

# ONTARIO SOCCER ASSOCIATION

## Grassroots Soccer - Provincial Curriculum

FOR COACHES OF FUNDAMENTALS PLAYERS

FUNDAMENTALS



L.T.P.D.  
long term player development



VERSION 1



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# Introduction

This LTPD resource has been created for Districts, Academies, Clubs and coaches to follow a provincial coaching curriculum that is physical literacy stage-specific for players from u4 to u12.

The information within this document will allow members to create programs and coaching sessions that are appropriate for the development stage of each player. By implementing the curriculum, along with good coaching methodology, players will benefit from and enjoy practice sessions more. All sessions will focus on player development in a low stress, supportive, positive, fun filled and safe environment. By coaches creating this environment the players will be excited to learn and be anxious to return.

In general terms a curriculum consists of everything that promotes technical, personal, social and physical development of the players. In addition to activity examples and sample session plans it includes approaches to teaching and learning. The curriculum helps to remove the 'guess work' in choosing developmentally appropriate content and enables coaches to work on their methodology and coaching style.

## Coaching Philosophy

Coaches of players in the Physical Literacy stream will benefit from a sound, well thought out coaching philosophy. We would strongly recommend that coaches follow a "player centred" coaching philosophy. Player centred coaching allows the player to make decisions within the practice session and/or game. The coach has to be confident enough to empower his/her players to become assured decision-makers during their session. As soccer is a game based on making numerous decisions it's vitally important that the coach allows the young player to practice and develop the decisions that they make. Initially many young players decisions will be unsuccessful but only through support, time and patience, will our young players develop the skill to make better decisions.

**“To apply the future game philosophy we need coaches who can develop environments in which players are encouraged to be creative and expressive without the fear of failure.”**

*Sir Trevor Brooking*  
*FA Director of Football Development*

# Physical Literacy Complimentary Sports

Sports can be classified as early or late specialization, and the seven stages of LTPD are based on this concept. Acrobatic and artistic sports such as figure skating, diving and gymnastics are early specialisation sports while other sports such as basketball and soccer are late specialization sports.

Because soccer is a late specialization sport, LTPD actively discourages early specialization (i.e. prior to the age of 10 years) since premature specialization contributes to imbalanced physical development, overuse injuries, early

burn out and inadequate development of movement and sport skills.

The first three stages of LTPD, Active Start, FUNdamentals and Learn to Train, encourages physical literacy for all players, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The diagram below shows examples of sports and activities (not exhaustive) that are complimentary and will support physical literacy and soccer. Soccer volume can increase but participation in other sports is important to all round balanced athletic development.

## THE CANADIAN PHYSICAL LITERACY FAB FIVE



*Promoting full physical literacy by learning fundamental movement skills and fundamental sports skills on land, in the air, in water, on ice and on snow.*

## COMPLIMENTARY ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING TO TRAIN



*Each category has a unique and collective impact on all-around development and it is important that children ages 4-12 sample activities from all three.*

