



**“LET THEM PLAY” PROGRAM –
UNDER 4 & 6 HANDBOOK**

WEST REGION SOCCER



INTRODUCTION

“Let Them Play” Program is a concept that targets Under 4 & 6 kids playing soccer. The focus is on enjoyment and freedom of expression and developing their gross motor skills, such as walking, running, jumping, falling, throwing, catching, kicking, rolling, etc. Basically the kids developing their balance and coordination through “modified games”.

The program also encourages parents to get involved in the development and learning of their child and strengthen the parent-child bonding through parental interaction in every session. This concept has existed for a very long time but in an informal setting, where the parent would take their child to the park and play “catch,” “throw” or “kicking a ball”, establishing a social interaction between the parent and the child.

Some comments of particular interest:

- Children touched the ball lots of times and were very active.
- “Let Them Play” promotes a positive playing environment for children.
- Children’s physical development and gross motor skills improved throughout the season.
- It is easier to become involved as a volunteer in “Let Them Play” and there was not a feeling you needed to be a Soccer expert.
- Volunteers are not coaches but Leaders or Managers, trying to keep the kids within the set boundary.

The implementation of the Let Them Play formats to begin in 2009 with Under 4 and Under 6 age groups and over the ensuing years introducing the Small-Sided Soccer format which will roll over to Under 8’s up to and including Under 12’s in a staged approach.

The justification for taking such an approach is based on the following criteria:

- 11-a-side Soccer is in essence an adult game devised by and for adults to play.
- More fun and individual enjoyment due to smaller fields and simplified rules.
- Modified games, which maximises individual participation and involvement.
- More involvement leads to greater improvement in fitness.
- Parents who are new to the game are likely to be more comfortable playing the role of “game leader” or “supervisor” of teams playing.
- Increases parent-child interaction creating a positive parental bond with their child.
- Make more efficient use of facilities, given there can be multiple games on one standard-size field.

Other demonstrated benefits of Let Them Play concept over Traditional Soccer on observational research are as follows:

- Far more repeated touches of the ball by all players.
- More touches throughout all areas of the pitch.
- More passes attempted and in a forward direction.
- More attacking 1 v 1s.
- Repeated decision-making experience.
- The ball is in play far more often.
- Active participation is directly related to increased fitness and enjoyment.
- More experience in all phases of the game.
- Establishment of positive parent-child bond.

LEARNING PROCESS OF A 3 - 5 YEAR OLD

At this age children are “playing” all day long. They have a short concentration span and cannot focus on only one target. They see the world as an open space and they can watch the ball coming or forget the ball and follow the flight of a butterfly!

Children in this age group need short breaks, but can play for a long time. They know exactly when to take their rest and sit down on the field, but a few moments later start to chase the ball again. They can be trained and coached in skill development by dribbling the ball with the guidance from parents.

They want to enjoy themselves, are looking for a challenge, but losing or winning is of little importance. They are always positive.

Skill training should be the only part of the training. There should be no stretching and no training without the ball, and exercises should not be too complicated.

They are not that interested in playing soccer, but prefer to play modified games.



LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

Canadian Soccer Association in 2008 produced the “Wellness to World Cup” document to promote the Long Term Player Development (LTPD) to all Canadians. The LTPD model accommodates athletes at all levels of interest, ability and achievement. After children enter at the Active Start stage and become physically literate, they can continue on a pathway towards excellence or choose to enter an “Active for Life” recreational stream. The model promotes maximum player retention for both optimum wellness and sporting excellence.

The diagram below demonstrates the stages of development in the LTPD model.

Canadian Soccer LTPD



Long-Term Player Development (LTPD)

LTPD is a program for soccer player development, training, competition, and recovery based on biological age (i.e. physical maturity) rather than chronological age. It is player centred, coach driven, and administration, sport science, and sponsor supported.

- Eliminates gaps in the player development system.
- Guides planning for optimal athlete performance at all stages.
- Provides a framework for program alignment and integration, from volunteer club coaches to national and professional teams.
- Follows scientific principles and practical coaching experiences.

Benefits for players & parents:

- Better understanding of what makes a good soccer program.
- More players learning at their level and having fun.
- Appropriate game (e.g. size of balls, goals, field etc.).
- More opportunity for players to realize their athletic potential.
- More coaches who are knowledgeable in leading safe, effective practices.
- Creating a positive bond between child and parent.

Benefits for coaches & clubs:

- Information and education on effective coaching and practice methods.
- Guidelines for appropriate game structures.
- Guidelines on appropriate competition levels.
- Established pathways for player development for all levels of ability and ambition.
- Affirmation of best practices for coaches and club administrators.

Benefits for all:

- Competitive behaviour is fostered in players, while over-competitive behaviour is discouraged in adults (e.g. coaches and parents).
- Players, parents, coaches, and administrators understand that players are unique and therefore different in interest and aptitude.
- Players stay involved in the sport throughout their lives (as players, coaches, referees or club administrators).
- Soccer grows, and lifelong wellness is promoted for players of all ages, genders, and levels of ability and disability.



1

STAGE 1: Active Start

**U4-U6 Female and Male
"FIRST KICKS"**

Soccer contributes to the well-being of children by engaging them in the sport while teaching them basic movements. At this introductory level, the objective is to get moving and to keep active.

Where: Home, daycare, schools, clubs, community, parks and recreation centres.
Why: Provide early opportunities for children to learn basic soccer elements.
Who: Technical leaders, parent coaches, parents, educators, caregivers.
Coaching: Training in Physical Literacy (CSA Program).

- **Physical** – Provide the environment for learning proper fundamental movement skills such as running, jumping, twisting, kicking, throwing and catching.
- **Technical** – The player and the ball: Running with the ball, dribbling, controlling, kicking and shooting.
- **Tactical** – None.
- **Mental** – Fun, fascination, and passion for play.



Game Structure:

No competitive games – adult and child play together informally.

Recommended training times:

30 to 45 minutes.

Season Length:

4 to 16 weeks Winter/Spring/Summer, indoor and/or outdoor.

Recommendations:

- Player success is encouraged. While the adult should challenge the child player, they should allow the child to "score" goals and "beat" the adult opponent.
- Adult discontinues play when the child has lost interest.



STAGE 1 - ACTIVE START – DESCRIPTION

At this stage, players should participate in stimulating practices and games that develop basic technical skills in a FUN atmosphere. The emphasis should be movement exercises and games that promote a feel for the ball while teaching basic principles of play within a fun but structured setting. Informal games can be set up at the end of practices or as part of a jamboree mixing exercising and games. Play equal time and try all team positions, equal time should be allotted to practices and games.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The "Let Them Play" Program is based on **TWO Guiding Principles:**

Principle No.1

The focus is on enjoyment and freedom of expression and developing their gross motor skills, such as walking, running, jumping, falling, throwing, catching, kicking, rolling, etc. Basically the kids developing their balance and coordination through "modified games".

Principle No.2

Getting Parents to be involved in the development and learning of their child and strengthen the parent-child bonding through parental interaction in every session. This concept has existed for a very long time but in an informal setting, where the parent would take their child to the park and play "catch", "throw" or "kicking a ball", establishing a social interaction between the parent and the child.

TRADITIONAL SOCCER – U4 & U6

- Teams can be from 7 v 7 to 9 v 9 with goalkeepers on a full size field.
- Too many kids in one game.
- Lack enjoyment for many kids.
- Dominant kids control the game.
- Every kid of different ability and developmental stage are grouped together.
- Limited ball contact for many kids.
- The kid in goal is not involved for long periods of time.

"LET THEM PLAY" - 3 V 3 SOCCER

- Kids are grouped based on ability and developmental stage.
- More enjoyment and excitement.
- A lot of ball contact for each kid.
- Maintains motivation and involvement.
- Every kid is learning and developing.



CLUB ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSIBILITY

- In the future would not need to spend hours and hours of administrative time placing children in teams.
- Schedule a particular day/s for each age-grade at a central location.
- Recruit volunteers as “Leaders” to manage the sessions over the season.
- Provide appropriate equipment – ball per child, t-shirt that promotes the club, pennies, flat cones, tall cones.
- Communicate to all parents that they will be expected to be involved in the sessions.

SESSION PLAN LAYOUT

Session setup & duration

- 45 - 60 minutes session.
- Mark out as many 15 metres x 15 metres areas through the fields as needed.
- Divide children at the beginning of each session and assign them to a Leader.
- Six (6) children per Leader.

Session structure

- Playing modified activities/games with the involvement of parents.
- Use soccer balls, balloons, hoops etc.
- 3 v 3 games with very basic rules for the last 10 minutes of the session.

RULES AND REGULATIONS

The field of play

15 metres x 15 metres

Goal size

1 or 2 metres depending on the ability of the children.

Penalty area

No penalty area

The ball

Size 3

The number of players

3 v 3 with no substitutes.

Goalkeeper

No Goalkeeper

Duration of the game

10 minutes (however the players will let coaches know if they had enough)

Start and Re-start of play and after a goal

Leader to roll the ball into the grid to begin play.

Offside

No offside

Method of scoring

A goal is scored when the whole ball crosses the line. Where cones are used as goals, a goal is scored when the ball passes through the cones without touching or knocking them over.

Referee

Leaders are used to manage the game. This person's main role is to keep the game moving fluently, limit stoppages and assist players with all match restarts. Use the parents to assist with management of the game to keep the players within the boundary of the grid.

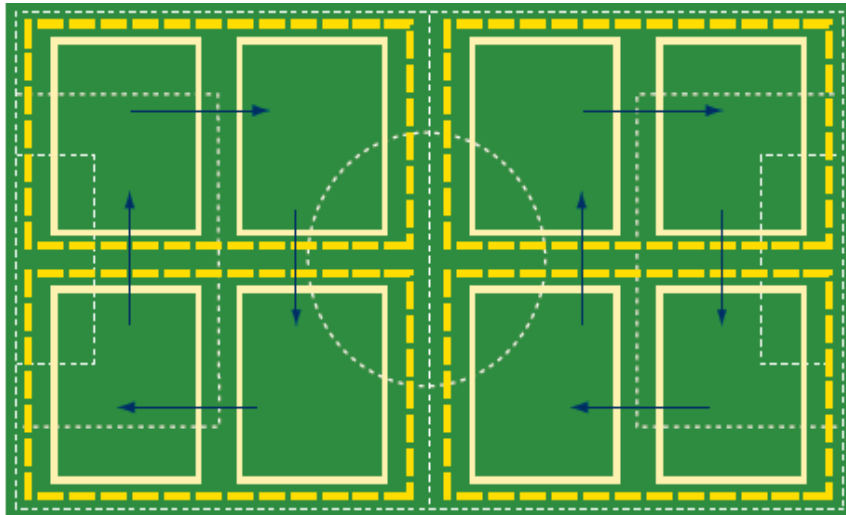
The official recording of competition tables, statistics and playing of finals is not permitted at this age. At all times the focus of these games should remain on player development and providing the best experience possible through participation and enjoyment for the players.

This environment will be created by clubs, officials, game leaders and parents.



Field layouts

Grids to the correct dimensions can be set up on existing smaller fields or open grass areas.



Equipment required

Players

Players will need to wear all of the same clothing/equipment that they would currently do at this age – shorts, shirt, socks, cleats and shin pads.

Club

Use markers for both their goals and to mark out the lines on the field.

For each field you will need:

- Large cones to mark out the goals.
- A marked field with sufficient markers to be able to do this.
- A whistle for the game leader.
- Adequate balls – ball per player.
- A horn or equivalent to signal the start of play, and full time for the session.

ROLE OF A LEADER/COACH

- To provide positive encouragement and support
- Never expose children to unrealistic expectations
- Attract more players to the game
- Make training enjoyable and positive experience for children
- Provide safe environment that is conducive to learning
- Emphasis should be on:
 - Maximum participation
 - Skill improvement
 - Fostering good spirit
 - Instil good values of Fair Play and good sportsmanship
 - Fostering fun and enjoyment, not on results and winning at all cost
 - Be patient in coaching approach and expectations as player development is long term

PARENT CODE OF BEHAVIOUR

Parents need to understand the philosophy of the Let Them Play concept. Through your involvement, support, assistance and positive behaviour, the right environment will be created for your child to enjoy their soccer experience.

