

8U COACH



Complete "How-To" for Coaching Young Children
Includes a Complete Season of Training Plans



AMERICAN YOUTH
SOCCER ORGANIZATION

COACHING SERIES

8U COACH



everyone plays®

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Accredited By:



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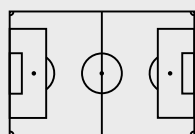
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WELCOME TO THE FIRST TEAM!

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 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 FOR VOLUNTEERING!

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

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 content of this manual is drawn from the knowledge and experience of AYSO’s Player Development Team and our National Coaching Advisory Commission—people with vast soccer knowledge, yet volunteers of AYSO—just like you. The coaching methodology and soccer skills included in this manual have been carefully researched and have **natural** alignment with U.S. Soccer’s Zone One (6-12 years) objectives for player development: Development over Winning, Age Appropriate, Quality Training, and Having Fun/Inspiring Players.

We encourage you to attend your local Region’s Annual Coach Orientation, as well as other AYSO coaching courses available in your area or online. Your Regional Commissioner or Coach Administrator can provide you with information about what’s required for your specific age group.

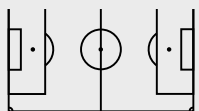
On behalf of the entire organization, thank you for joining the team!

NATIONAL COACHING ADVISORY COMMISSION

AYSO PLAYER DEVELOPMENT 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
Current WNT Performance Analysis Coach*

THE WORLD'S BIGGEST SOCCER CLUB

Founded in Torrance, CA in 1964, AYSO is a distinguished cornerstone of US Soccer and with approximately 60,000 teams across *all* age groups; AYSO is the world's biggest 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, our contribution to the US game's success is founded upon our unique **Vision**, **Mission** and **Philosophies**.

KEEP IN MIND



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

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:

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.

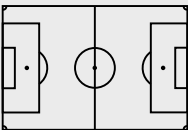
KEEP IN
MIND



AYSO Six Philosophies:

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

FROM THE FIELD

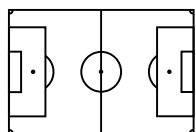


“It is better to win ten times 1-0 than to win once 10-0.”

Vahid Halilhodžić, Bosnian Coach and Former Professional Player

STEWARDS OF THE GAME

FROM THE FIELD



“We must all work together; coaches, officials and parents to create the optimal performance environments for our players’ development.

Players need to play with freedom, confidence and enjoyment in a developmentally rich environment to truly reach their potential.”

Scott Snyder
AYSO Player Development Specialist

Stewardship: “The conducting, supervising, or managing of something; especially: the careful and responsible management of something entrusted to one’s care” (2017 Merriam-Webster).

APPLICATION ON THE FIELD

Referees and coaches are to be Stewards of the Game and work together to ensure that player safety, at the physical and emotional level, is the number one priority on the field. All 7 members of the team (3 referees and 4 coaches) are equal participants and are there for the sole purpose of discussing how to ensure a safe and protective environment for the players to play. The Center Referee shall initiate a brief meeting between referees and coaches before the AYSO match to collectively:

- Identify any potential issues that may impact the ability of players to safely have fun; such as the field, sideline areas, field equipment, players’ equipment, the physical and emotional states of participants, and other game related concerns.
- Review and follow a simple process that encourages communication and collaboration when there is a concern or issue with players/participants.

REFEREES

Referees, as Stewards of the Game, are responsible for keeping the game safe, fair, and fun. Referees should support and work with coaches to manage the behavior of players and spectators.

COACHES

Coaches must keep their sideline participation to being: Positive, Instructive and Encouraging at all times. Coaches must ensure respect and support for referees by players, parents, and all other spectators.

PARENTS

Parents are expected to respect coaches and referees, and model positive sporting behavior; and at the same time, maintain realistic expectations.

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. It also includes signs, buttons and other match-day reminders.

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 this program, four basic elements are involved (and available from the AYSO Store):

1. **Kids Zone® Button.** Worn by program supporters at matches and serves as a reminder of the importance of positive sideline behavior.
2. **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-- all others are not.
3. **The Pledge.** AYSO requests all parents to sign a pledge that holds them to the Kids Zone® standards.
4. **The Video.** A 12-minute documentary introduces AYSO's principles and its Kids Zone® action plan to new participants. Viewers will also watch a parent intervene to change another parent's negative behavior. In order to make this program work, everyone must help!

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



THE VIBRANT WORLD OF 8U

STILL KIDS!

8U is a time for **DISCOVERY**! New and exciting findings are revealed to the 8U player as their coordination improves and their size and strength increase.

From a coaching perspective, we now have a training session to plan for so our focus should be on **Quality Training** and establishing good habits and foundations for development (theirs and ours), but at the same time prioritizing **Age Appropriate** application...THEY ARE STILL KIDS!

KEEP IN MIND

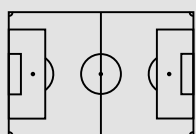


At this age (in fact most ages), the game itself is the best teacher.



COACHING METHODOLOGY

FROM THE FIELD



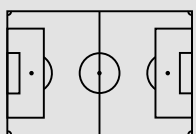
“One of my biggest pet peeves is youth team coaches who take winning too seriously. This has always bothered me, and I always tell coaches to forget about winning with young players. They need to create an environment where the kids enjoy playing and are developing their soccer skills. Winning should never be a priority.”