# Four Corner Development Model

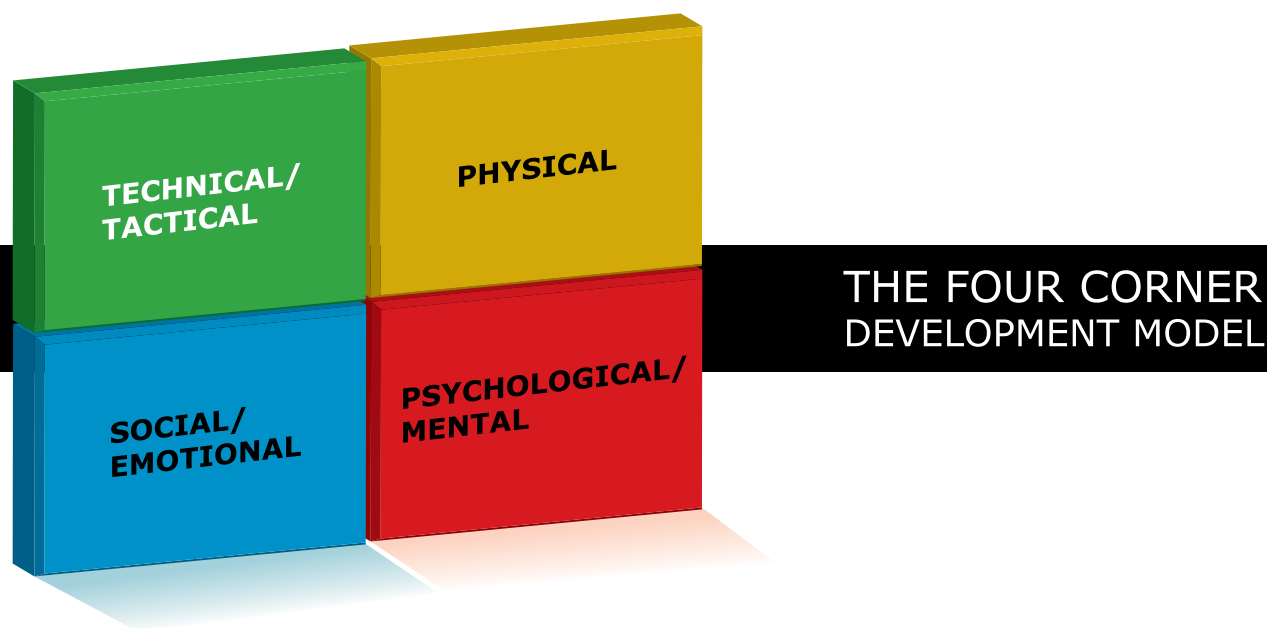
The Four Corner LTPD model consists of technical, psychological, physical and social/emotional components. Each corner of the model reflects a wide aspect of a player's development that has to be considered. The gradual progressive development of players is fundamental to the enjoyment, technical competency and retention in the game. The Four Corner approach places the player at the center of the development process with soccer experiences that meet the four key needs of the player.

Although priorities will vary during the player's different ages and phases of maturity, the model provides a basic framework for coaches to work within. In addition to the four main components, there are a number of additional 'contributions' from a wide number of people, such as parents, teachers, schools and local clubs. The model is deliberately interlinked, which means that activity in any one corner will produce a reaction throughout all aspects of the model. For example, a practice technique may impact physical balance and co-ordination while producing

increased confidence and enhanced social standing within the group. The key message to coaches is not to consider any of the programme's aspects in isolation.

As the development pathway for each individual player is unique and diverse, the needs of each player will ebb and flow in all of the 4 corners. And, whilst the need for added support for some players will be minimal, others will require much more applied and specific support.

A player's performance in practice and matches can be influenced by the following factors, nearly all of which need to be considered when forming an opinion of a player's progress and true ability: date of birth, relative to the rest of the group; body types; adolescent growth spurt in all the four corners; physical maturity; psychological maturity; social maturity; previous experience; opposition; position suitability; instructions given to the player; and recent playing activity.



*The Four Corner development model is referenced throughout this resource using the colour codes found above in the diagram. Tactical information is shown using white.*

# TECHNICAL/TACTICAL:

Players improve by playing lots of soccer and being active in other complementary sports and activities. That said, without a skilled mix of guidance, challenge, appropriate questioning, demonstration and teaching, it's unlikely that players will reach their true potential.

## TIPS FOR TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Use the coaching activity to challenge and develop players technically. Encourage players to try new skills.
- Appropriate challenges may be set for the whole group or for individuals within the group. For example in a passing practice some players may be challenged to play one-touch passes whenever they think it's appropriate.
- When appropriate, practice activity should replicate the demands of the game, encouraging players to think and make decisions just as they would in a game. Clever practice design should allow players to repeat and re-visit elements of the game without experiencing boredom.

