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Becoming a great coach takes time, effort, and open-mindedness. In order to give kids the best possible environment to enjoy the game and develop, we must plan our sessions carefully; connect with our players and get to know them as individuals; deliver practices that are fun and engaging; review those sessions and consider ways to improve them; and create a harmonious atmosphere within our club where coaches, players, parents, staff, and volunteers all work together in partnership.

This may seem daunting for people near the start of their coaching journey, but we can make this process easier by breaking it down and taking it one step at a time. This guide examines the fundamentals of junior soccer coaching, (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/an-introduction-to-coaching-kids-soccer-a-comprehensive-course-for-youth-soccer-coaches/) lays the foundations for further learning, and explains how we can support young players in organized sport.

In this article

The fundamental principles of youth soccer coaching

Getting started: The essentials for first-time soccer coaches

Session planning

Coaching soccer on the grass: How to deliver a session

Reviewing your session

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The fundamental principles of youth soccer coaching

Make practice fun

If you're wondering how to be a good youth soccer coach, creating practices that are fun is a great place to start. We want to help children fall in love with soccer and forge a path towards lifelong participation in the game, and this means giving them an environment where they can enjoy themselves.

"If you can make them love the game, then you can teach them the game (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/every-moment-matters-you-coach-a-person-not-a-sport/)," says Kris Van Der Haegen, Director of Coach Education at the Belgium FA. By moving away from soccer coaching drills where most of the decision-making is removed, we can create practices based upon games, where kids can experiment, be creative, and problem-solve without fear of failing (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/fighting-the-fear-factor/).

Practices that resemble the game of soccer and provide variation — activities that have goals, opposition, or an attack and defense — make sessions more enjoyable for players. And this in turn makes it easier for kids to learn, makes them excited to play and develop, and increases their likelihood of staying in the game for life.

Take a player-centered approach to coaching

"It's not about the team, it's about the individual; it's just all about them," says Rob Sherman, Former Technical Director at Football Australia. As coaches, we should get to know all of the kids on our team (as people, not just soccer players) (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/coach-the-person-not-the-player/) and tailor our approach to meet their individual needs.

(https://playerdevelopments/edited is different, and they all learn and process information in different

coaching weaks. The value different lives away from soccer, are influenced by different

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from us. Likewise, the aspects of their game that they need, or want, to work on

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will be unique.

 $\frac{\text{website@utm Miplemy projected approach is helping kids to improve their}{\text{to-socetarengths while strengthening areas of weakness}}$

(https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/the-player-centred-approach/). This means redefining success so that development is prioritized over results and league tables (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/masterclass-discussions-redefining-success-an-individual-approach-to-player-development/), and helping players to appreciate what this looks like.

As we get to know our players, we can work with them to create individual targets that will form the basis of their own individual development plans. Objectives can be as simple as trying to switch the play more often in games or successfully dribbling the ball a certain number of times. By considering factors like a player's age, ability, skill set, level of confidence, and perhaps the position they play, we can create appropriate challenges that help kids to develop, and teach them to recognize their own improvement.

Allow kids to learn through play

The importance of play shouldn't be underestimated. Studies have found that over 70% of young athletes stop playing competitive sport by the age of 14 (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/let-them-play/), often due to a loss of interest or enjoyment. Letting kids learn through play is both a vital part of making soccer fun and encouraging lifelong participation, and an incredibly effective way to help them develop.

"If the training situations never vary in rhythm, complexity, intensity or physical demand, the players never have to react to novelty or uncertainty or insecurity," explains Tom Turner, USA National Instructor and member of the US Soccer National Coaching Committee. But by adding variability to our practices, we encourage children to think, move, and find solutions in different ways (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/tom-turner-play/).

"We use play a lot, for a number of different reasons," adds Dr. Craig Harrison, Research Fellow at Auckland University of Technology and expert in the field of youth athlete development. "From a fundamentally human point of view, play is how young people learn (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/masterclass-discussions-purposeful-play-with-dr-craig-harrison/)... It also provides us an opportunity to look into how kids move, how they solve different problems."

Learning environments that are centered on play challenge kids and promote creativity, helping them to grow through adversity (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/the-power-of-play/). And this can have huge benefits for their long-term development.

Keep kids active throughout the training session

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coaching & later later and get bored easily," explains Rob Sherman. "They don't want to (https://playerdevelopmenteralization foreyer, they don't want to shouting, no information during the practice; as long as it looks like the game, they ill enjoy it."

website but Many websites, we should aim to one minute or less $\underline{\text{to-socata}}$ maintain "ball rolling" time for at least 70% of the session

COACHING&UTM (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/masterclass-discussions-developing-the-individual-with-arthur-brammer/). By minimizing set-up time and coaching interventions during training, as well as using simple, game-like practices that flow and are easy for our players to understand, we can keep kids active and engaged, and maximize their learning opportunities.