Landon Donovan, AYSO Alumni and Professional Player

The AYSO Player Development Team and NCAC have researched current coaching methodologies and approaches to quality training from all across the soccer globe and are proud to present our findings for your consideration and implementation.

DEVELOPMENT OVER WINNING

FROM THE FIELD



“Development over winning. Being faithful to it, being really faithful to it every single day. Are the players, are the kids the most important thing? That’s what I worry about. That’s what I talk about. That’s my only goal: making the players and of course, the coaches who teach them, all of us, better!”

Claudio Reyna, Former U.S. Soccer Youth Technical Director

Prioritizing **Development Over Winning** does **NOT** reduce competition, which is instrumental to a player’s development. However, a competitive environment does not necessarily need to be all about wins, draws and losses.

Consider the emotional roller coaster of equating success *only* when you win the game or score a goal (aspects that are *not* 100% within your control). How would we like to be judged as adults in that type of scenario?

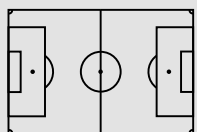
As coaches, it is our responsibility to determine if the competitive environment is healthy or not. Please consider this on your coaching journey.

KEEP IN MIND



Children should be competitive, not the adults! And a competitive environment for our youth players should focus on **performance** rather than **outcome** (favoring ball skills, effort, creativity, etc., as means to find success, not the score).

FROM THE FIELD

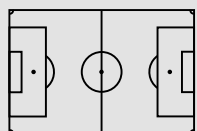


"In matches the coaches should keep out of the way. He/she is an important figure, of course, but is more likely to lose a match than win it. Matches are won by players."

Romario, Brazilian Legend

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCCER (VS. OTHER U.S. SPORTS)

FROM THE FIELD



"AYSO emphasizes all the positives of soccer: the enjoyment that kids get from the sport, understanding how to play on a team and be a good teammate, and developing skills in a fun environment."

Julie Foudy, AYSO Hall of Fame, 1991 & 1999 World Cup Champion, 1996 & 2004 Olympic Gold Medalist

It is important to recognize some key differences between soccer and other American sports, as this impacts how the game should be played, viewed and coached. In comparison, soccer is:

- Free-flowing (fewer stoppages).
- Low-scoring (more often).
- Requires eye-foot coordination (versus eye-hand, as in baseball, basketball and football).
- Has no physical size requirement.
- Equal opportunity sport (girls are equally as talented and have comparable opportunities to boys).
- **PLAYER-based** (as game flows, *players* make the decisions and PLAY the game, less coach involvement).

STYLE AND ATTITUDE

Mourinho, Ferguson, Klinsmann, Guardiola? Coaching styles differ based on personality and beliefs on how the game should be played. Effective coaches; however, all possess similar qualities:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------------|--------------|
| • Leader | • Knowledgeable | • Observant |
| • Teacher & Motivator | • Quality Demonstrator | • Humorous |
| • Conscientiousness | • Enthusiastic & Energetic | • Personable |
| • Fair & Honest | • Patient & Understanding | • Confident |
| • Smart Appearance | • Communicator | |

The general qualities of any coach combine into four fundamental attributes that all successful coaches share:

1. Soccer knowledge.
2. Prioritize athlete's well being.
3. Ability to communicate knowledge to the player.
4. Ability to observe and evaluate (coaching eye) to correct any apparent faults (in a positive manner).

KEEP IN MIND



Whatever coaching persona you may adopt, avoid being the center of attention! Create an environment where the players are the focus and priority, and they can gain success on their own.

PREPARATION AND ORGANIZATION

PREPARATION

Always prepare a written Training Plan! Consider what you wish to work on and what activities you can use to achieve your goal. A written plan ensures smooth transitions, less down time and a more economical use of precious time. A blank AYSO Training Plan and numerous completed plans can be located in the back of this manual.

Take a few minutes just before your training session to review your plan and the coaching points you want to make. (Consider saving your plans as a coaching library for future seasons/sessions or to share with other coaches in your Region.)

APPEARANCE

Appropriate attire is expected when conducting your coaching session. Wearing soccer apparel and footwear go a long way to comforting your players that you know what you are doing related to your role as their "soccer coach."

Sunglasses are discouraged (unless you require a medical prescription), as the players cannot see your eyes. Even with a prescription, remove your sunglasses when in direct communication with your players.

ORGANIZATION

Ideally, set up your 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 provide confidence for the parents.** In organizing your coaching 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 you have to pick up or reset.
- Have a place for equipment and breaks.



EQUIPMENT

Below is a basic list of the minimum equipment you should have as part of your coaching kit:


- AYSO Player Registration Forms – which include the Emergency Authorization.
- Basic first-aid kit*.
- **(Players should bring water to every session).**
- 12 cones (preferably multi-colored).
- **7** scrimmage vests (preferably 2 sets of different colors).
- Extra soccer balls (players should bring a ball to *every* session).
- Pump.
- Extra pair of shin guards (players must wear shin guards at *every* session).
- Pop-up goals (preferred).
- Whistle.
- Charged cell phone (in case of emergency).
- Training plan.

*Be familiar with your first-aid kit contents so that you know what you have **and where it is** if needed.