As a parent, always remember:

- Children participate in sport for their enjoyment, not yours
- Be prepared to be involved in all activities during the soccer session
- Encourage children to participate, do not force them
- Let children play and learn by doing, limit constant instruction
- Focus on your child's efforts and performance rather than whether they win or lose
- Encourage children to play according to the rules and spirit of the game
- Encourage children and teams to keep control of ball
- Ensure that the time players spend with you is a positive experience

All young people are deserving of equal attention and opportunities:

- Never ridicule or yell at a child or team for making a mistake or losing
- Remember that children learn best by example. Appreciate good performance and skilful plays by all participants.
- 'Smart supporting' – not loud and intense but calm, relaxed and at all times positive
- Respect officials' decisions and teach children to do likewise
- Show appreciation for volunteer coaches, officials and administrators. Without them, your child could not participate.
- Respect the rights, dignity and worth of every young person regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion



REFERENCES


- Football Federation of Australia
- UEFA Grassroots Football
- The English Football Association
- Scottish Football Association
- US Youth Soccer
- Canadian Soccer Association
- Koninklijke Nederlandse Voetbalbond (Dutch Football Association)

WEST REGION SOCCER
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**U4 "LET THEM PLAY" PROGRAM
HANDBOOK**



WELLNESS TO WORLD CUP DU MIEUX-ÊTRE À LA COUPE DU MONDE

PRESENTED BY / PRÉSENTÉ PAR BMO 

LONG-TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT / DÉVELOPPEMENT À LONG TERME DU JOUEUR



STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT - ACTIVE START “LET THEM PLAY” PROGRAM - UNDER 4 & U6





LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MODEL

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Canadian Soccer LTPD





STAGE 1 - ACTIVE START

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Other Sports & Activities

Children should participate in many additional activities. Swimming and well-structured gymnastics programs are recommended.





"LET THEM PLAY" PROGRAM UNDER 4

WEST REGION SOCCER





GUIDING PRINCIPLE #1

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GUIDING PRINCIPLE #2

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LEARNING PROCESS OF A 3 - 5 YEAR OLD

- Only need short breaks, but can play for a long time.
- They know exactly when to take their rest and sit down on the field, but a few moments later start to chase the ball again.
- They can be learn by dribbling the ball with assistance from parent.
- They want to enjoy themselves, are looking for a challenge, but losing or winning is of little importance.
- They are always positive.
- Skill training should be the only part of the training. There should be no stretching and no training without the ball, and exercises should not be too complicated.
- They are not that interested in playing soccer, but prefer to play modified games.





TRADITIONAL VS LET THEM PLAY

Traditional Soccer – U4 & U6

14 – 16 kids per team playing 7 v 7 up to 8 v 8 with GKs.

No parental involvement.

Too many kids in one game.

Lack enjoyment for many kids.

Dominant kids control the game.

Every kid of different ability and developmental stage are grouped together.

Limited ball contact for many kids.

The kid in goal is not involved for long periods of time.

Let Them Play - 3 v 3 Soccer

Kids are grouped based on ability and developmental stage.

More enjoyment and excitement.

A lot of ball contact for each kid.

Maintains motivation and involvement.

Every kid is learning and developing.

Positive parental involvement.





IMPLEMENTATION PROCESS

- **Conduct Coaches/Leaders Workshop**
- **“U4 LET THEM PLAY” Handbook**
 - ***For Clubs, Coaches (Leaders) & Parents***
 - **Club Organizational Responsibility**
 - **Rules and Regulations**
 - **Role of a Leader**
 - **Parent Code of Behaviour**
- **Session Plan Layout – For Leaders**
- **10 Week Session Plans – For Leaders**

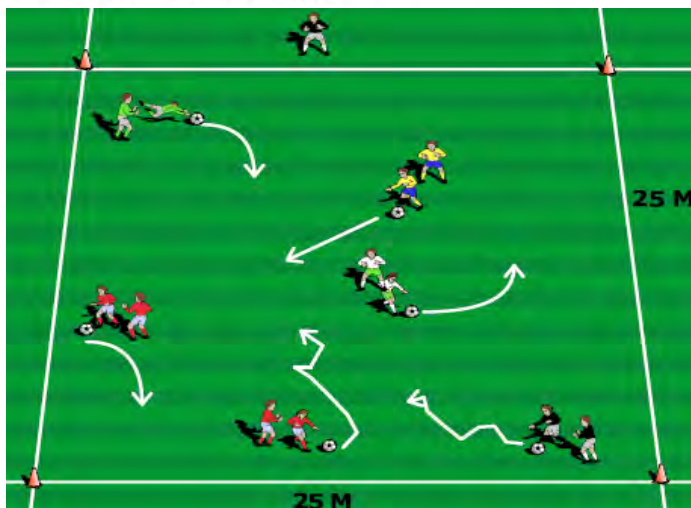


Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 1: Making friends with the ball.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes):

Organization:

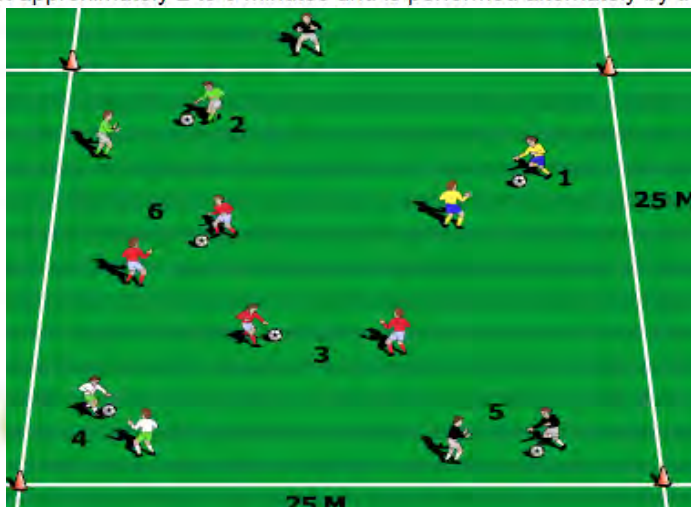
- Each child partners with his/her parent and finds space inside the playing area not too close to other pairs. As well as being purposeful each exercise described should be treated as fun/inventive and is performed alternately by the child then the parent. Child follows parent as they jog around the area. As coach shouts change they quickly switch roles:
 1. Jogging forward, weave in and out of other pairs until the command to change.
 2. As above but jogging backward
 3. As above but skipping sideways and alternating leading shoulder every three strides until command to change.
 4. As above but walking and taking giant steps.
 5. As above but walking backwards and taking giant steps.
 6. As above but two footed "bunny hops".
 7. As above but with the leader jogging with a ball at his/her feet trying to lose their shadow using little feints and turns.



Technical Development (15 minutes):

Organization:

- Each child partners with his/her parent and finds space inside the playing area not too close to other pairs, with one ball between them. Each exercise described should last approximately 2 to 3 minutes and is performed alternately by the child then the parent.
 1. Child and parent run side by side around the area as the child guides the ball using both feet. After a few seconds the child and parent switch roles. Process is repeated.
 2. With parent and child keeping approximately 5-6 meters apart, the child runs with the ball for a few strides and kicks the ball to his/her parent. The parent, in turn, repeats the process.
 3. The parent and child stand together and the parent kicks the ball about 5-6 meters away. The child then runs after the ball and brings it back using the feet. Repeat 5 times and switch roles.
 4. Parent and child take turns throwing the ball up and catching it 5 times each. Increase the difficulty by throwing the ball back and forth (parents should stand close to their child and almost place the ball in their hands until coordination is improved).
 5. Each parent makes a small goal using markers and acts as goalkeeper while their child tries to score. Switch roles every so often.



Coach's Big Challenge!

Show me how many different methods you can use to turn when running with the ball? Take a few minutes to experiment.



Example of using the sole of the foot to turn.

2 v 2 Fun Game Kids and Parents (10 minutes)

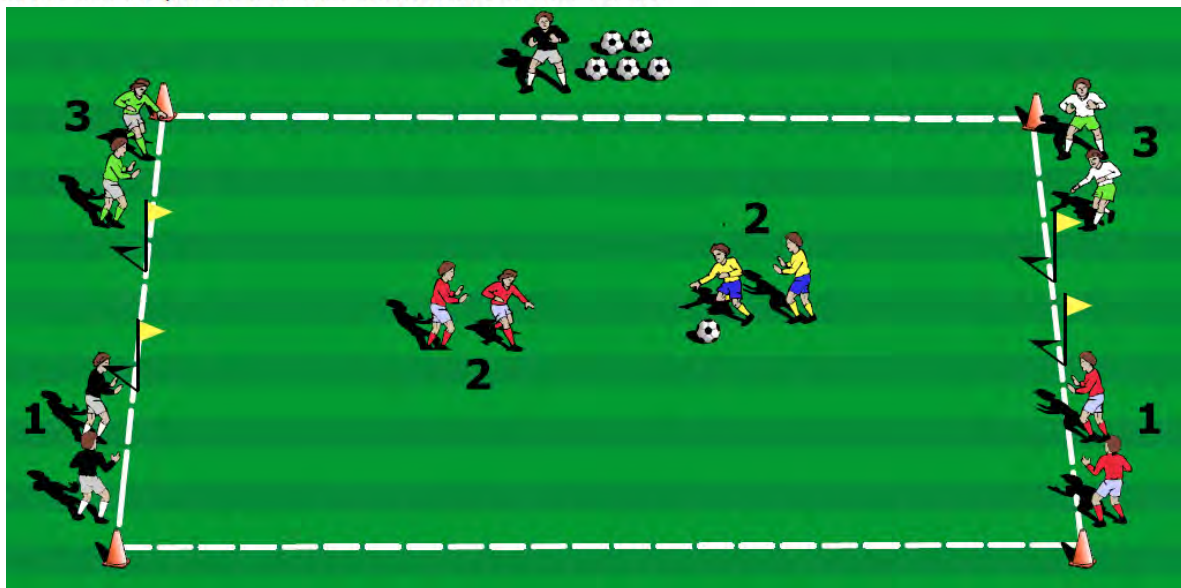
Organization:

- **2v2 Link Soccer:**

Select two teams consisting of equal numbers of Parent/Child pairings who must form a link by holding hands. Number the pairings on each team 1, 2, 3, and so on. When the coach calls number 1, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and score in the opposite goal until the coach says stop. At which time both pairs return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another number and two new pairs begin to play. If the ball goes out of play the game can be restarted with a "kick-in" or the coach may serve in a new ball. Parents may kick the ball as usual but cannot score.