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Getting started: The essentials for first-time soccer coaches

Before we start planning our session, it helps to note the equipment and information we'll need in order to run it effectively:

Essential equipment

- Cones
- Bibs (two sets)
- Balls (of the right size for the age group you're coaching)
- · Soccer ball pump
- First aid kit
- A list of parents' phone numbers
- Emergency protocols in the event of injuries or unexpected incidents

Supplementary equipment

• A whiteboard and magnets

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We should try to provide enough balls for players to have one each — helping us to maximize "ball rolling" time — and ensure that they're pumped up. Flat

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Whiteboards and tablets can be used to demonstrate new practices to players, with these kinds of visual aids often helping them to understand new activities and be ready to play more quickly, once again increasing the time that kids are active.

Session planning

Organization is an essential part of being an effective coach. If we want our players to work hard and be respectful during training, it's only fair that we show them the same respect by delivering well-organized sessions. Good planning will reduce the time kids spend listening to instructions, maximize playing time, and give our practices purpose. This doesn't mean we have to plan complicated practices, it is simply a case of being clear on how the session will work.

A good starting point is to identify a topic or theme (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/qa-what-is-your-planning-process/). Whether our topic is dribbling, defending, counter-attacking, or passing and receiving for example, we can use this as a framework for designing our session.

The next step is considering our key objectives. For instance, we might focus more on players in a certain position one week and players in another position the next. The skill is in making specific players or learning outcomes the focal point of the practice while still engaging and challenging all of our players. For example, we may have a central-midfielder who's working on playing split passes; while focusing on this, we can still have other midfielders pressing, wingers practicing their movement off the ball, and defenders working on tracking runs.

Before planning the session, it helps to think about how many players we're working with, and what areas they're trying to develop; whether we're working alone or with an assistant; and if we're going to work with the whole group or split it up. Then, knowing our topic and our key objectives, we have a framework around which to design our session.

Coaching soccer on the grass: How to deliver a session

Once we have a session plan, we need to map it out on the grass for our players. If we don't have much set-up time, we can use arrival activities like small-sided games or ball-mastery challenges to engage players while we prepare the area of

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For instance, we may intend to use half a pitch for our game, but set up smaller positional games or possessional activities within that space as a lead-in activity, allowing us to move quickly from one practice to another.

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TO-SOCKWE should also consider pitch geography and how players will transfer their COACHINGRUTM UNDERSTANDING from practice to a game. This means locating practices in the COTE CONTROL OF THE PROPERTY OF TH

Practices with realistic pitch geography are likelier to provide triggers that players will recognize when they find themselves in similar situations on game day, helping them to transfer knowledge from training sessions to matches.

How we deliver our session also has a huge impact on "ball rolling" time; if we're successful in our planning and delivery, we can keep children active throughout practice and minimize the time they spend waiting or listening to instructions. This is especially important when coaching players in the Foundation Phase (ages 8-12), when we should aim to maximize the time they spend on the ball and ensure that at least 50% of the group is working at all times.

By allowing players to problem-solve and discover solutions to challenges on their own, we can avoid disrupting the session by 'over-coaching. This will not only help the practice flow, but give kids the freedom to make choices based on what they see and feel (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/coaching-in-the-grey/), empowering players and improving their decision-making.

Finally, we should be prepared to deviate from our plan when required. "As you develop as a coach, you become a lot more adaptable," says PDP Co-Founder Dave Wright. "If things go wrong, change them. Don't just stick with a session because that's what's down on the plan. Don't be afraid to be adaptable or vulnerable in front of your players."

Sometimes it will take longer for players to achieve the desired outcome or get what they need out of a practice. When this happens, it's okay to extend that practice so that they can receive the intended benefit, even if it means shortening one of our other practices or saving it for another session.

Having a framework for our sessions is important. But it's equally important to be adaptable and let our players' needs at a particular moment govern how we deliver our practice.

Reviewing your session

As coaches, we should aim to spend an equal amount of time planning, delivering, and reviewing our sessions (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/unit-2-delivery-review-and-reflection/).

(https://playerdevelopmentaring.com/practices is crucial to our own development and identifying ways

coaching to improve fluture sessions for our players, while reviewing a practice with our

(https://playerdevelopmentaryers.com/effective.way.to.help.them.consolidate what they've learned.

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"An old-school way [to review a session] would be the coach de-briefing," says

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PDP Technical Advisor Dan Wright, "but a more powerful way would be the

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Alternatively, we might ask another coach to observe one of our sessions and give a peer review, or we may review the players and how we think the session impacted them. This could mean assessing whether we affected the individuals we were aiming to affect, or how interested and engaged the players were; or we may consider how kids coped with the physical load of the practice, or how often they understood what we were asking of them or achieved the outcome we were aiming for.