AGE APPROPRIATE UNDERSTANDING AND APPLICATION

The following chart generalizes age characteristics of children ages 5 through 8 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

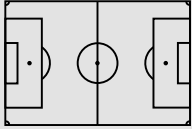


Our players are *not* mini-adults; therefore, our training sessions must be adapted to life through *their* eyes, *their* interests and most important, *their* capabilities.

AGE APPROPRIATE CHARACTERISTICS AND TRAINING ENVIRONMENTS	
6U	<p>6U is a time for freedom and EXPLORATION! Let them Play!</p> <p>Training should be based on fun games, adventures, story telling 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.</p>
7U	<p>Fundamental motor skills (balance, walking, running, jumping, etc.) should be highlighted and combined with ball control.</p> <p>Players must maximize their contact with the ball and most activities should be individual (ball per player). 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>
8U	<p>Let any tactical insight be developed through small-sided matches and activities.</p> <p>8U is a time for DISCOVERY! Let them Play!</p> <p>Prioritize FUN and INSPIRE your players!</p>

COACHING MOMENTS (SECONDS)

FROM THE FIELD



"Football is simple; trainers (coaches) shouldn't make it so complicated."

Johan Cruyff, Dutch Soccer Legend

At the end of the day, it is the coach's job to coach! But having the content is one thing (and we are providing this for you), but knowing **how** to effectively communicate, motivate and develop your individual players is another talent.

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.

MANAGING THE COACHING MOMENT...LESS IS MORE!

Occupy a central but sideline position during training to allow a clear, panoramic view of the activity.

The coaching environment you create must be safe and conducive to learning. Players must be stimulated to learn and educational opportunities must be well thought out if you want to maximize player development. Players must be given freedom to be creative, find solutions without constant coaching, and ultimately learn from their mistakes. Remember, mistakes are guidelines for improvement!

It is a fine line managing the flow of your session and finding the appropriate time to step in. Methods:

- Forced Stoppage (freeze, get in, make your point, get out).
- Natural Stoppage (be careful that the coaching opportunity hasn't passed and the situation forgotten).
- Flow (talking as the game is playing...but avoid constant commentary).
- Individual Reference (pulling a player aside to make an observation).

LET THEM PLAY AND THE GAME TEACH!

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). Coaching points or instructions should be:

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

When addressing your players, make sure **they** are not directly facing the sun.

KEEP IN MIND



Avoid lengthy speeches!

Keep instructions for activities as simple and quick as possible.

I HEAR...

I SEE...

I DO...

I FORGET

I REMEMBER

I UNDERSTAND



VOICE

- Do consider the volume and tone of your voice.
- Avoid being monotone.
- Modulating the intensity of your voice can help emphasize your coaching points and gain the required attention.
- Always maintain control and *never* raise your voice in anger or frustration.

INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS OF DELIVERY

Questions

Children respond enthusiastically to questions and are stimulated to find the answer. Questions can be:

- Factual Definitive, simple answers (what).
- Conceptual Requires a higher level of processing and thought (how).
- Stimulating Requires complex reasoning (why).

Commanding

Definitive, controlled, lecture (less player-centered).

Guided Discovery

Guides the player through process by posing a series of questions whose responses lead to the understanding of a concept (like detectives).

Experimentation

Cause and effect comparison (try it and see, compare).

COMPLETE SYSTEM OF DELIVERY

Say, Show, Do and Review

An effective complete teaching method for any age group:

1. **SAY:** Explain skill or technique (keep it brief especially with younger players).
2. **SHOW:** Effectively demonstrate skill or technique.
3. **DO:** Have players perform skill or technique.
4. **REVIEW:** *Observe*, *Correct* and *Confirm* proper technique.
 - Observe** (silently). Instead of trying to correct immediately, let them play uninterrupted for a time (they will learn from mistakes) and take notes (preferably written), focusing on *one* effort they can improve.
 - Correct** what you saw in terms of the player's execution, and then provide the player with attainable modifications to correct one or two deficits by once again demonstrating.
 - Confirm** accomplishments once success is achieved! Say it out loud, so everyone can hear.

Post Session

Discussion with the players: Do not underestimate the value and impact of a positive comment or constructive feedback to a player after the training session (but keep it concise).

Review your training plan: Note what worked well and what needs to improve.

Evaluate yourself: Encourage constructive feedback from others in relation to your coaching management and session structure.

COACHING YOUR OWN CHILD

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

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!

But I’ve Never Coached Or Played Soccer Before!

- It’s okay if you never played soccer or don’t know much about it! However, by reading this manual and progressing through the AYSO National Coaching Program, you **will** gather valuable tools to succeed.
- No pressure! Do not misinterpret the role you’re supposed to play. Go out to enjoy!
- Change your adult perspective and **view the game through your child’s eyes.**
- If you can create a safe, fun and developmental environment for your child and team, **encourage self-expression and mistakes (learning)**, you are already in the running for Coach of the Year.
- Fun, exercise and the chance to play soccer is what it’s all about, particularly at the younger ages.

What’s My Role As Coach?

- 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, the role of the coach in the first stages is simply to give children the opportunity to discover the game’s joys in a safe and nurturing environment.
- Generally speaking, through 10U let them play. At 12U we can expand their technical development and reading of the game.
- 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 coaching your own child.



Coach or Parent?