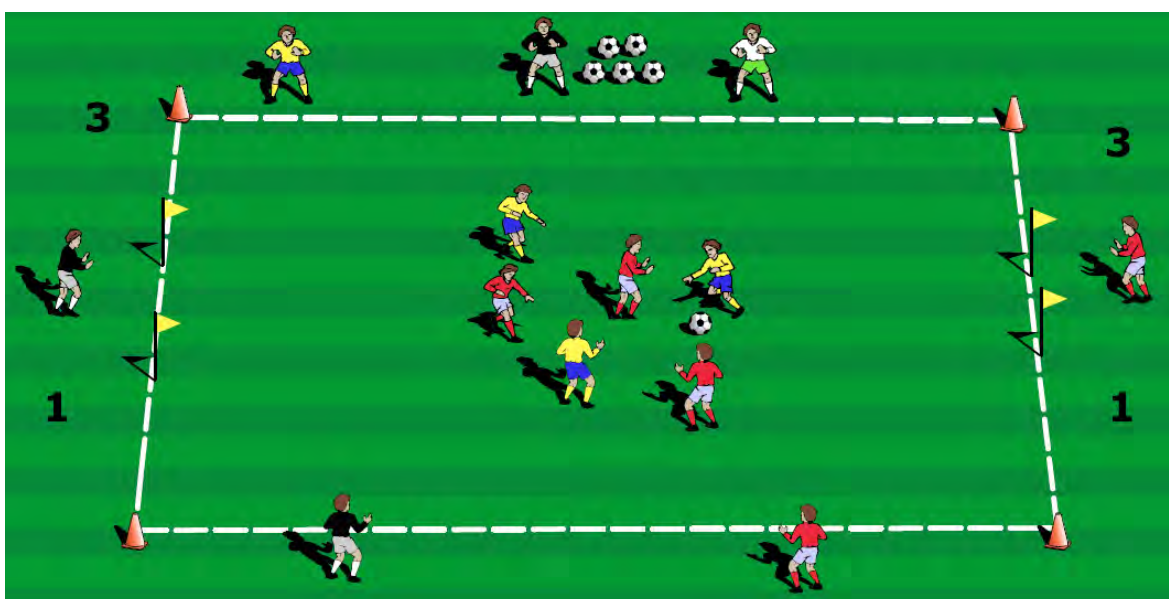
- **Variations:**

As above but the parent and child do not have to hold hands.



Small-Sided Game 3 v 3 (10 – 15 mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m



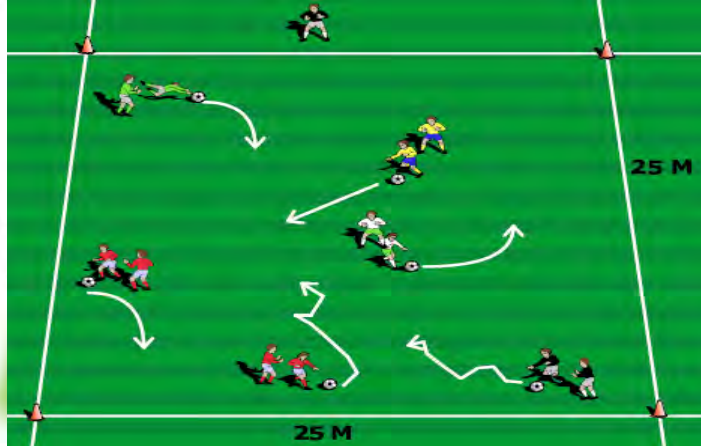
End Session

Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 2: *Running with the ball.*

Warm up and agility (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Parent and child work together in pairs with one ball between them. Taking turns and using their hands they:
 1. Run forward holding the ball;
 2. Run forward while bouncing the ball;
 3. Run forward pushing the ball along the ground (rolling it) with one hand;
 4. (repeat movements when possible running backward, sideways to the left and right, etc);
 5. Roll the ball between their own legs and quickly recover their ball;
 6. Roll the ball through their partner's legs while they have to recover the ball quickly;
 7. Stand bringing the ball around their waist;



Coach's Big Challenge!

*Show me how many different ways you can kick the ball?
Take a few minutes to experiment.*



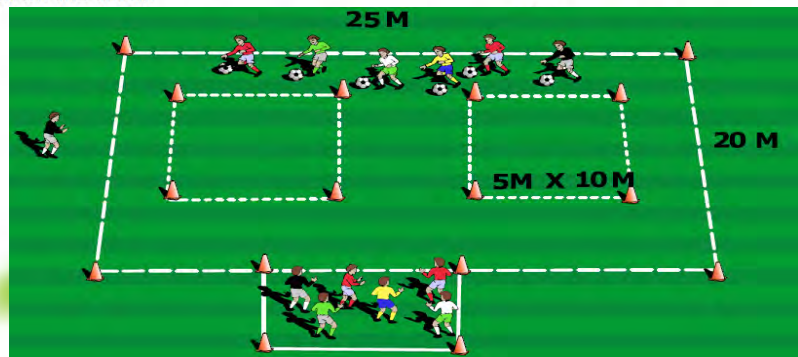
Example of using the heel of the foot to kick the ball.

Technical Development (15 minutes):

Indy 500

Organization:

- This is a cruising game. The cars (kids) need to race around the outside roads. They start from the pits and finish back in the pits. Four cones can mark the inside track, but do have marker disks for the outside so the children need to keep the ball under close control and stay on the road. If they do go off the road, three quick toe touches on the top of their ball starts their engine and allows them back on the track.
 1. Players run with the ball in a clockwise direction and once back into the "pits" the parent repeats the process.
 2. As above but the players/parents run with the ball in a counter-clockwise direction.
 3. Parents and players run with the ball from the pits along the middle and continue around the outside road and back to the pits. Half the players must go in a clockwise direction and half in a counter-clockwise direction.
 4. As above but the parents and players switch directions.



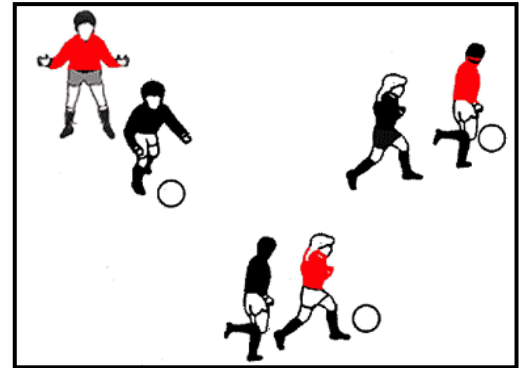
Fun Game: Me and My Shadow (10mins)

Objective:

- Teaches dribbling, change of pace and direction.
- Also encourages disciplined marking.

Organization:

- In pairs with a ball between two Parent and child).
- On a signal the player with the ball (the Dribbler) tries to lose his/her Shadow.
- Shadow must be disciplined and persistent.
- After a few seconds the coach shouts "Change!" and the Shadow becomes the Dribbler, and vice-versa.
- Don't go for too long (30 seconds) as the activity is very demanding.
- Introduce other pairs activities in between the runs, e.g., try to head the ball back and forth; play Keep-Up; play Nut Mags (ball is played through the legs of straddling partner).



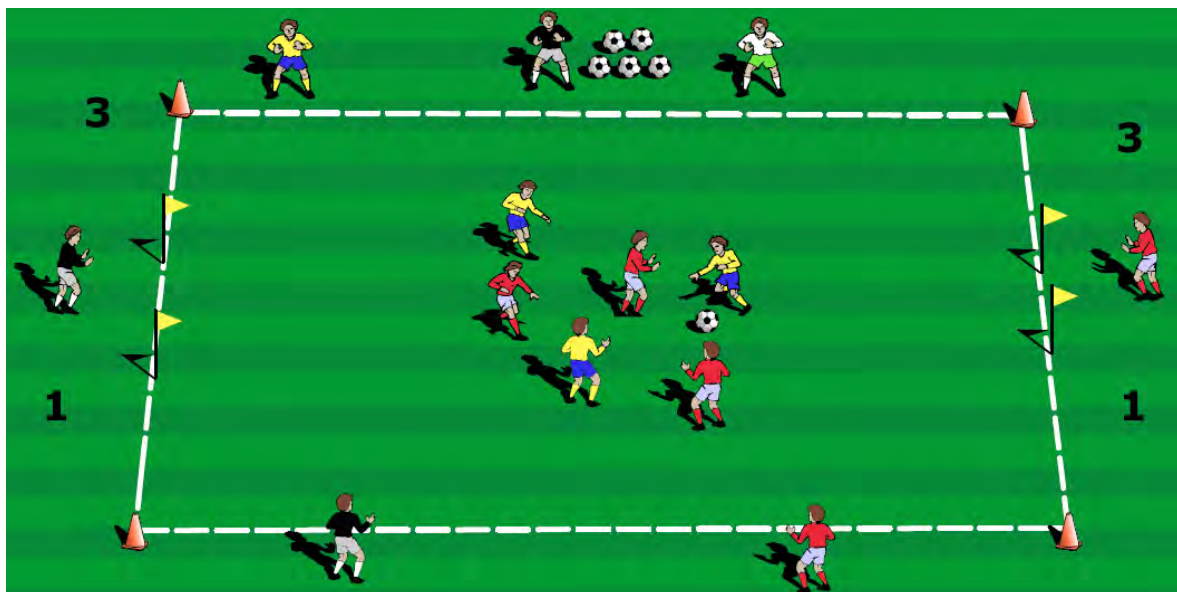
Teaching:

- Try to burst away from the Shadow by change of pace and direction.
- Shadow tries to stay "touch tight."

Target:

- To lose the Shadow; conversely not to lose the Dribbler.

Small-Sided Game – 3 v 3 (15mins)



End Session.

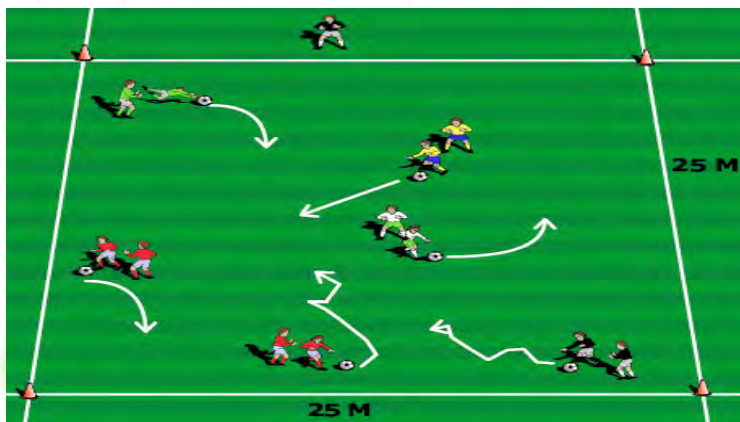
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 3: *Running & Changing Direction with the ball.*

Warm up and agility (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Parents and children work spread out inside a designated area to play various games of Tag as follows:

1. Tag game with one ball. Player/Parent holds a ball in both hands and tries to tag others with it. Tagged players must pick up the ball and become the player tagging others.
2. As above but everyone holds a soccer ball in both hands, except the player who is "it". If tagged you switch roles and give your ball to the person who tagged you.
3. As above but everyone has a soccer ball at their feet, except the person who is "it". To avoid being tagged you can dribble your ball away from the person who is it, or, stand with your foot on top of the ball for 5 seconds. The person who is "it" cannot wait but must chase after someone else. If tagged change roles.

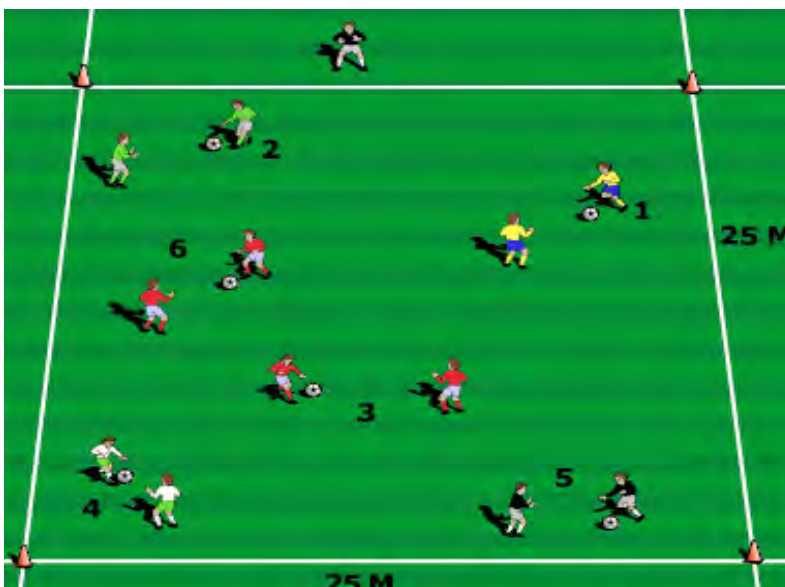


Technical Development (15 minutes):

Square Dance with sharks

Organization:

- Mark a square. The size may vary according to numbers. Each parent/child pair should find some space inside the square and have one ball between them. Each child starts with the ball, while the parent rests. Parent and child trade places on the coach's command. The activity begins with each player moving the soccer ball around the playing area using their feet and reacting to the coach's commands:



1. "stop", players freeze like statues with one foot on the ball;
2. "change", players stop the ball with the sole of the foot and move backwards dragging the ball with the sole of the foot.
3. "turn", players make a half turn, using the sole of the foot, then progress to using the inside of the foot
4. "Toe-touches", players stop the ball and do three toe-touches (left-right-left), then continue to move the ball around the area.
5. The coach or a parent becomes a ball-eating-shark, and will try to kick a player's ball out of the area. If it happens, the player retrieves the ball and after three magic toe-touches (left-right-left) he or she can return to the game.

