



# Player Development

## What is "Developmentally Appropriate" for your players?

Basic characteristics for youth players are listed below. The material presented here is a basic outline derived from the United States Soccer Federation National Coaching Program.

### U6 Players

Kids at this age do not "play soccer": they play while at soccer. Practices must be kept active with fun, imaginative games. Each player works with his or her own ball for most of the practice. Kids need generous praise. Curiosity should be stimulated through games of their own devising. Look for successes; manufacturer accomplishments. Coach should exert minimal pressure. Provide an environment where kids can experiment and learn. The concept of team is non-existent at this age. Instead of 3 vs. 3, it is really 1 vs. 5! Practices shouldn't last longer than 45 minutes (60 minutes with good breaks). Focus on dribbling and fundamental movement skills (running, leaping, hopping, bending, stretching, twisting, throwing, catching, and kicking). In practice players should never wait in a line more than 30 seconds. They should not run laps. The coach should not lecture for long periods of time. Keep players active in the practice. Develop a "flow" in which a flurry of activity is followed by short rests or less demanding activities. Let players demonstrate skills or accomplishments. Players will learn by copying other players. Kids at this age barely understand rules and boundaries (sidelines). Don't emphasize boundaries in your practices or games. Keep the rules very simple.

### U8 Players

Children at this age still have fragile self-image. They become more concerned what others think. Players are able to cooperate with a partner. Most of practice is done with one ball per person or one ball per pair. Practices should focus on games and problem solving. U8's start to understand rules and concepts of fairness. Practice should be no longer than 60-75 minutes. Players believe that "if I try hard, then I performed well", regardless of actual performance. Effort equals performance. They still only have a limited ability to attend to more than one task at a time: controlling or dribbling a ball, for example, will take most of the concentration capacity thereby leaving little or

no room for making tactical decisions. Players like to "show off" for adults and other players: "Watch me. Watch me. Watch me." Again using players to demonstrate or show skills is an effective way to teach other players (as others will try copying the action)

### **U10 Players**

Motor skills are becoming more refined. A great diversity in maturity and playing ability is apparent. The players have a better sense of reality vs. fiction but still like imaginative games (roll playing). U10's demonstrate more responsibility (will bring own ball, water, choose shirt, etc.). They are a little more aware of their play or performance. Players will recognize basic tactical concepts (width, depth, and support). They have more leg strength which means more power. Passing becomes a real part of the game. Repeating technique (kicking, receiving) is very important but must be done in a dynamic, interactive environment (no drills, no lines). Explanations must be brief and concise as for all kids. Players are able to work in small groups during practices. Practice activities should focus on small groups working together to solve problems. Coach can also include games with one player one ball and pair activities. Practice lasts 75-90 minutes max.

### **U12 Players**

This is a critical age for drop out. Players decide their own participation not solely the will of the parents. Overuse injuries and burnout are associated with high-intensity programs that fail to stress skill development and learning enjoyment. The coach not teaching or not making practices fun turn kids away from the game. Players can start to benefit from limited strength building activities. They also begin to develop abilities to sustain complex coordinated skill sequences. Players will question everything, and will begin to think in hypothetical situations. Practices should focus on problem solving while moving, while playing the game of soccer (or derivations of the game). Players decide which direction to go, whether to pass or dribble, whom to pass to, and so on. Peer pressure is significant. Team building becomes a very important consideration for the coach.