# PHYSICAL:

To become an effective soccer player there are basic physical movement skills that need to be developed. Agility, balance, coordination, and speed (ABC'S) are all essential qualities for players; between the ages of 4-12 young players have a "window of opportunity" to develop these attributes.

Addressing the state of physical literacy of children is one of the biggest challenges we currently face in society and coaches should help communicate the benefits of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

## TIPS FOR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Children are not mini adults and shouldn't be subjected to running laps of the field and doing push ups.
- Through well-designed practice all coaching activities can include physical outcomes.
- A shooting practice may include a physical challenge which is realistic to the demands of the game. E.g. a defender and an attacker may have to turn and race onto a through ball before taking a shot at goal. In this way the players are working on turning, acceleration and deceleration as well as the technical elements of the exercise.
- Coaches working with young players should be aware of the key windows for physical development and which aspects of a players development can be improved and when.
- Appropriate movement skills such as tag games and activities which develop agility, balance and coordination should be encouraged through enjoyable games.
- Don't expect too much from young players too soon!

# PSYCHOLOGICAL/MENTAL:

Creating learning environments that challenge players to be imaginative, creative and reflect on their performance—both during and after practice/game—is fundamental to the development of the future player. Coaches should adopt different coaching styles and methods to meet the individual needs of young players, understanding that there is more than one way for players to learn the game.

## TIPS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Use different methods to communicate with different types of learners.
- **Visual (seeing):** tactics boards, posters, diagrams, cue and prompt cards as well as arrangements of cones on the pitch are some ways in which coaches can communicate with players visually.
- **Auditory (hearing):** As well as speaking with the players and asking questions, coaches can encourage players to discuss aspects of the game in pairs, small groups and also with the whole group. Through communication with others, players can help solve game-related problems and learn more about the game.
- **Kinaesthetic (doing):** physically 'walking through' positional arrangements and freeze-framing parts of the game can help paint pictures in the mind of the players and contribute to the understanding of the game.
- Help players learn the game and develop their decision-making skills by setting game-related problems for players to solve. For example "in this passing practice try and turn with no-touches whenever possible; try and work out when you will be able to do this and when you won't"

# SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL:

Playing soccer can help children learn many life skills: cooperation, teamwork, communication and friendship are some of the benefits of joining a team and playing the game. To allow these social skills to develop, players should be allowed a safe and supportive environment and given encouragement to learn the game.

## TIPS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Coaches should strive to create a positive environment which is welcoming for players both during games and training. How you treat your players is crucial to ensuring this is positive and fulfilling for the young player.
- Players should be praised and recognised for effort and endeavour as well as ability. This will highlight the process of learning and striving to get better rather than just the final outcome.
- As coaches are in a significant position of influence with their players it is important to give consideration to the type of role-model you are. What are your values and beliefs and how is this demonstrated in your behaviour?

*The relationship between the coach and the players is of a significant importance. The ability of a coach to establish a rapport with the players will accelerate the learning process. Coaches should be adaptable and flexible in their coaching methods, changing to the need of the individual player.*

## **COACHING METHODS**

When planning a coaching session the coach should consider the most appropriate coaching method for the group of players that they are working with and the outcome they wish to achieve.

The “coaching methods” table below outlines a range of approaches that can be used to meet players’ individual needs. The use of coaching methods will vary due to the ever-changing process of coaching. Some of the key factors coaches should consider when planning their coaching methods are;

- The group of players/individual player the coach is working with
- The intended outcome of the practice
- The technical content of the practice

Mastery of the different coaching methods and communication styles is the mark of a gifted coach and will be an essential requirement for a coach.