Coach's Big Challenge!

*Can you hold the soccer ball between your feet and jump like a kangaroo?
Take a few minutes to practice.*



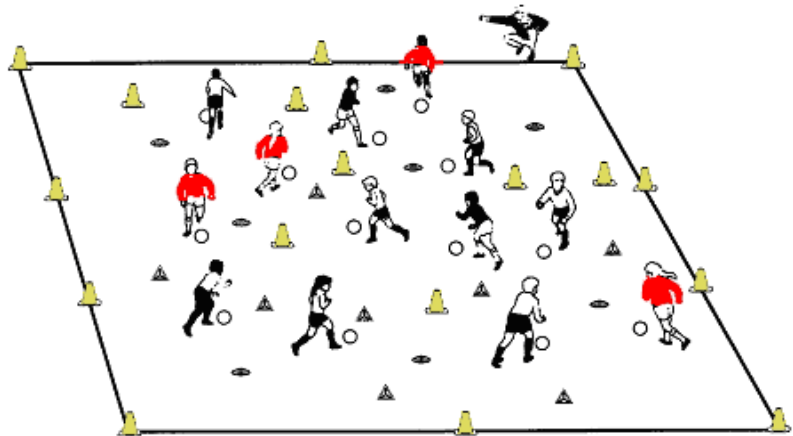
Fun Game: Jungle Run (10mins)

Organization

- Make an area using marker disks, cones, etc.
- One ball per Parent and Child.

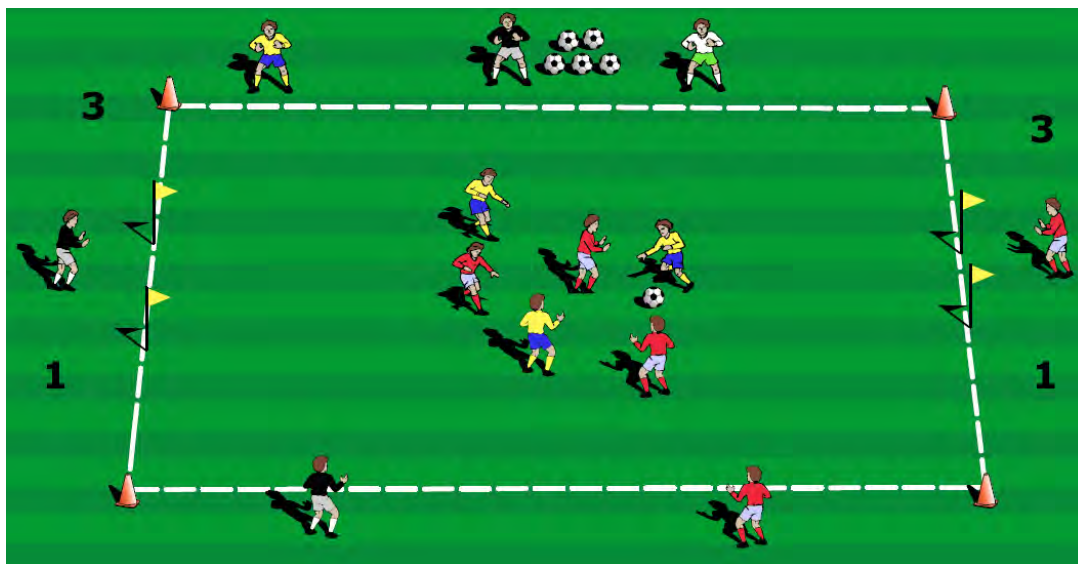
Games and variations

- All the Children must dribble the ball through the jungle without touching a tree (poisonous).
- They have to throw (and kick) the ball over the jungle to get the Parent across.
- They may be chased by lions, tigers or elephants.
- They can "clear" the jungle by knocking down the cones with the ball.
- Cones are poisonous and cannot be knocked down with feet...only by kicking the ball against the cone.
- Later reforest the jungle by putting the trees (cones) back up, using only our feet (seedlings/non-poisonous!) and not our hands (little bit poisonous!). Use your imagination to spark the imagination of the Children.



Small Sided Game: 3 v 3 game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m v 15m



Session End

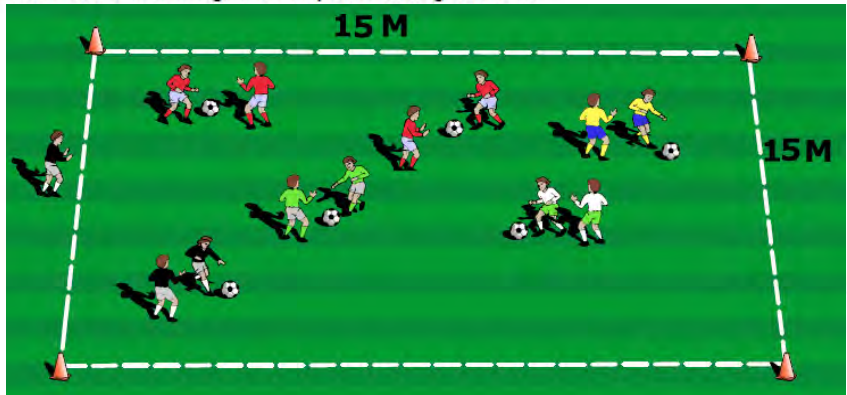
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase:

Session 4: Kicking the ball.

Warm up, agility and coordination work (10 minutes):

Organization:

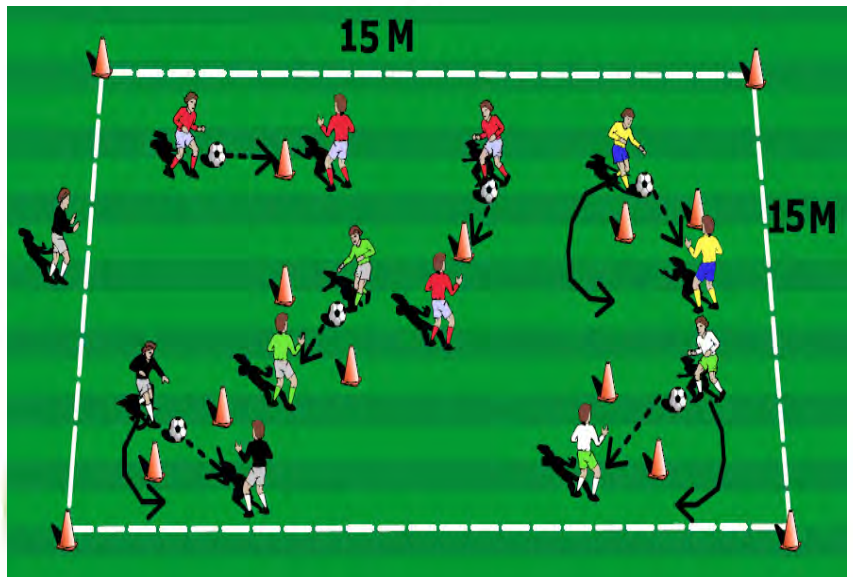
- Cones positioned 15 meters apart. Parent and child work together in pairs taking turns to:
 1. Run forward;
 2. Run backward;
 3. Skip forward/sideways
 4. Hop on one leg;
 5. Hop on two legs;
 6. Caterpillar walk;
 7. Walk on all fours; etc.



Technical Development (15 minutes):

Organization:

- Each parent and child works together in an area 40m. x 40m. and go through the following exercises:
 1. Standing approximately 6m. apart with a cone between them they take turns trying knock the cone down by kicking the ball at it. How many times can you do it before the coach changes exercises?
 2. As above but the cone is replaced by a central goal made with two markers approximately 2m. wide. How many goals can you score?
 3. Each parent/child pair runs around the area trying to score in one of the goals by kicking it between the markers to their partner. The partner receiving the ball dribbles to another goal and tries to score through the goal while his/her partner takes up position on the other side of the goal. They repeat the process until the coach says stop. You cannot score through the same goal twice in succession



Coach's Big Challenge!

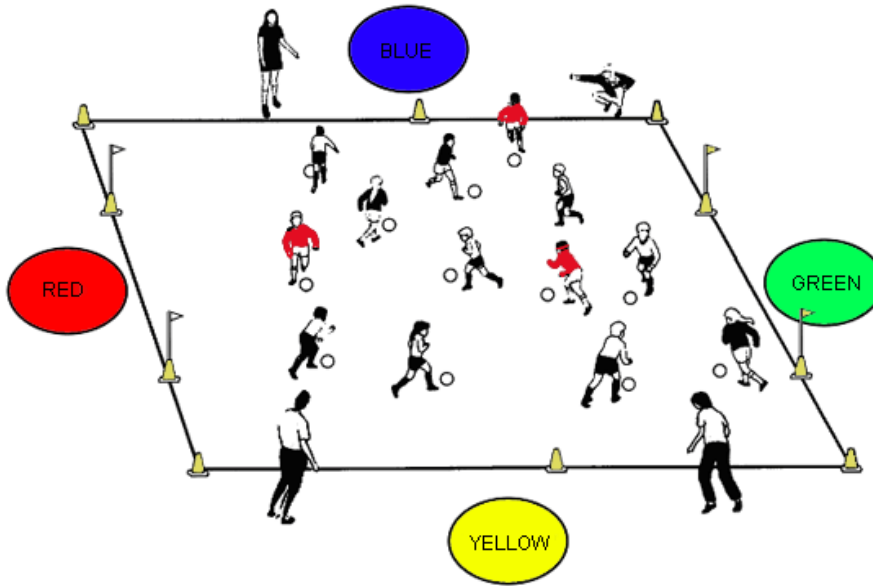
Can you hold the soccer ball between your feet, jump and toss the ball into the air and catch in your hands when you land?

Take a few minutes to practice.



Toss it high and get ready to catch it again!