- When you first start coaching you may be introducing your child to a new experience other than the game: sharing the attention of mom or dad with a larger number of **other** children (while at the same time, you are trying not to show favoritism).
- The Positive Coaching Alliance (PCA) recommends you explain to your child, “I always love you and you are special to me. But when I’m coaching you, I need to be fair and treat you like all the other players. And you need to respond to me as your coach, not your dad. Do you think you can do that?”

Am I Doing Okay?

- **Avoid being harder on your own child than the other players because you’re worried about perceptions of favoritism.** No matter what you say or how you say it, your comments can often register as a personal attack because they come from dad or mom.
- Don’t be afraid to praise your child and acknowledge her strengths and accomplishments at every opportunity. As well as your child they are also a player on the team!
- A good test on how to treat your child on the soccer team is to constantly ask yourself if your reactions to his play or behavior are the same as they are to his teammates.
- Another peril of coaching your own children is to leave your coaching hat on when the session/match is over. Limit your post-session soccer discussions once the whistle blows. Once the topic of food is raised, it is probably time to get back to your **full-time** role.

KEEP IN
MIND

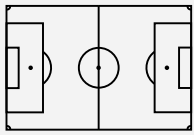


SAVOR EVERY MOMENT!

It will pass all too quickly!

AGE APPROPRIATE (PLAYER) DEVELOPMENT

FROM THE FIELD



“Learning to be a soccer athlete, there are progressive stages and if you don’t get the early stages right, *in sequence*, then you are fighting an uphill battle in developing an athlete.”

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

THE SCIENCE OF AGE APPROPRIATE TRAINING

“To provide youth soccer programs *that enrich children’s lives.*”

This vision can *only* be achieved if we continually ask ourselves if the activity, method or decision will truly enrich the player’s life. To achieve this goal, our training sessions *must* be adapted to the player’s specific age and stage of development.

Technical, tactical, physical and psychosocial training components should be woven throughout each session; however, *at all-times* with deep respect to the player’s specific age *and* stage of development. At AYSO, we prioritize these important aspects as follows:

Psychosocial

Respect, motivation, confidence, cooperation, competitiveness, etc., and how these emotions and feelings impact a player’s development. Also, includes a player’s ability to reason, learn and solve problems. **At AYSO, we develop the *whole* person!**

Physical

A player’s physical attributes: speed, agility, endurance, strength and power, etc. **At AYSO, we promote a healthy lifestyle through soccer!**

Technical

A player’s ability to master ball skills, i.e., ball control, shooting, passing, etc. **At AYSO, we prioritize skill development and ball mastery.**

Tactical (NOT a priority at this age!)

A player’s capacity to use their skill and ability *within* a game environment, i.e., creating space in midfield, possession and transition, creating width, etc. **At AYSO, we educate our players on playing as part of (and within) a team dynamic.**

KEY DEVELOPMENTAL COMPONENTS IN AYSO 8U TRAINING

A TIME FOR DISCOVERY...

PSYCHOSOCIAL

- Have definite likes and dislikes (begin to rank importance of things based on real criteria).
- Friendship is important (become more outgoing, but can be overwhelmed by unfamiliar situations).
- Enjoy purposeful play.
- Afraid of failure.
- Beginning to compare themselves to others (actions can be influenced by peers).
- Self-esteem and self-concept are big issues (need concrete reinforcement and positivity).
- Cooperate with adults.
- Like to feel they belong to a group.
- Begin to grasp moral rules of the game (apply rigid understanding of fair play – even a small infraction can be a BIG deal. Quick to tattle when others aren't obeying).
- Problem solving skills are improving.
- Understand that parts make up a whole (i.e., individual players make up a team).
- Often set unrealistically high standards for themselves.
- Improved cognitive development enables them to see that underlying rules are often useful for understanding everyday events.



PHYSICAL

- Work and play hard.
- Exhibit significant improvement in agility, balance, endurance, timing and hand-eye coordination.

TECHNICAL

- Instep kick
- Dribbling
- Inside of the foot–push pass
- Inside of the foot–ball control
- Throw-ins (For 8U, each region shall have the discretion to use either throw-ins, dribble-ins or pass-ins to restart play.)

TACTICAL

Attacking Objectives

Score
Maintain Possession

Defending Objectives

Prevent Scoring
Regain Possession

Attacking Principles

Penetration
Support
Mobility

Defending Principles

Pressure
Cover
Balance

ELEMENTS OF SOCCER

OBJECTIVES OF THE GAME

ATTACKING OBJECTIVES			DEFENDING OBJECTIVES		
SCORE	Maintain Possession	Advance Ball	Prevent Scoring	Regain Possession	Delay Opponents
BASED ON A PLAYER'S RELATIVE POSITION TO:					
The Ball	Teammates	Opponents	Location on Field	Time in Game	

However, like most aspects of the game, **objectives vary depending on player age and stage of development:**

ATTACKING OBJECTIVES (BY AGE)

	6U	8U	10U	12U
Score	✓	✓	✓	✓
Keep Possession		✓	✓	✓
Advance Ball			✓	✓

DEFENDING OBJECTIVES (BY AGE)

	6U	8U	10U	12U
Prevent Scoring	✓	✓	✓	✓
Regain Possession		✓	✓	✓
Delay Opponents			✓	✓

PRINCIPLES OF PLAY

The Principles of Play are used to **achieve** the Objectives of the Game.