<b>CONTINUUM</b>					
<b>Coaching Method</b>	<b>Command</b>	<b>Question &amp; Answer</b>	<b>Observation &amp; Feedback</b>	<b>Guided Discovery</b>	<b>Trial &amp; Error</b>
Player/coach interventions	Coach tells and shows required solution	Coach leads with a question to gain a response from players	Coach and players observe	Coach asks a question or issues a challenge	Players &/or coach decide on a challenge
Example	“I want you to pass the ball to Rahim”	“Can you tell me who you could pass to here?”	“Let’s watch and see what happens”	“Can you show me how you could get the ball to Anna?”	“Try it for yourself...”
Description	Coach determines the outcomes in practice	Coach poses question & players offer a verbal solution	Players & coach observe & discuss feedback	Coach prompts and player offers a demonstration of their personal solution	Players are encouraged to find solutions with minimal support



# General Player Characteristics of Age Appropriate Development

Stage	Age	Characteristics
<b>Active Start</b>	<b>U4</b>	Players at this age have a very short attention span, they are very easily distracted. They all want to play with their ball, the toy. There is no sense of sharing toys, especially with strangers.
	<b>U5</b>	There is no ability yet for team play. As sharing is still an alien concept, passing the ball is not yet comfortable for them. They are only able to understand very simple rules.
<b>FUNDamentals</b>	<b>U6</b>	Able to understand very basic coaching info like stay in the area, attack in that direction etc. Learning through trial and error. Biggest challenge is learning to control the moving ball with their feet.
	<b>U7</b>	Players now understand that the game's purpose is to score more goals than their opponents. Still a lot of individual play.
	<b>U8</b>	Players' understanding that acting with the ball purposefully will lead to success is developing. Combining basic motor skills with ball control is now encouraged.
<b>Learn to Train</b>	<b>U9</b>	Now playing on a 7v7 field the understanding of team play, direction and opponent is developing. Optimum age to work on soccer specific techniques and skills
	<b>U10</b>	More and more understanding and feeling for teamwork. Understanding of playing without the ball (running off the ball) develops.
	<b>U11</b>	Perfect mental and physical ability for developing motor skills. Preference for specific positions becomes clearer. Developing an understanding of individual roles in relation to team.
	<b>U12</b>	Likes to compete and compare. Socially aware, critical of own performance and that of ???others. Ideal mental and physical condition in this age group. Imitates idols.

**FOR MORE DETAILED PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS SEE EACH DEVELOPMENT STAGE'S INFORMATION PAGES**



# FUNdamentals

U6, U7 & U8

DEVELOPMENT STAGE	FUNdamentals		
TECHNICAL	U6	U7	U8
Dribbling	1	1	1
Shooting	1	1	1
Running with the ball	1	1	1
Ball control	3	1	1
Passing	3	3	1
Receiving	3	1	1
Heading	4	4	4
Shielding the ball	4	4	3
Crossing	4	4	3
Finishing	4	4	3
1v1 Defending	4	4	3
1v1 Attacking	3	3	2

DEVELOPMENT STAGE	FUNdamentals		
PHYSICAL	U6	U7	U8
Agility	2	2	1
Balance	3	2	1
Coordination	3	2	1
Stamina	4	4	3
Strength	3	3	3
Speed	2	1	1
Suppleness	3	3	3
Acceleration	3	2	2
Reaction	3	2	2
Basic Motor Skills	1	1	1
Perception	1	1	1
Awareness	1	1	1
Other Sports	1	1	1

DEVELOPMENT STAGE	FUNdamentals		
SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL	U6	U7	U8
Listening	2	2	1
Cooperation	2	2	1
Communication	1	1	1
Sharing	3	2	1
Problem-solving	3	2	2
Decision-making	3	2	1
Empathy	3	2	2
Patience	3	2	2
Respect/Discipline	2	1	1
Fair play/Honesty	3	2	1

DEVELOPMENT STAGE	FUNdamentals		
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ MENTAL	U6	U7	U8
Motivation	1	1	1
Self Confidence	1	1	1
Competitiveness	4	3	2
Concentration	3	3	3
Commitment	4	3	2
Self-Control	3	3	2
Determination	3	3	2

PRIORITY KEY	1 = HIGH	2 = MID	3 = LOW	4 = NOT APPLICABLE
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The physical attributes indicated below should be introduced and developed through FUN games and activities. Continue with development of physical skills introduced in the Active Start phase, i.e. running, jumping, hopping, skipping, throwing, catching etc.