Fun Game: North, South and Colours (10mins)

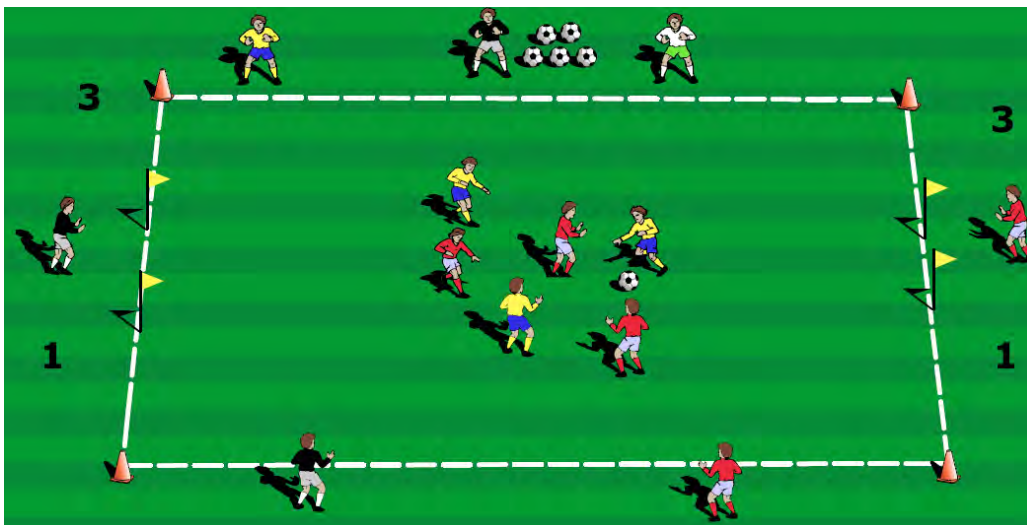


How To Play:

- North and South goals; or red, blue, yellow, greens zones marked by cones and pinnies.
- On shout "North!" all players inside the grid should dribble or pass/shoot ball through the "North" goal and wait outside square until all players have "scored." Explain what a goal is. Yellow go over the line to the yellow zone.
- Mix it up, but not too much or the children will get "mixed up!"
- Progression – "South!" – go through South goal, around the square to reenter at the North Goal

Small-Sided Game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3 game



Session End

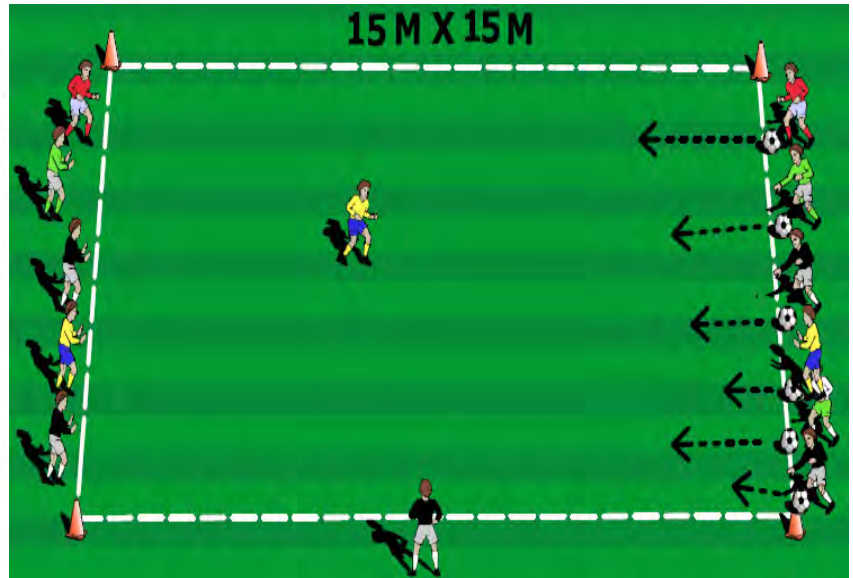
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 5: Passing and Shooting

Warm up, agility and coordination work (10 minutes):

Fox and Chickens:

Organization:

- All players line up at one end of the playing area with one parent, the "fox", in the middle of the area. When the coach shouts go the players try to run to the other end of the playing area and avoid being tagged by the "fox". If they are tagged they become frozen in place until another player touches them, at which time they may join in again.
 - Game is played without a ball.
 - Players must hold a soccer ball in front of them with both hands.
 - Players must hold a soccer ball behind their backs with both hands.
 - Players must dribble the ball with their feet.



Coach's Big Challenge!

*Can you kick the soccer ball out of your hands and into the air so that you can catch it again?
Take a few minutes to practice.*



Kick it high and be ready to catch it again!

Technical Development (15 minutes):

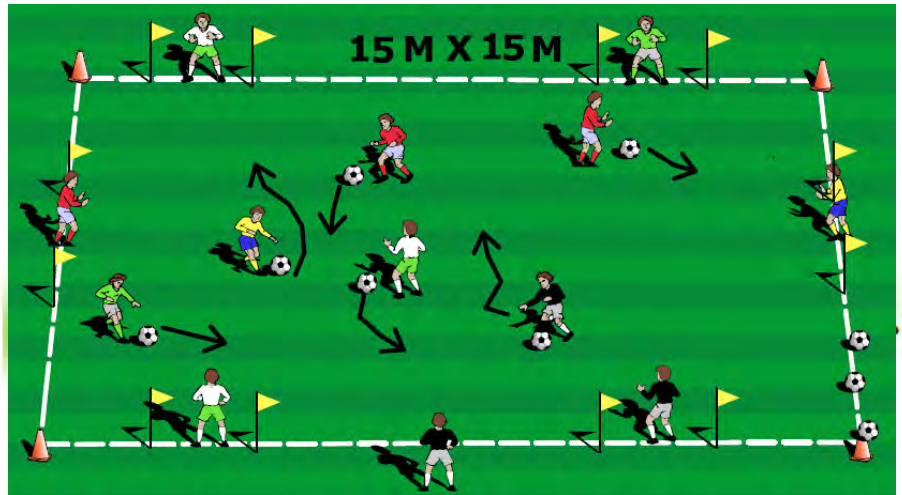
Goals Galore:

Organization:

- Six goals are set up around the perimeter of the playing area.
 - Each parent/child pair runs around the area passing the ball to each other and trying to score in one of the goals by kicking it between the flags to their partner. Once they have scored they continue passing the ball as they move toward another goal. Repeat the process until the coach says stop. You cannot score through the same goal twice in succession.



2. A parent plays as a goalkeeper in each goal. Six children are in the middle of the playing area with a ball each. The children move around the area trying to score as many goals as possible in any and all of the goals. If a parent saves a shot he/she gives the ball back to the shooter. Players must retrieve their ball if they miss the goal.



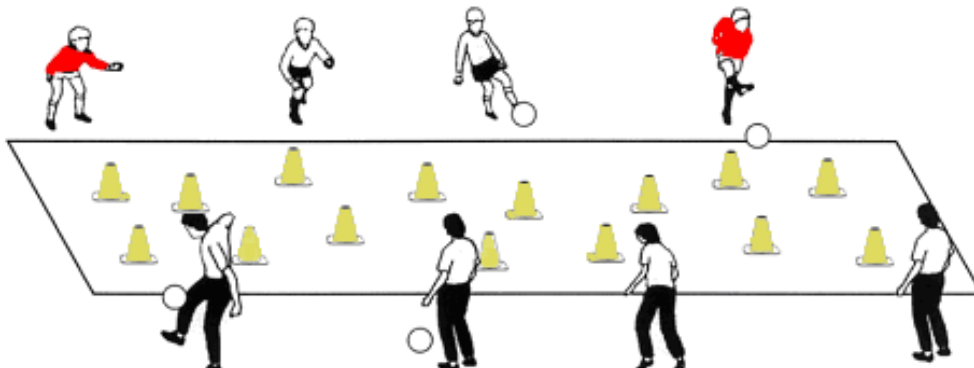
• **Progressions:**

1. Children can score in any goal.
2. Children can score in any goal but not in the same goal twice in succession.

Fun Game: Skittle Alley (10mins)

Organization

- A rectangle area three yards wide by whatever is needed (number of participants) is filled with cones. The Parent and Child are on opposite sides of the rectangle and kick back and forth, working with the rest of the group to knock down the cones. Parents can go into the "War Zone" to retrieve any balls that get stuck there.



Small-Sided Game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
 Format: 3 v 3



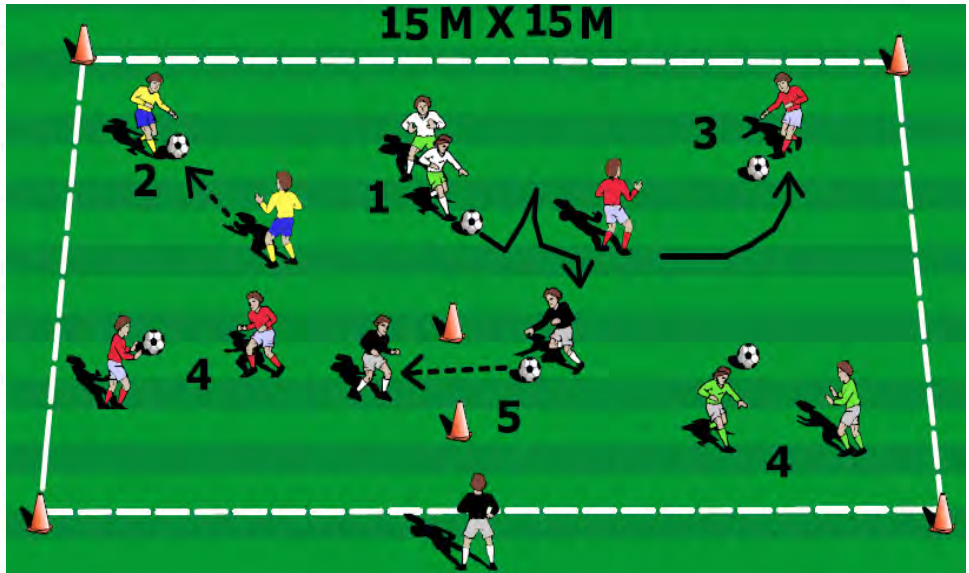
Session End

Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 6: *Running with the Ball, Passing and Receiving*

Warm up and coordination work (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Each child partners with his/her parent and finds space inside the playing area not too close to other pairs, with one ball between them. Each exercise described should last approximately 2 to 3 minutes and is performed alternately by the child then the parent.
- Child and parent run side by side around the area as the child guides the ball using both feet. After a few seconds the child and parent switch roles. Process is repeated.
 - With parent and child keeping approximately 5-6 meters apart, the child runs with the ball for a few strides and kicks the ball to his/her parent. The parent, in turn, repeats the process.
 - The parent and child stand together and the parent kicks the ball about 5-6 meters away. The child then runs after the ball and brings it back using the feet. Repeat 5 times and switch roles.
 - Parent and child take turns throwing the ball up and catching it 5 times each. Increase the difficulty by throwing the ball back and forth (parents should stand close to their child and almost place the ball in their hands until coordination is improved).
 - Each parent makes a small goal between them using markers and they both try to score by kicking the ball through the goal.

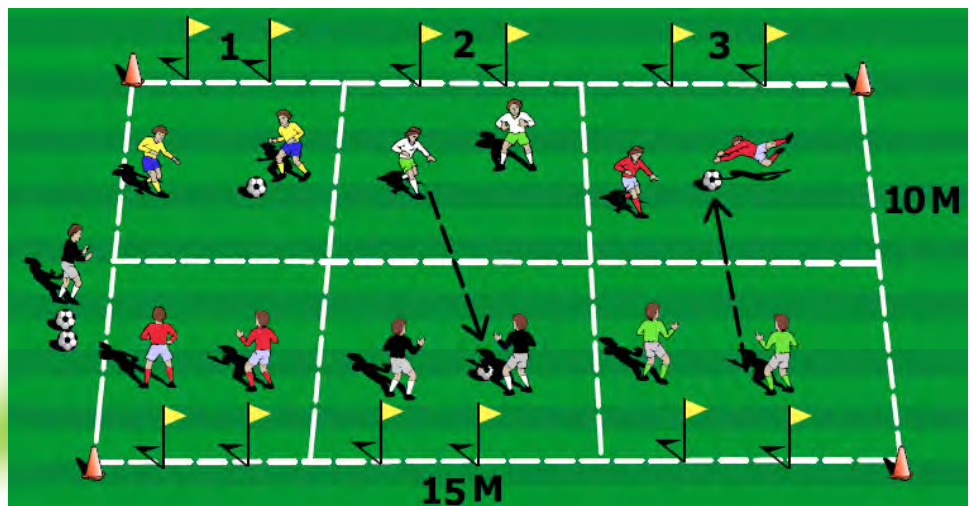


Technical Development (15 minutes):

Goal Alley:

Organization:

- Parent/child pairs play against one another in a 10m. x 5m. channel. Each parent/child defends their goal line while trying to score on their opponents. Players have unlimited touches but must remain in their own half of the playing area. Players try to block shots and control the ball to prevent a goal. After 2-3 minutes the pairs on one side of the field move to the right and play against new opponents.
- Progression:** If the ball rebounds across the half way line or out over the side line when a save is being made, possession goes to the opponents.