There are ten **Principles of Play** utilized in soccer — five **attacking** and five **defending** principles, each introduced at a specific age and stage of development. **8U Principles of Play are highlighted in the chart below:**

For each attacking principle, there is a defending principle to counter it.	
ATTACKING	countered by DEFENDING
Penetration 8U v Advancing the ball past opposing players by dribbling, passing and shooting.	Pressure (delay) 8U v Pressuring opponents in possession by giving immediate chase, denying their options, i.e., dribbling, passing, shooting, etc., or delaying the opponents in order to regain possession.
Support 8U v Supporting teammates by creating safe options for the player with the ball.	Cover 8U v Supporting the player(s) challenging the ball in case they are beaten. Limits options for 1st attacker.
Mobility 8U v Players interchanging positions (filling in for one another as needed) and moving off the ball. Unbalancing defense, creating numerical advantages and thereby attacking/scoring opportunities.	Balance 8U v Reading the attack and providing an equal or greater number of defenders than attackers at the point of attack, while simultaneously covering the vital area near the goal.
Width Kin of mobility. Attacking on a broad front (players spread out) stretches and isolates the defense and creates space for players to advance.	Compactness Compressing or restricting the space the attacking team has by “shepherding” them into a confined area making it easier to defend and regain possession of the ball.
Creativity Creating opportunities for advancement, possession and scoring by utilizing individual skills such as feints and fakes.	Control/restraint (composure) Staying calm, disciplined and organized in the face of an attack by maintaining proper defensive techniques and positioning.


Remember, due to the fluid nature of soccer, players’ roles are in constant rotation, and supporting players can be behind, to the side, or in advance of the ball.

The only players with definitive roles are the 1st attacker and 1st defender.

Additional roles (support, mobility, width, creativity **and** cover, balance, compactness, control/restraint) can be provided by numerous players.

Ultimately, you must UNDERSTAND the Objectives and Principles of Play if you want to be successful.

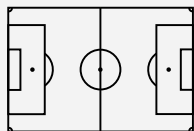
KEEP IN MIND



In soccer there are no *absolutely* correct decisions. You cannot always judge how well your team is playing by the results of the game. You need to have a standard method of assessing your team form moment to moment. The **Principles of Play** can be your measuring stick.

POSITIONS

FROM THE FIELD



“The Dutch change positions quicker than you can make a cup of coffee.”

Paolo Rossi, Italian Soccer Legend

At AYSO we do not formally introduce position-specific coaching until **12U**. There is no harm *familiarizing* your players with the basic responsibility of each position at 8U, but this does NOT mean you have players rooted to one spot covering their positions, while the game develops...without them! How many times have you seen young defenders be contained in their “own” half because they are not permitted to cross the half-way line? **Frankly, this needs to stop as it is *not* conducive to player development and impacts the player’s overall experience!**

Regardless of age, *all* outfield players should be encouraged to defend AND attack. Players should be given the freedom to be involved in the flow of the game, but empowered with the responsibility to cover their position (or have someone else cover it) if they choose to explore. Your center-half should be encouraged to score goals, your striker encouraged to chase back and stop goal scoring chances.

Throughout the season, try to let all players experience all field positions (not in the same game). Allow players to play one, or at most, two positions in a single game giving them some time to familiarize themselves and get comfortable with the position. This also applies to the 10U-18U goalkeeper position so that *all* children get a chance to develop their field skills .

Everyone Plays! Remember, every child in AYSO must play 1/2 of every game; however, we recommend strongly that each player play 3/4 of every game *before* any player plays a full game. Children of all abilities improve when they play and the more they play, the better they get.

Soccer has four basic positions: **goalkeepers (not introduced until 10U), defenders, midfielders, and strikers.** There are numerous specialized names for each: sweeper, forward, wing, outside back, center back, stopper, etc. We will concentrate only on the four *basic* positions whose *general* responsibilities are outlined below:

Position	Own Team with Ball	Other Team with Ball
Goalkeepers (Not Introduced Until 10U)	Begin the Attack	Stop Scoring Attempt
Defenders	Maintain Possession Advance the Ball	Stop Scoring Attempt Regain Possession
Midfielders	Advance the Ball Maintain Possession	Delay Attack Regain Possession
Strikers	Score Advance the Ball Maintain Possession	Regain Possession Delay Attack

KEEP IN MIND



All players should be encouraged to defend and attack, and given the freedom and responsibility to be involved in the flow of the game.



SYSTEMS OF PLAY (FORMATIONS)

Refers to the formation of positions that a team engages during a game, i.e., 1-3-3-2 = 1 goalkeeper, 3 defenders, 3 midfielders and 2 strikers). Age and stage of development should influence what and when to introduce shape and organization of play.

Do NOT be discouraged if your team plays as a herd at times with little or no organization (especially at the younger ages). Player maturity, skill and an understanding of the objectives, principles and systems will slowly but surely alleviate this problem. Guaranteed!

KEEP IN MIND

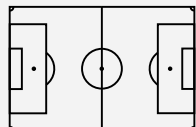


No system of play will overcome a lack of basic technique or skill. Systems of play must be appropriate for the players on your team. Therefore, find a system of play that fits the ability of your players instead of trying to fit **your players** into a particular system.