### **AGILITY, BALANCE AND COORDINATION (ABC'S)**

can be developed during warm-ups, cool downs and games.

### **STAMINA (ENDURANCE)**

Very low priority. Developed through FUN activities and small sided games.

### **STRENGTH**

Very Low Priority but can be developed through FUN activities and games that work with the child's body weight (as opposed to weights and formal exercises)

### **SPEED**

1st window of speed trainability. Coaches should stimulate and encourage fast cadence of movement, developing linear, lateral and multi- directional speed using FUN games and exercises.

### **SUPPLENESS/FLEXIBILITY**

Introduce exercises that mimic movements that are required in sport e.g. dynamic stretching. Should include whole body movements, shoulders, trunk, hips, knees.

### **ACCELERATION**

Should be developed using FUN games that use acceleration as a part of the activity.

### **REACTION**

Can be introduced and developed in conjunction with Speed and Acceleration, in FUN games and activities.

### **BASIC MOTOR SKILLS**

As per Agility, Balance and Coordination introduce in FUN games and activities.

### **PERCEPTION AND AWARENESS**

Introduce and develop playing small-sided games

### **OTHER SPORTS**

As mentioned earlier in this resource, children should participate in other activities and sports to help FUNdamental movement skills.

*Kids will take a chance. If they don't know, they'll have a go. They are not frightened of being wrong. If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original. By the time they are adults most kids have lost this capacity, they have become frightened of being wrong! We are running education systems where mistakes are the worst things you can make. The result is that we are educating people out of their creative capacities"*

*Sir Ken Robinson  
Author, Professor, Education, Creativity and Innovation*

# FUNdamental Practice Activities

## BALL FAMILIARITY

### TIME FRAME

6 - 8 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Dribbling
- Lots of Touches on the ball
- Change of direction
- Working in Pairs
- Change of Speed
- FUN!

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Dribbling, shooting

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, celebrating

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, Feel Safe

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

Players form pairs and find space inside the square with one ball between two. One player in each pair starts with the ball, while the other rests. Begin with the first player moving the ball around the area using feet and reacting to the coach commands:

1. Dribble as you weave in and out of the resting players.
2. On the signal run to the nearest cone dribble the ball in a circle around it using the inside of your foot. Keep alternating from right foot to left foot.
3. "change", players stop the ball, leave it and go and get another's ball and continue dribbling.
4. "legs", players try to pass the ball through the legs of as many resting partners as they can. (Coach ask all resting players to stand with their feet apart)

## SMALL SIDED GAME 2v1

### TIME FRAME

8 - 10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Running with the ball
- Dribbling towards goal
- Decision; when to pass when to shoot
- Shooting
- Rebound
- FUN!

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Dribbling, shooting

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, celebrating

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, Feel Safe

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

Divide the players into 2 groups and put them in two different coloured pinnies. Teams send 2 players to attack 1 defender. Game can be played with or without goalkeepers. Once one team has attacked the roles change and the other team gets to attack the goal. As players progress game can be played 2 v 2.

## NUMBERS GAME

### TIME FRAME

8 - 10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Dribbling with the ball
- Running with the ball
- Beating a Defender
- Defending
- Shooting
- FUN!

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Dribbling, shooting

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, celebrating

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, Feel Safe



### INSTRUCTION

Set up area depending on number of players. Separate players/parents into 2 teams as shown below. Number players 1,2,3,4,5 etc. Call out a number. The player called from each team enters into the field to challenge for the ball. The coach sends the ball in and players try to score on opposing side while defending their own side. Goalkeepers can be added to the game. Coach can call out more than one number to make 2 v 2 and 3 v 3 situations.