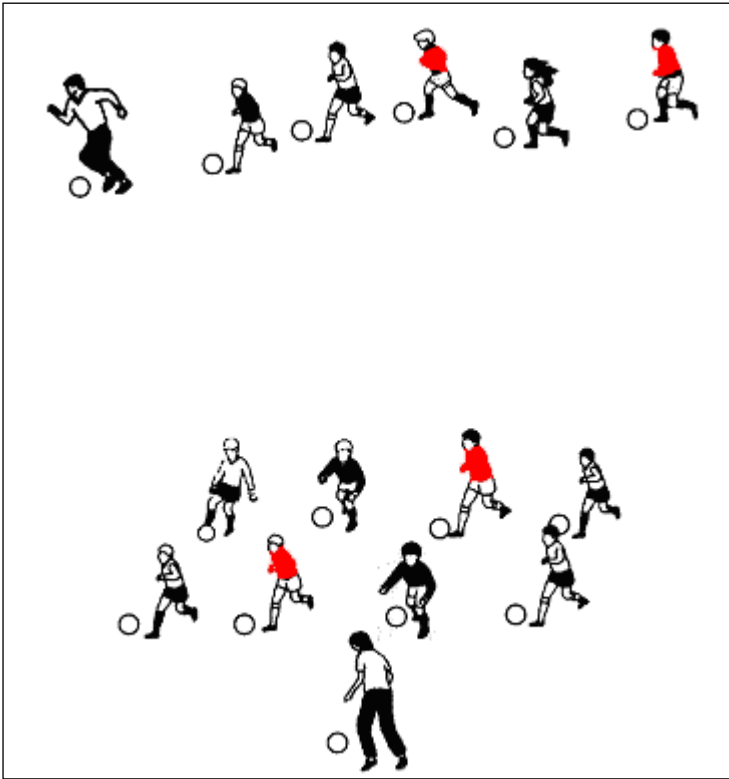
Coach's Big Challenge!

Can you kick the soccer ball through your parent's legs?
How many times can you do it?
Take a few minutes to practice.



Try it from approximately 3 meters!

Fun Game: Pied Piper & The Mirror Man (10mins)



- Children and Parents follow the Pied Piper (Leader), in single file, and then form a line facing the Pied Piper, who has become the Mirror Man.
- Everything the Mirror Man does, Kids (and Parents) have to copy, but in reverse. The Mirror Man moves with the ball to the left, Kids go right. Mirror Man moves forwards, Kids go back. Mirror Man puts right foot on the ball, Kids and Parents put left foot on the ball.

Small-Sided Game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3

Session End

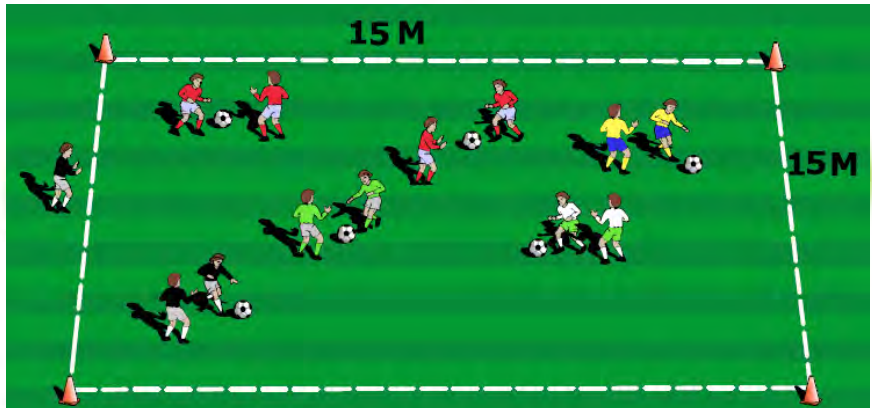


Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 7: Dribbling and Shooting

Warm up and coordination work (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Mark a square. The size may vary according to numbers. Each parent/child pair should find some space inside the square and have one ball between them. Each child starts with the ball, while the parent rests. Parent and child trade places on the coach's command. The activity begins with each player moving the soccer ball around the playing area using their feet and reacting to the coach's commands:



1. "stop", players freeze like statues with one foot on the ball;
2. As above but when the coach shouts "stop" the players must stop the ball and sit on the ball, or touch the ball with one knee, or with an elbow, etc.
3. "change", players stop the ball, leave it and quickly go and get another's ball and continue dribbling around the area.
4. "turn", players must change direction using any part of the foot they like.
5. "legs", players try to pass the ball through the legs of as many resting partners as they can before the coach says stop.
6. The coach or a parent becomes a "pirate", and will try to kick a player's ball out of the area. If it happens, the player retrieves the ball and after he/she dribbles the ball around one of the corner markers he/she can return to the game.

Technical Development (15 minutes)

Organization:

- A parent plays as a goalkeeper in each goal. Six pairs of markers approximately 2m. apart are laid out in the playing area. Six children are in the middle of the playing area with a ball each. The children move around the area trying to score as many goals as possible in any and all of the goals after carrying out each of the coach's commands. If a parent saves a shot he/she gives the ball back to the shooter. Players must retrieve their ball if they miss the goal.



1. Dribble through a pair of markers and shoot at the goal. You cannot shoot at the same goal twice in succession. How many goals can you score before the coach says stop?
2. As above but dribble in a big circle around a pair of markers before shooting at goal.
3. As above but dribble in a circle around one of the markers before going to shoot on goal.
4. As above but dribble in a figure eight around the two markers before shooting at goal.

Coach's Big Challenge!

Can you do a step over and change direction?
Can you do it with both feet?
Take a few minutes to practice.

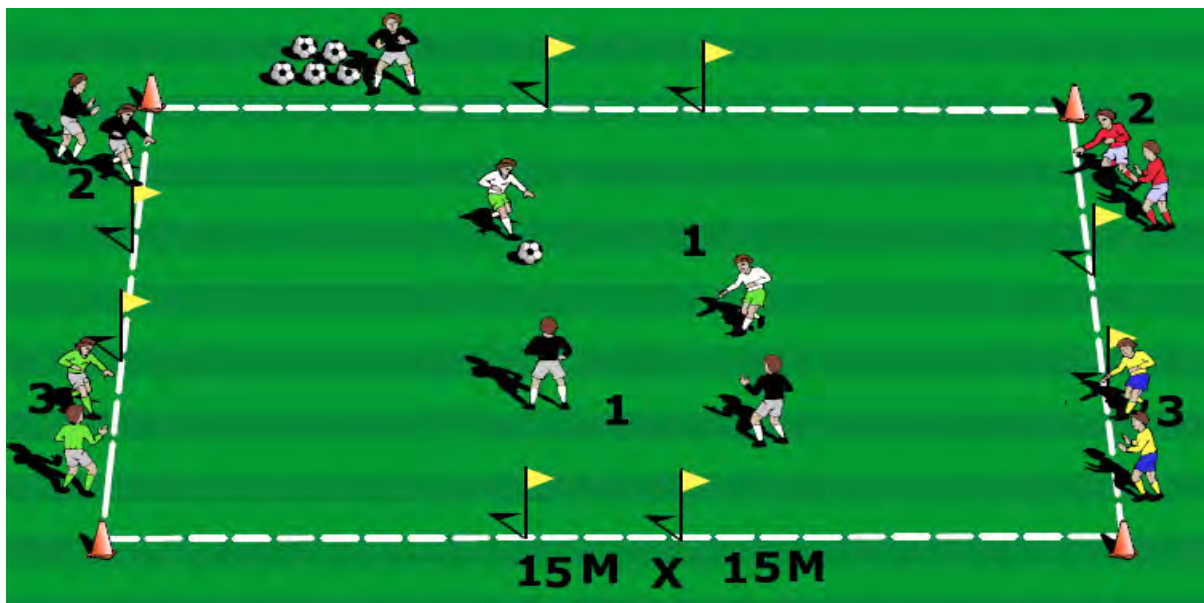


Take a big step over the ball!

Fun Game: Four Goal Game (15mins)

Organization:

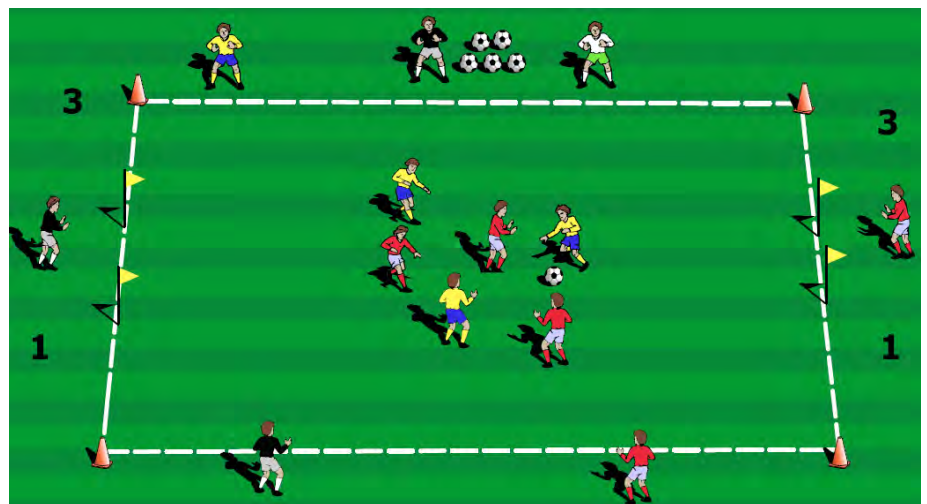
- Select two teams consisting of equal numbers of Parent/Child pairings. Number the pairings on each team 1, 2, 3, and so on. When the coach calls number 1, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and score in any one of the four goals until the coach says stop. At which time both pairs return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another number and two new pairs begin to play. If the ball goes out of play the game can be restarted with a "kick-in" or the coach may serve in a new ball. Parents may kick the ball as usual but cannot score.



Small-Sided Game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3

Session End



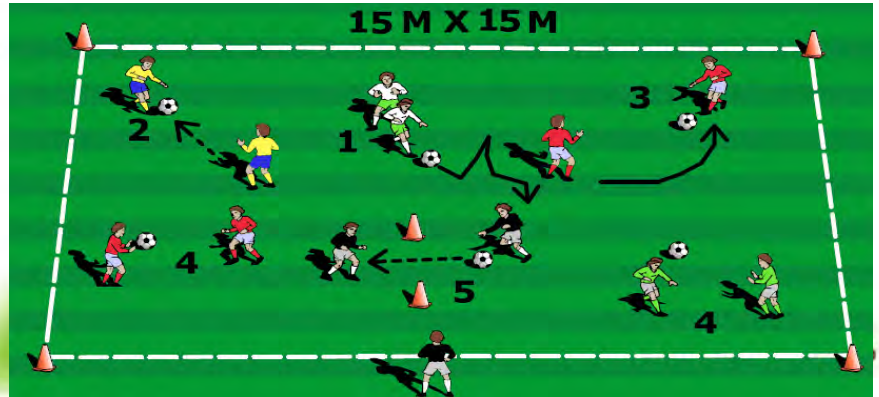
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase:

Session 8: Dribbling with the Ball

Warm up and coordination work (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Mark a square. The size may vary according to numbers. Each parent/child pair should find some space inside the square as a starting position and have one ball between them. Each child starts with the ball, while the parent rests. Parents encourage their child during the exercises and take part as required. The activity begins with each child moving around the playing area and reacting to the coach's commands as follows:
 - Jog around the area weaving in and out of the parents and on the coach's command run in a circle around the nearest parent (forward or backwards depending on the instruction), then continue jogging around the area.
 - As above but on coach's command crawl through the legs of the nearest parent.
 - As above but on the coach's command do three "bunny hops".
 - All children do the "caterpillar crawl" around the area.
 - "Give a ball; get a ball". Each child jogs around the area holding a soccer ball. As they jog they give their ball to a parent, then look to take a ball from any other parent holding a ball. Continue the process for approximately 1 minute. Progress to the child using his/her feet to dribble, pass and receive the ball (parents should use hands to collect the ball and roll the ball underarm to the children).
 - Child tries to kick the ball out his/her hands into the air so that parent can catch it and roll it back. The child must stop the ball with his/her feet before picking it up again.