Soccer is a free-flowing and dynamic game (not static). Players must be encouraged and given the freedom to move relative to the ball, their teammates, their opponents, time in the game and the goal.

QUALITY TRAINING

FROM THE FIELD



“The coach has to establish a playing environment where everyone is eager to train and perform at their best. Each player should understand what they should bring to each session, i.e., set of standards or expectations. Once everyone on the team understands their role, learning (and fun) develop naturally.”

John Kerr, Head Men’s Coach, Duke University

THE COACHING CYCLE

- Coaching involves **OBSERVING** and **EVALUATING** player and team performance to determine what needs to be worked on (**ORGANIZING** and **COACHING**) during training in order to maximize **PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**.
- Training components (psychosocial, physical, technical, tactical) are then incorporated into a training session (plan) to develop and improve the player’s competence within a match environment.
- **ORGANIZE/COACH:** Training sessions are comprised of: (free play); warm-up; activities I & II; small-sided matches & cool-down.
- **Principles of Play** should be considered and applied throughout the session.
- Adjusting **Speed, Space, Opposition** controls the intensity of an activity.
- Coach using sound methodology (P.I.E., Say, Show, Do, Review, etc.) to challenge, increase success and develop players.
- **DEVELOPMENT:** Player’s improved competence within match environment (finishing; short/long play; short combined with long play; ability to keep possession; risk; transition).
- **Observe and evaluate** performance and select elements for the next training session.



KEEP IN MIND



Coaching involves **OBSERVING** and **EVALUATING** player and team performance to determine what needs to be worked on (**ORGANIZING** and **COACHING**) during training in order to maximize (**player**) **DEVELOPMENT**.

DURATION AND FREQUENCY OF TRAINING SESSIONS

KEEP IN MIND



It is widely accepted that it takes 10,000 hours of *deep* practice to learn a new skill. However, the real lesson of the 10,000 hours rule is *not* about the quantity; it's about the *quality* of the practice and the environment in which it takes place.

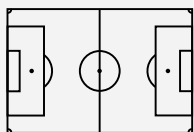
It is important to maximize the learning opportunity without *overdoing* duration or frequency. Exhaustion and fatigue can be detrimental to learning (slows brain, lessens focus, increases errors) so it is wise to consider you training in terms of the number of quality repetitions or touches as opposed to time.

AYSO National Coaching Program Training Duration & Frequency Recommendations

Age Group	Frequency	Duration
6U	One Activity Session/ Jamboree per Week (<i>includes</i> 25 min. game)	1 Hour
8U	Once Per Week, <i>Plus</i> Game	1 Hour
10U	Twice Per Week, <i>Plus</i> Game	1 Hour
12U	Twice Per Week, <i>Plus</i> Game	1 Hour

SMALL-SIDED MATCHES

FROM THE FIELD



"The need for parents to see their children play in 11-on-11 tournaments from a young age instead of insisting on more small-sided [matches] and practices to develop technical skills produces great athletes but limited soccer players. Parents need to become a little less shortsighted."

Carli Lloyd, U.S. Women's National Team referencing the youth soccer culture for her team's technical shortcomings

Youth players need to practice in a match-like environment, which provides *numerous* opportunities to practice and **repeat a skill**; not one *possible* chance every few minutes (like full-sided play can often present). Therefore, the concentrated ebb and flow of small-sided matches create the optimal learning environment for young players to develop.

There are unlimited benefits of small-sided matches:

- Children learn more when the ratio of coach to player is reduced.
- Maximize ball contact, involvement, and mistakes (markers for improvement).
- Increase scoring opportunities.
- Maximize attacking and defending play.
- Maximize transitions and decision-making situations.
- Present more coaching opportunities (observation and analysis).
- Excitement and fun!

To cultivate the numerous benefits of small-sided matches and maximize Player Development, AYSO has carefully balanced the number of players on the field and the number of players on the roster by age group.

AYSO National Coaching Program
In-Season Play Recommendations

Age	Players Per Team	Max on Roster	Goalkeepers
6U	4	6	No
8U	4	6	No
10U	7	10	Yes
12U	9	12	Yes

PROGRESSIVE (BUILD UP) TRAINING

It is essential to technical and tactical development to scaffold player challenges by adding different factors into our training sessions. In general, sessions should progress from:

SIMPLE TO COMPLEX and from **UNOPPOSED TO OPPOSED**

Progression of Technical Build-Up

- Technique demonstrated with *no pressure*.
- Technique demonstrated while *under pressure* (passive to full, integrating decision making).
- Technique demonstrated in match-like situation.

Match Pressure

Training should simulate match conditions as much as possible (most effectively accomplished through small-sided matches). Control methods used to manipulate the playing environment:

- Changing the physical **SPACE** available to players (increasing/decreasing size of playing area).
- Varying the **SPEED** of the play (adding time constraints or number of touches).
- Introducing and varying the amount of **OPPOSITION** (numbers up or down, opposition/defenders are bunnies and can only hop, etc.).

KEEP IN MIND



Players must **FIRST** be successful with a technique to build success and confidence *before* you progress the activity (progression or build up should be paced with your player's success rate). Alternatively, manipulating **SPEED, SPACE** or **OPPOSITION** can help *enable* your players to succeed (i.e., increasing space, touches or numbers).

