

12U COACH



Complete "How-To" for Coaching Pre-Teen Soccer Players
Includes a Complete Season of Training Plans



AMERICAN YOUTH
SOCCER ORGANIZATION

COACHING SERIES

12U COACH



everyone plays[®]

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Accredited By:



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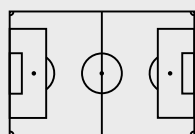
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WELCOME TO THE FIRST TEAM!

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.

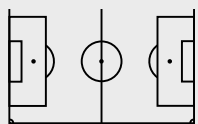
On behalf of the entire organization, thank you for joining the team!

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.

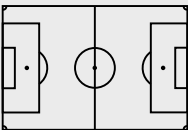
KEEP IN
MIND



AYSO Six Philosophies:

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

FROM THE FIELD

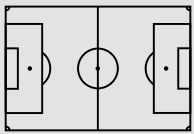


“It is better to win ten times 1-0 than to win once 10-0.”

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.
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



12U COACHING

GAME ON!

12U is the time to polish our players' technical skills to accommodate the tactical demands presented to this ambitious age group.

Ultimately, 12U should confirm the foundational skills and tactical understanding to advance our players into the intermediate and advanced stages of the game.

However, this is also the time where players consider leaving the sport for one reason or another. They have played (and been coached) for seven years? They are bored? They are not having fun? They are ready for a new challenge? A new sport?

Therefore, it is our job (as coaches) to address all of these possible dilemmas and not only engage our players with innovative learning and age-appropriate challenges, but **inspire** them to push beyond their current comfort levels, technically, tactically and physically...and **become** soccer players!

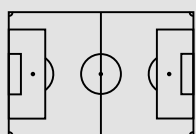
And as one might expect, as our players' needs change, our own knowledge and application should advance and align accordingly.

Welcome to 12U coaching!



COACHING METHODOLOGY

FROM THE FIELD



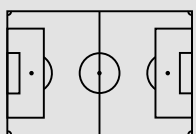
“One of my biggest pet peeves is youth team coaches who take winning too seriously. This has always bothered me, and I always tell coaches to forget about winning with young players. They need to create an environment where the kids enjoy playing and are developing their soccer skills. Winning should 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?

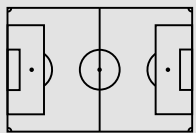
As coaches, it is our responsibility to determine if the competitive environment is healthy or not. Please consider this on your coaching journey.

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

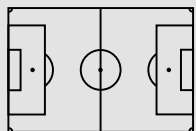


"In matches the coaches should keep out of the way. He/she is an important figure, of course, but is more likely to lose a match than win it. Matches are won by players."

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 in baseball, basketball, 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 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.

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 activity).**
- 12 cones (preferably multi-colored).
- **12** scrimmage vests (preferably 2 sets of different colors).
- Extra soccer balls (players should bring a ball to *every* activity).
- Pump.
- Extra pair of shin guards (players must wear shin guards at *every* activity).
- 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 9 through 12 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

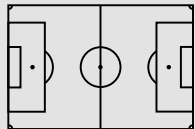


Our players are *not* mini-adults; therefore, our training sessions must be adapted to life through *their* eyes, *their* interests and most important, *their* capabilities.

AGE APPROPRIATE CHARACTERISTICS	
10U	<p>9-12 years is the golden age for learning and the perfect age to increase focus on specific techniques and skills. It is the time for ADVENTURE!</p> <p>Physically, ages 9-10 are still in the early stages of development.</p> <p>Pre-pubescent players (9-12) are responsive to role models, friendships and peer approval.</p> <p>Players enjoy the team concept but will participate enthusiastically in competitive arenas, so 1v1 and 2v1 situations are perfect to develop individual skills. Passing technique/activities will help develop their team concept.</p>
12U	<p>Players have increased understanding of strategy and tactics so small-sided matches can help develop basic attacking and defensive principles. Players should still rotate positions to avoid early specialization (as well as participate in other activities/sports).</p> <p>Physical literacy (balance, agility, speed, coordination, etc.) improves.</p> <p>12U is the time for “polishing” the player’s technical skills.</p>

COACHING MOMENTS

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! 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 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).

PRESENTING YOUR COACHING 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)!

LET THEM PLAY AND THE GAME TEACH!

When addressing your players, make sure **they** are not directly facing the sun or have the wind in their face. Also, consider a semi-circle to see each player.

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 the player 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 them 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: Reflect on your session, your coaching and your choices to help maximize your own development. Encourage constructive feedback from others in relation to your coaching 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).

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.

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!



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 your child’s play or behavior are the same as they are to your child’s 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

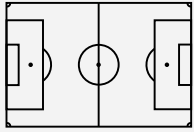


SAVOR EVERY MOMENT!

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, Former U.S. Soccer Director of Coach Education
Current WNT Performance Analysis Coach*

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

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.**