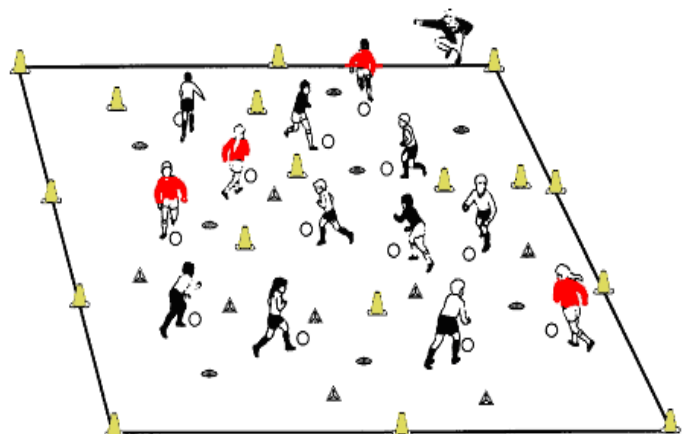
Technical Development (10mins)

Organization

- Make an area using marker disks, cones, etc.
- One ball per Parent and Child.

Games and variations

- All the Children must dribble the ball through the jungle without touching a tree (poisonous).
- They have to throw (and kick) the ball over the jungle to get the Parent across.
- They may be chased by lions, tigers or elephants.
- They can "clear" the jungle by knocking down the cones with the ball.
- Cones are poisonous and cannot be knocked down with feet...only by kicking the ball against the cone.
- Later reforest the jungle by putting the trees (cones) back up, using only our feet (seedlings/non-poisonous!) and not our hands (little bit poisonous!). Use your imagination to spark the imagination of the Children.

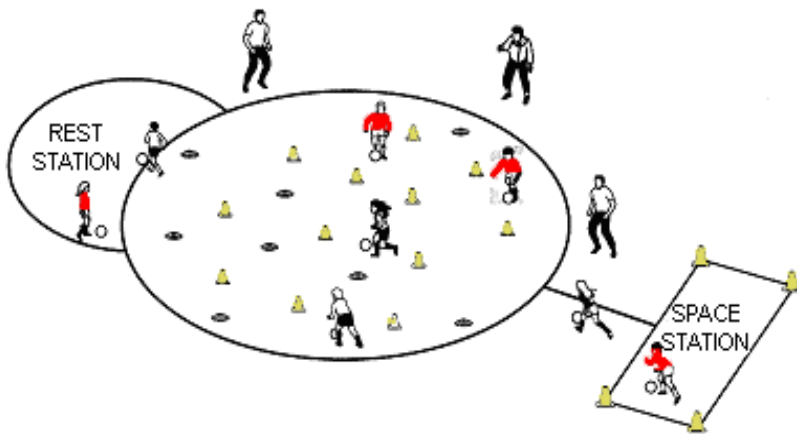


Coach's Big Challenge

Can you turn a circle with the ball at your feet?
 Can you do it using the inside & then the outside of
 your foot?
 Can you do it using the right foot and then the left foot?
 Take a few minutes to practice.

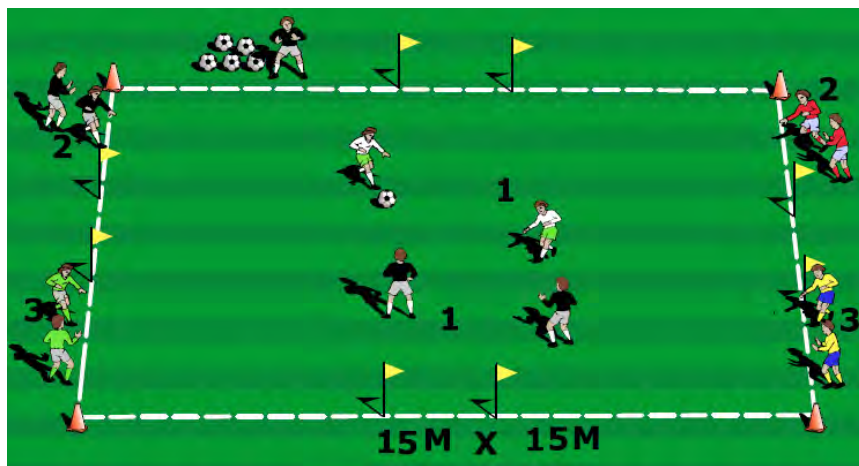


Technical Development - Progression (10mins)



- Getting through space without hitting meteorites, alien spacecraft and flying monsters.
- Use of cones, disks, and monsters (Leader) to try to knock out the Kids' spaceships (balls).
- Touching a cone or not eluding a monster could put any Child in trouble. If "caught," they must dribble ball to the Space Station outside the area, where four touches with the sole of the foot -- right, left, right, left -- re-energizes their space mobile. If they make it to the other side of the universe, they get a well-earned rest.

Fun Game: Four Goal Game (10mins)



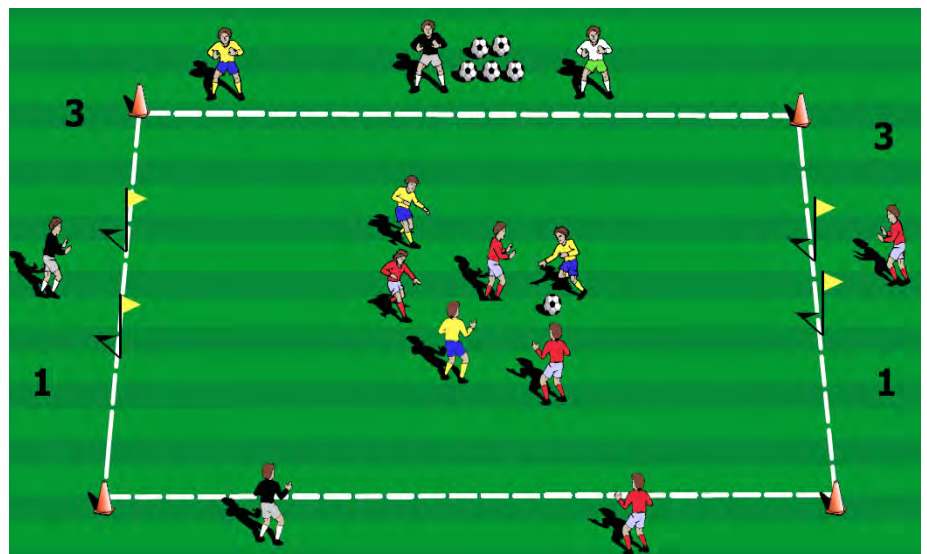
Organization:

- Select two teams consisting of equal numbers of Parent/Child pairings. Number the pairings on each team 1, 2, 3, and so on. When the coach calls number 1, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and score in any one of the four goals until the coach says stop. At which time both pairs return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another number and two new pairs begin to play. If the ball goes out of play the game can be restarted with a "kick-in" or the coach may serve in a new ball. Parents may kick the ball as usual but cannot score.

Small-Sided Game (10mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3

Session End



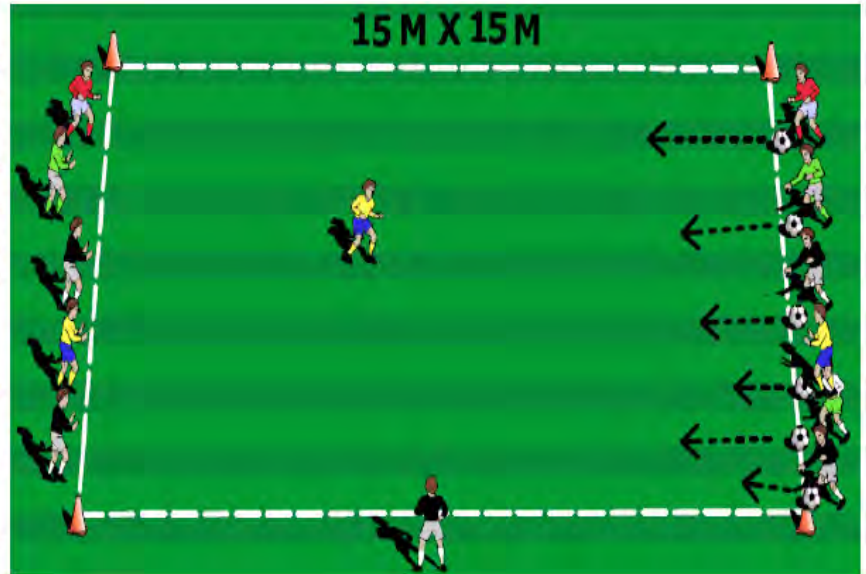
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 9: Running with the Ball and Shooting

Warm up, agility and coordination work (10 minutes):

Fox and Chickens:

Organization:

- All players line up at one end of the playing area with one parent, the "fox", in the middle of the area. When the coach shouts go the players try to run to the other end of the playing area and avoid being tagged by the "fox". If they are tagged they become frozen in place until another player touches them, at which time they may join in again.
 - Game is played without a ball.
 - Players must hold a soccer ball in front of them with both hands.
 - Players must hold a soccer ball behind their backs with both hands.
 - Players must dribble the ball with their feet.



Technical Development (15 minutes)

Organization:

- Set up four houses by placing four cones in each corner of the playing area. A parent/child team is stationed inside each house. Place all the balls in the middle of the playing area. On the coach's signal, one player at a time runs out to get a ball and brings it back to the house (must stop the ball inside the house). When the balls are all recovered, count the number of balls in each house



Variation and Progression (use as needed and as time allows):

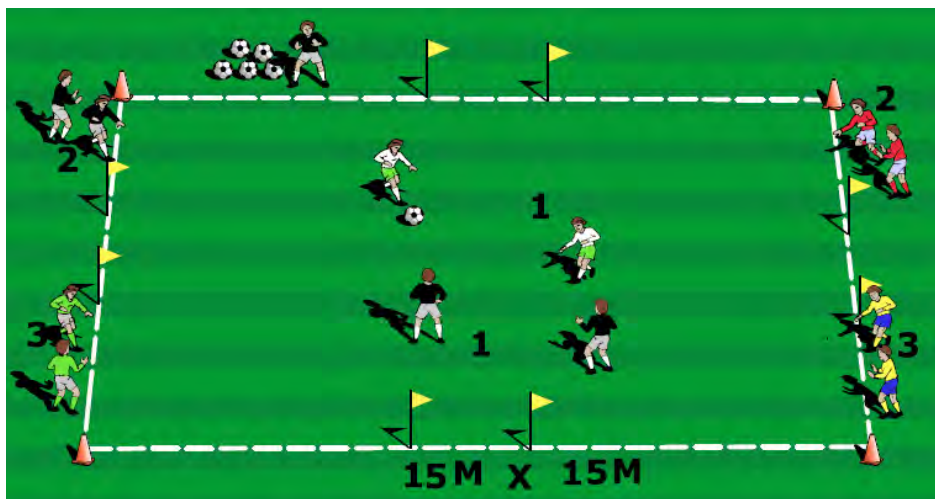
- As above but all balls are placed inside each house. Players try to bring as many balls as possible inside their house by taking the balls from other houses.
- One ball per player; players run with the ball inside their respective houses. On coach's signal, players must change houses in a circle pattern – clockwise, counter clockwise, switch house with another team (to the side of them, diagonally, etc).
- Players must dribble around a hoop before returning home.

Coach's Big Challenge!

Can you turn a circle with the ball at your feet?
Can you do it using the inside & then the outside of
your foot?
Can you do it using the right foot and then the left foot?
Take a few minutes to practice.