"There's a lot of satisfaction in actually reviewing a session properly and then going back, changing it, implementing those changes, and seeing the benefits of how a session can work better," says Dave Wright. "Because we all have bad sessions, we all come up with practices that look good on paper and then don't work on the grass, and that's perfectly normal. We all have those evenings when it doesn't quite work out, so it's important to reflect on the good, reflect on the bad, and really try to implement that model of reviewing and improving."

Soccer coaching and communication: How to connect with your players

If we want to take a player-centered approach to coaching, it's vital that we connect with our players and get to know them as individuals. Our ability to do this hinges on how we communicate.

As coaches, there are various communication techniques we can use when working with our players. There is no single method that works best — we must choose our approach based on the individual(s) we're talking to and the context of the situation. Some of the more popular methods include:

- Question and answer: through effective and thought-provoking questioning (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/what-is-the-game-asking-you-to-do/), we can encourage our players to work out specific answers or solutions on their own.
- **Guided discovery:** this means letting players try new things and guiding them towards discovering solutions through our session design. Guided discovery requires patience, but helps kids to develop as independent problem-solvers.
- **Trial and error:** the key to trial and error is allowing players to fail as they try new techniques and develop new skills, letting them know that it's okay to fail and encouraging them throughout the learning process.

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It's worth remembering that we don't necessarily need to stop the session to speak to a player; we can often make our point with a quick word on the run or after practice so that we don't disrupt kids when they're in the flow of a game and immersed in their own learning experience.

"The drip-feeding of information and the timing of its delivery is crucial (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/silence-is-golden/)," writes Dave Wright. "Information overload is something that even the most experienced coaches can be guilty of, and so we should all constantly reflect on how much we squeeze into a session... It has been stated that 90% of a player's development is about what learning is going on at their end, and only 10% is about what the coach is doing at the time."

Similarly, we should carefully consider the tone and language we use (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/masterclass-discussions-coaching-with-empathy-communicating-with-purpose/), keeping our communication concise and upbeat (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/140-character-coaching/), and adapting it to suit our players. We also need to be good listeners. In order to add value and effectively deliver information to our players, we must be aware of them and their needs (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/the-lone-wolf/), appreciate that all children are different, and tailor our approach so that every kid we coach feels valued and supported.

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Running a youth soccer team

The key to a well-run youth soccer club is an effective partnership between soccer coaches, a governance or leadership team that provides direction, and a collective of staff and/or volunteers (https://playerdevelopmentproject.com/thesecrets-of-successful-clubs/) to support club operations.

(https://playerdevelopmeriascolettember of this Off-Field Team should have clearly defined roles and coaching tempons bilities with governance and operational teams supporting coaches, (https://playerdevelopmeriasches.supporting.the.players.The.governance team at most grassroots clubs is comprised of volunteer directors whose responsibilities will include budgeting, arranging funding, and setting the overarching direction of the club.

websiterum nepherwersher with with the player and equally important role, covering tasks to social player registration, team registration in leagues and tournaments, fee coaching collection, field and facility reservation, and the procurement of equipment and uniforms. In many clubs, these roles are filled by parents who, alongside the groundsman, welfare officer, and players, make up the most important people in any club.

As coaches, we should work with all staff and volunteers to implement our club's vision and provide the best possible sporting and educational environment for our players.

Soccer coaching 101: The key points

- When it comes to coaching soccer basics, remember the four fundamental principles: make practice fun; take a player-centered approach; let kids learn through play; and keep players active throughout your sessions.
- Organization is key to being an effective coach. By planning our sessions, we can reduce the time that players spend waiting or listening to instructions, increase "ball rolling" time, and maximize their learning opportunities.
- When planning our session, it helps to begin with a theme and a set of objectives. This can provide a framework for our session design.
- Consider pitch geography when setting up practices. By giving players realistic distances and areas of the pitch to work with, we can make it easier for them to transfer their knowledge to game day.
- Reviewing a session is just as important as planning and delivering it.
 Reviewing a practice can help us to become a better coach, improve future training sessions, identify areas we can work on with individual players, and even help players to consolidate their own learning.
- Effective communication is an essential part of coaching. We should carefully consider the best tone and language to adopt with our players, be good listeners, and be careful not to overload them with information.
- As coaches, our job is to give players the best experience we can. This means
 providing them with an environment where they can enjoy playing soccer,
 explore, learn, and develop without fear of failing, and fall in love with the
 game.

(https://playerdevelopment roect.com) Smith (https://playerdevelopment roect.com) Smith is a former football coach and lead writer for PDP. Ajay specialises in taking complex topics and treaking them down into simple, valuable guides for coaches.

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