Long term: Your coach will know. How will they react?

Tune into Team Progress

What would you do? This will actually require a lot of introspection on your part. You have to determine what you would expect a player to do in the above scenario or any other. Your reaction to these scenarios will ultimately determine your players actions.





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports Responsible Decision Making

Objectives

1. Students will use problem solving skills to address a school issue
2. Students are able to think through three stages of problem solving

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Organizing information to solve problems.
2. Collaborating and working with others as part of a team.

Activity

Three stages of problem solving:

*If there is another applicable problem or issue you think would better apply to your athletes, please feel free to use instead.

1. **Identify a problem:** Social media use by students

Explain: Social media can be pretty negative and filled with lots of trolls and even bullies.

2. **Analyzing Situations:**

Ask students why they think people can be negative on social media. (possible answers: They think it's funny, they are mad about something, maybe they are unhappy and are taking out frustrations on other people, some people think it's cool to put down other people, etc.)

Ask students how it probably feels to be the target of online trolls or bullies.

3. **Solving Problems:**

Ask students how they think they can help solve the problem. (note: this problem is pretty widespread, which the kids will probably acknowledge. So, turn the conversation to how they can do their part to make it better, even if it doesn't fix the problem.)

Challenge: Encourage kids to commit to making one positive post about someone or something every day.

(note: If somebody gives an awesome solution that could lead to a better challenge, use it.)





CALLS FOR COACHES



Coaching Social and Emotional Skills in Youth Sports Identifying Emotions

Objectives

1. Students will discuss emotions and how they respond to strange feelings

Skills and Competencies in Focus

1. Understanding and recognizing more complex emotions and situations.

Discussion

Ask: *Have you ever been mad for no reason, or sad but can't figure why? Or, have you ever just been in a bad mood with no real reason why?*

Take their answers.

Explain that we all deal with a lot of strange emotions, and sometimes they don't make sense. You can discuss hormones and brain chemicals at a basic level and reassure them that this happens a lot to this age group simply because their bodies and minds are developing.

Explain that learning to deal with these emotions involves being able to identify when they have these feelings, even if unexpected. Ask: *When you are feeling down or angry, and don't know why, what can you do?*

Answers: Talk to friends, talk to parents, talk to teachers, talk to you. Be explicit that they don't just have to get over it. If it doesn't pass, then they should talk to somebody. If they can't shake their strange feelings, it doesn't mean something is wrong with them. It just means that they need to find some outlet for their feelings and they can also talk to their coaches for support.

Tune into Team Progress

What to look for: Observe how kids handle their emotions during practice and games. Do they shut down? Do they lash out? Do they shake it off quickly? Do they tell a peer why they are frustrated? Create your team atmosphere as a safe space for having these discussions and expressing their emotions.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

AYSO National Coaching Council

Scott Stensrud, AYSO Region 269

Scott Gorgas, AYSO Region 327

Chicago Fire Soccer in Community

Aspen Institute Project Play

All of our AYSO superstars...players and volunteers!

U.S. Soccer Game Format Research Project

Sport Specialization: developmental and learning issues: early specialization may limit a child's acquisition of fundamental motor skills. The Journal of Physical Education, Recreation & Dance, 2010 Crystal F. Branta, Associate Professor, Growth and Motor Development, Michigan State University.

Fundamental Movement Skills in Children and Adolescents, 2010, Lubans DR, Morgan PJ, Cliff DP, Barnett LM, Okely AD.

Risks and Benefits of Youth Sport Specialization: Perspectives and Recommendations, 2000, Wiersma, L.D., Pediatric Exercise Science.

Australian Sports Commission Indigenous Sports Program

AYSO VISION

is to provide world class youth soccer programs that enrich children's lives.

AYSO MISSION

is to develop and deliver quality youth soccer programs which promote a fun, family environment based on AYSO's Six Philosophies:

AYSO SIX PHILOSOPHIES

- Everyone Plays®
- Balanced Teams
- Open Registration
- Positive Coaching
- Good Sportsmanship
- Player Development



AYSO National Office
19700 S. Vermont Ave., Suite 103, Torrance, CA 90502