Fun Game: Four Goal Game (10mins)

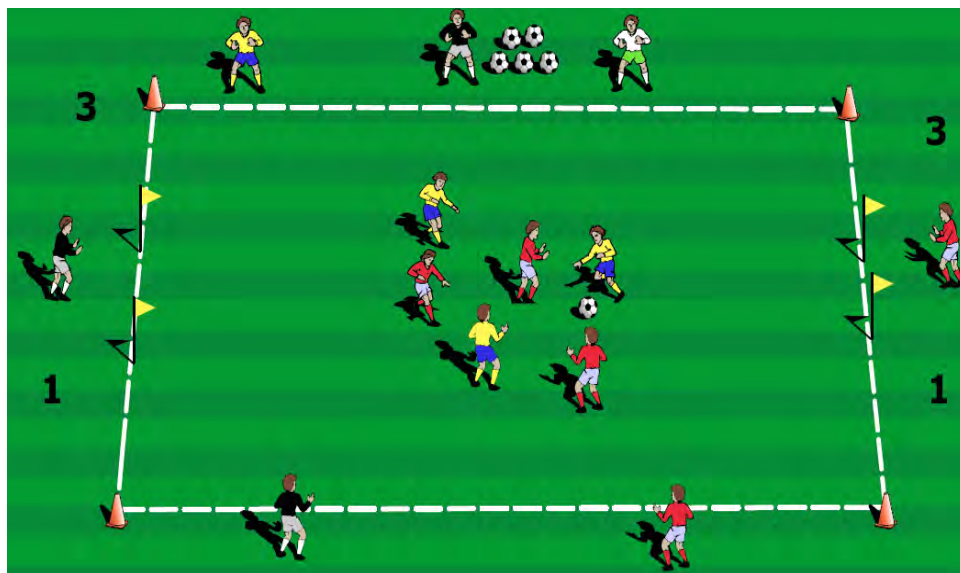


Organization:

- Select two teams consisting of equal numbers of Parent/Child pairings. Number the pairings on each team 1, 2, 3, and so on. When the coach calls number 1, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and score in any one of the four goals until the coach says stop. At which time both pairs return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another number and two new pairs begin to play. If the ball goes out of play the game can be restarted with a "kick-in" or the coach may serve in a new ball. Parents may kick the ball as usual but cannot score.

Small-Sided Game (15mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3



Session End

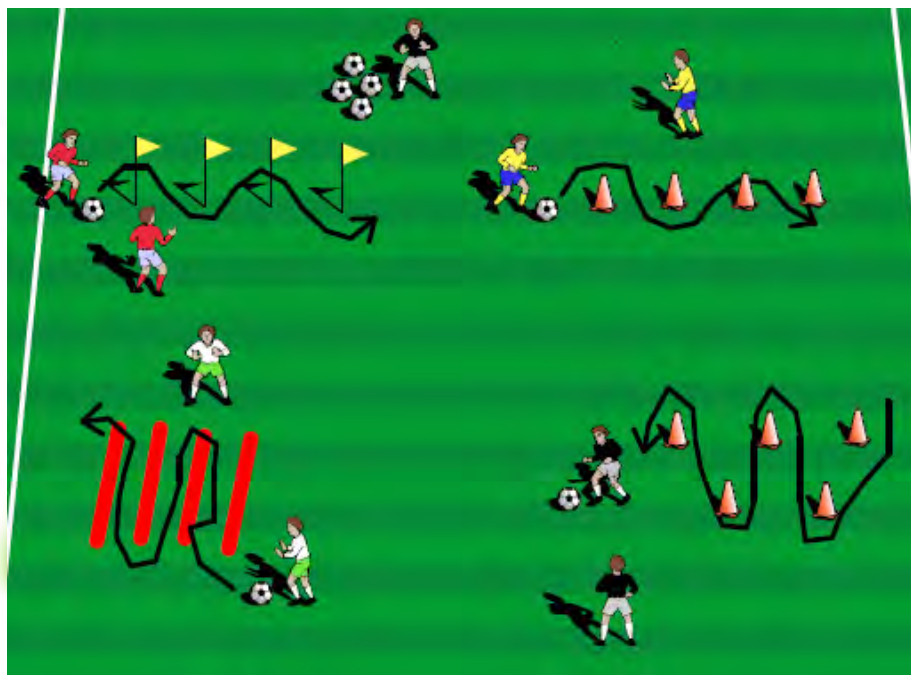
Coaching Children in the Active Start Phase: Session 10: Dribbling & Passing the Ball

Warm up and coordination work (10 minutes):

Organization:

- Set up an obstacle course inside a designated area. The children start at the first station and move in a clockwise direction around the course carrying out the exercises shown below. Parents follow and encourage their child:

- Step in each hoop with one foot only.
- Jog between stations.
- Zig zag in and out of the flags poles.
- Run forward to, and around, the advanced cone, and backward to and around the rear cone until the station is completed.
- Sideway skipping between the sticks.
- Repeat the circuit as necessary.



- Variation:** You may also change the exercises at each station such as:
 - Two footed jumps into each hoop.
 - Skipping.
 - Crawl in and out of the flag poles.
 - Run forward around each cone.
 - Run and step over each stick.

Technical Development (15 minutes)

Organization:

- Set up four houses by placing four cones in each corner of the playing area. A parent/child team is stationed inside each house. Place all the balls in the middle of the playing area. On the coach's signal, one player at a time runs out to get a ball and brings it back to the house (must stop the ball inside the house). When the balls are all recovered, count the number of balls in each house



Variation and Progression (use as needed and as time allows):

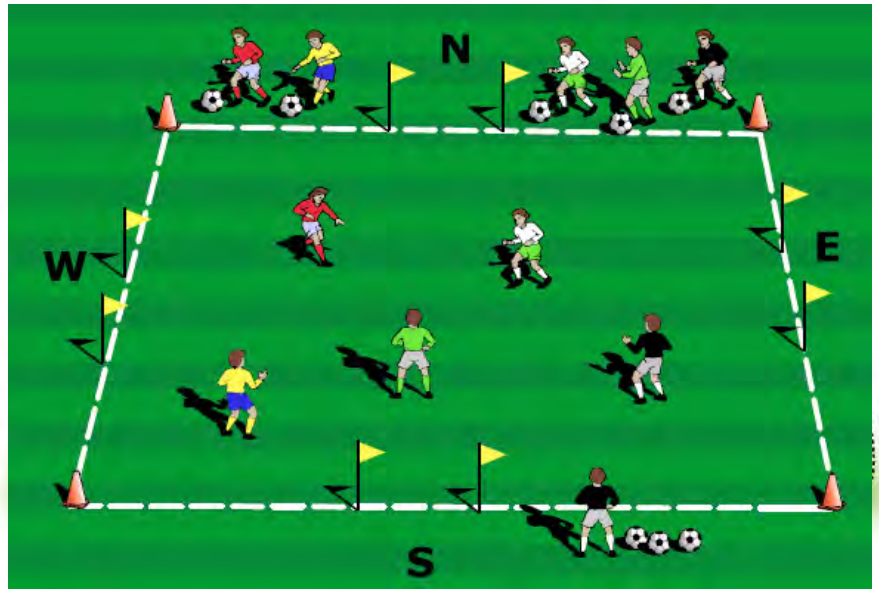
- As above but all balls are placed inside each house. Players try to bring as many balls as possible inside their house by taking the balls from other houses.
- One ball per player; players run with the ball inside their respective houses. On coach's signal, players must change houses in a circle pattern – clockwise, counter clockwise, switch house with another team (to the side of them, diagonally, etc).
- Players must dribble around a hoop before returning home.

Technical Development (15 minutes)

North, South, East, West:

Organization:

- Mark an area approximately 15m. x 15m., depending on the number of players. Four goals, about three paces in width, are added on each side of the area. Begin by only using the North and south goals so as not to confuse the children. When the coach shouts "North" the players must dribble through the North goal and then make their way around the outside of the field to come back in through the South goal. Once they become comfortable with North and South then introduce East and West. If they go through the East goal they must make their way around to re-enter through the West goal, and vice-versa.
- Parents and children pass the ball to each other as they move around the area until the coach shouts "North" and then the parents remain inside the area while the children dribble through the appropriate goal and:
 1. Dribble the ball around the outside in a clockwise direction and back into the area through the opposite goal and resume passing the ball with their parent.
 2. As above but in a counter-clockwise direction.
 3. As above but coach shouts East and the players dribble the ball in a clockwise direction around the outside.
 4. As above but in a counter-clockwise direction.
 5. When coach shouts a goal (ie, South) half of the players must dribble the ball in a clockwise direction and half in the opposite direction.
 6. Vary the commands and have fun with the players.



Coach's Big Challenge!

Can you kick the soccer ball out of your hands and into the air so that your parent can catch it?
Can you do it using the right foot and then the left foot?
Take a few minutes to practice.



Be ready to kick as you let go of the ball. Kick it high!

Small-Sided Game (15mins)

Grid size: 15m x 15m
Format: 3 v 3

Session End



TEMPLATE FOR U4 PROGRAM

LESSON PLANS OUTLINE

OBJECTIVES OF THE SESSION

While the overall objective of each session is to provide "soccer fun" for child and parent alike, underlying each session will be the development and learning. These will be presented in a fun way to give the opportunity for:

1. Pure skills development (kicking, shooting, dribbling, control, handling, etc.).
2. Developing "game savvy" (knowledge of the game and how to take advantage, i.e., rules and game-smarts such as cooperation, field perimeters, ball in and out of play, what a goal is, how a mini-soccer game is played, restarts, when and where can the hands be used, etc.)
3. In all sessions children need to be encouraged, and given the opportunity, to kick, dribble and control the ball with both feet. "Two-footedness" should be the hallmark of a child's development.

At the end of each session, practical and theoretical homework can be assigned by Leaders.

45-60 minute (maximum) session.

1. CATCH & KICK

This is about five minutes of fun and un-pressured time when child and parent play together. Notes in the "Let Them Play" Handbook will explain how this time should be approached. The overall aim is for parent and child to PLAY together in a pure fun way for 5 to 10 minutes before the "formal" program commences.

2. LET'S GO!

This is the collective phase of 8-10 minutes of fun games and activities that develop the individual skills of the game. Led by the Leader with the involvement and assistance of parents.

3. TIME OUT!

At the end of the Let's Go! introductory phase — all take a water break.

4. HERE WE GO AGAIN!

This is the "game savvy" segment where one or more aspects of the playing of soccer are presented and learned. For example:

- When the ball is out of play
- What a goal is
- The field perimeter
- Throw-ins
- Goal kicks
- Cooperation, etc.

The "game savvy" is also enacted in a fun, learning way.

5. HALF-TIME!

The whistle blows for half-time and a water (perhaps, snack) break before the Grand Finale.

6. THE BIG GAME!

Based on a modified format that will ultimately lead to 3-vs-3 small-sided game. The modified games must take into account an even greater need for active involvement and change of pace/activity than what is required for older children.

7. HOMEWORK!

Assigned from what was learnt. Such as improve juggling.

8. THE CHEER!

Finally the group disperses with the team cheer. Something like this...

- Circle with everyone holding hands and do the wave
- Then the cheer
- "One, Two, Three -- Gooooooooooooooooo!"
- On the word "Goal!" everyone together throws both arms above the head.

REINFORCEMENT & MAINTENANCE (R & M)

It's important that the skills and "game savvy" learned in earlier sessions are given the opportunity for further development and maintenance in each session. So the amount of completely new learning needs to be balanced with the time needed for reinforcement. It may only need a quick reminder...i.e. "When is the ball out of play?" — or have skills already learned incorporated in a game which allows the required reinforcement and practice.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Throughout the "Let Them Play" Program, — a time when individual experience soccer creativity is shown and experimented by young kids e.g., stopping the ball with the sole of the foot, turning the ball with the outside of the foot, faking to go one way and then going another, passing the foot over the ball and cutting in another direction, faking to kick and then bursting away on a dribble.

CHEERFUL GOOD-BYE!

The final cheer to finish the session can be developed or customized by the Leader(es), parents and the children.

Learn to play... play to learn!