TOPIC BASED TRAINING

Repetition is a key component to skill development; therefore, just like school, rather than bombard players with multiple topics per lesson, focusing on one topic, i.e., dribbling, provides the maximum opportunity to achieve mastery and success.

UNEVEN TRAINING NUMBERS

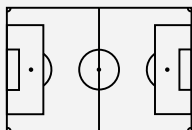
Whether it is due to your age group or attendance at training, a few suggestions on how to accommodate the possible discrepancy, **minimize isolation** and increase functionality:

- Rotate players in and out (players rest, watch, cheer, stretch).
- Pair up (players participate in activity but take turns with a partner).
- Play as a neutral (can play for either team).
- Play as two players (in numbered activities, i.e., Steven is 1 and 3).
- Help serve or retrieve balls.
- Help you demonstrate or help make small observations, etc. (Children can gain a deeper understanding of the skill if they have to explain it to others.)
- Emphasize number up number down practices (5 v 2, etc.).
- Weight the challenge (lower number team has different goal, i.e., less touches, etc.).



BUILDING YOUR 8U SESSION

FROM THE **FIELD**



“We (the U.S.) are producing players who are over-coached and predictable as opposed to players who can caress the ball and make you sit up and take notice. Coaches need to be secure with themselves and not allow winning games to validate their importance in the lives of their players.”

*Sonny Askew, former professional player and
current youth coach, Baltimore, MD*

FREE PLAY

In our current climate of over-organizing and over-coaching, Free Play is a useful method for players to develop in a natural and safe environment (like playing in the park with your buddies).

Free Play can be used as a pre-warm up upon arrival to prepare players for the technical warm up that will lead to the session’s tactical work. For younger players, Free Play can be used to evaluate their technical level so you have a logical starting point when the actual session begins.

Free Play can also be used in an activity or scrimmage to simply encourage player’s creativity, freedom and expression, not to mention learning through mistakes. In general, Free Play has simple limitations:

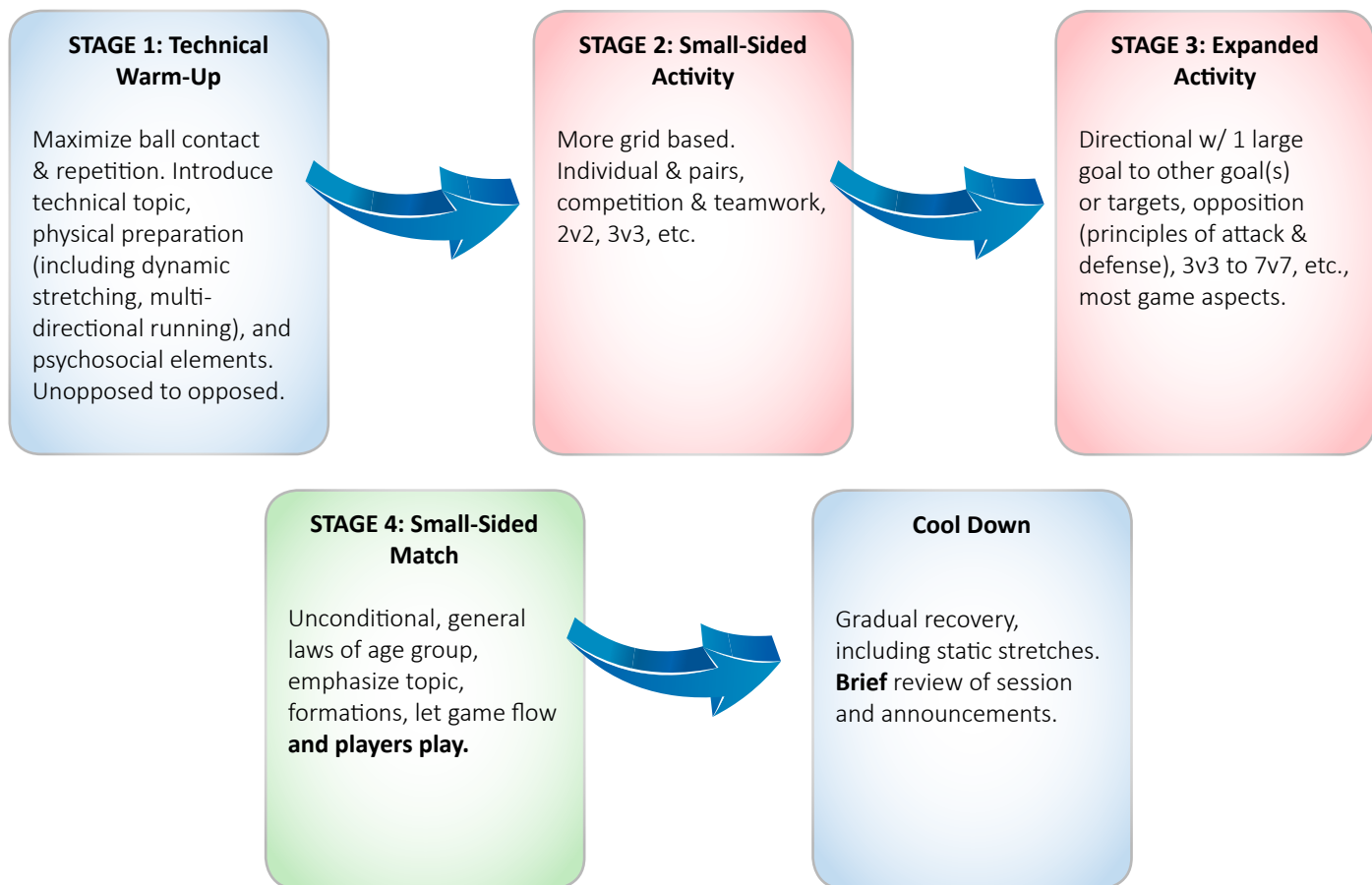
- A situation where individuals play **without** restrictions on time or space, or coaching.
- Players are given **general** directions on what they should attempt to accomplish and then left on their own.
- Free play allows players to **develop natural abilities** in a relaxed, coach-free environment.

KEEP IN MIND



Ultimately the use of Free Play in our sessions will remind the players of the fun and intrinsic benefit of practicing freely on their own (i.e., juggling or passing against a wall) or pick-up games with buddies at the park...simply playing!

Generally speaking, training sessions should progress as follows:



STAGE 1: WARM-UP

Your warm-up should be dynamic in nature, energize players, maximize ball contact/repetition and introduce the technical objective of your session. As well as physical and technical components, the warm-up also provides opportunity to introduce psychosocial elements such as leadership (having a player lead the warm-up), focus, communication and teamwork. Warm-ups should primarily be unopposed.

Warming up prepares the body for physical activity and should involve jogging as well as short sprints and multi-directional running (sideways and backwards). The intensity of the warm-up (especially sprinting) should be increased gradually to prevent a rapid increase in blood pressure. The warm-up improves blood flow to the heart and increases muscle temperature and pliability (and ultimately, reduces the risk of injury). Warming up should be done prior to any stretching. There are two methods of stretching:

- **Dynamic stretching:** moving limbs through the full range of motion that will be used during the game or training. Dynamic stretching is good for 'waking muscles up' and getting them ready to work hard, i.e., during warm-up.
- **Static stretching:** placing a muscle in its most lengthened position and holding for approximately 30 seconds. Cooling down is a good time for static stretching (helps the body recover and gradually return to its normal temperature).

At younger ages, player's muscles are not developed to a point where injuries will occur often, especially due to a lack of warming up and stretching. However, players should be taught proper form (TPF) and *introduced* to the concepts in order to prepare them for the years to come. Priority should increase with age.

STAGE 2: SMALL-SIDED ACTIVITY

Your **first** ACTIVITY should be more grid-based and integrate:

- Individual and pair work.
- Competition and teamwork.
- 2v2 and 3v3.

Stage 3: Expanded activity

- Opposition (attack & defense).
- Directional play (with goals or targets).
- Expanded numbers (3v3 to 6v6).
- Most game aspects.



STAGE 4: SMALL-SIDED MATCH

Conclude your session with a match-like activity/small-sided match, which should emphasize the training topic and other components of the game.

The match should be (for the most part) unconditional, have general rules and some formation guidelines, but **most importantly, it is time to let the game flow...and the player's play!**

COOL DOWN AND DEBRIEF

Gradually slowing down the level of activity after training is just as important in reducing the risk of injury as the warming up process before exercise, especially for older players.

The major purpose of cooling down is to bring the body back to a pre-training state and to assist in recovery. Static stretches are more appropriate to the cool down as they help muscles to relax, realign muscle fibers and re-establish their normal range of movement.

During the cool-down process you can review the lessons within your session or discuss announcements but keep it concise and always end on a positive!

LAPS, LINES AND LECTURES

Communicated often, but still a prominent factor in most training sessions, the 3L's are commonly regarded as detrimental to player development:

Laps: You **don't run laps** of the field during a soccer match and you can easily obtain the same cardiovascular benefit by running *with* the ball in a dynamic activity.

Lines: Do your best to **eliminate activities that involve players standing in long lines waiting** on their turn to play. We need to maximize time players have *with* the ball to avoid boredom and keep them engaged (two or three *active* groups are always better than one long inactive group). Remember circles are also lines.

Lectures: Children come to soccer to participate and be active not to sit and be lectured for long periods of time (either positively or negatively). **Keep your communication positive, brief and to the point.**

Eliminating **Laps, Lines, and Lectures** from your sessions will provide a healthier learning and developmental environment for your players.

WATER BREAKS

Proper hydration is vital to all children, but especially vital to young athletes; therefore, we need to make sure our training sessions provide adequate opportunity for rehydration. Some **general** guidelines:

- Players should hydrate themselves **throughout the day** not just prior to or at training (to allow for proper absorption into their system).
- Two to three hours prior to participation, players should drink approx. 16 fl. oz. (2 cups) to 20 fl. oz. (2.5 cups).
- Ten to 20 minutes prior to activity the players should drink approx. 7 fl. oz. (0.875 cups) to 10 fl. oz. (1.25 cups) of fluids.
- Break approximately every 10-15 minutes (**or as often as needed pending weather and age of players**).
- Fluids can be water or sports drinks.
- Rehydration should occur after the activity and ideally be completed within 2 hours.
- Rehydration should contain water to restore hydration status, carbohydrates to replenish glycogen stores and electrolytes to speed hydration.