## FOUR GOAL GAME

### TIME FRAME

10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Passing
- Receiving
- Dribbling
- Finding Space
- Having Fun

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Passing, dribbling, shooting, finishing

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, cooperation

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, cooperation

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

Set up a 20m x 20m grid with 4 goals in the middle of each side. 2 teams consisting of equal numbers. Call out 2 or 3 players from each team to run onto the field and play against each other and try and score in any one of the 4goals until the coach says stop. At which time both groups return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another group 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. Progressions could involve assigning 2 nets to each team to defend and 2 to attack.

## TURN AND BURN

### TIME FRAME

10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Dribbling
- Running with the ball
- Turning
- Changing of Direction

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Passing, dribbling, shooting, finishing

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

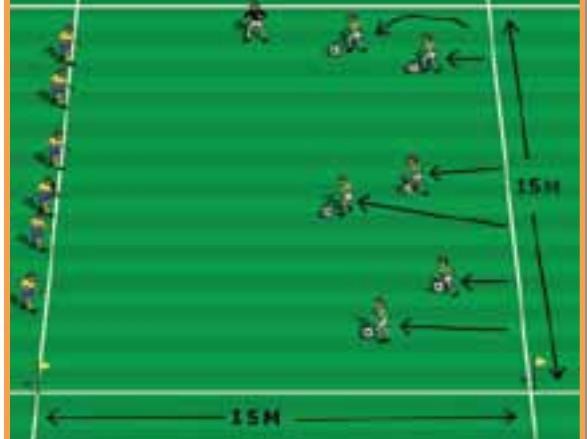
#### Social

Listening, communication, cooperation

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, cooperation

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

Divide players into two teams – put them in different colored pinnis One team starts on one end of the grid with a ball each. Objective is for players with the ball to dribble towards the players without, who remain stationary. The coach shouts “Turn” and the players with the ball stop, turn and try to dribble back to their starting line. When the players with out the ball here the coach shout “Turn” he players without the ball can release and try and steal the balls of the opposing team before they get back over the safe line. Take turns having both teams being attackers/defenders. Do not eliminate players who lose their ball. Let them have another go.

## 3 GOAL GAME

### TIME FRAME

8 - 10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Running with the ball
- Shooting
- Passing
- Heads up
- Decision Making

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Passing, dribbling, shooting, finishing

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, cooperation

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, cooperation

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

4 teams of 3 players working in a 25m. x 15m. area. 3 teams line up in rows at one end of the playing area ready to attack the goal. The other team has 1 player in goal and 2 as target players, standing between two cones, as shown. The first team runs with the ball to the halfway line. The first player to cross the halfway line shoots at the goal. The 2nd player to cross the line can pass to whichever target player he/she wishes. The 3rd player across the line passes to the remaining target player. All 3 attacking players then change places with the GK and target players they shot at, or passed to. The goalkeeper/target players collect the balls and go to the back of the attacking teams and await their turn.

## FOUR HOUSES

### TIME FRAME

8 - 10 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Dribbling
- Turning
- Awareness
- Communication

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Passing, dribbling, shooting, finishing

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, cooperation

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, cooperation

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

Set up 4 outer houses and central with in the middle with all the balls, as shown. Split the team into 4 groups. Have 1 player from each house leave and retrieve one ball at a time from the middle and dribble it back to their house. The next player can then leave to do the same. Continue until all the balls from the middle have been retrieved. Count the balls to see which house collected the most. Progress to taking a ball from another House- left foot only- sole of the foot only.

## KING/QUEEN OF THE RING

### TIME FRAME

5 - 8 minutes

### EMPHASIS

- Keep ball close
- Dribbling
- Have Fun

### 4 CORNER CONTENT

#### Technical

Passing, dribbling, shooting, finishing

#### Tactical

Not applicable

#### Physical

Agility, balance, coordination, change of direction

#### Social

Listening, communication, cooperation

#### Psychological

Building Confidence, cooperation

### DIAGRAM



### INSTRUCTION

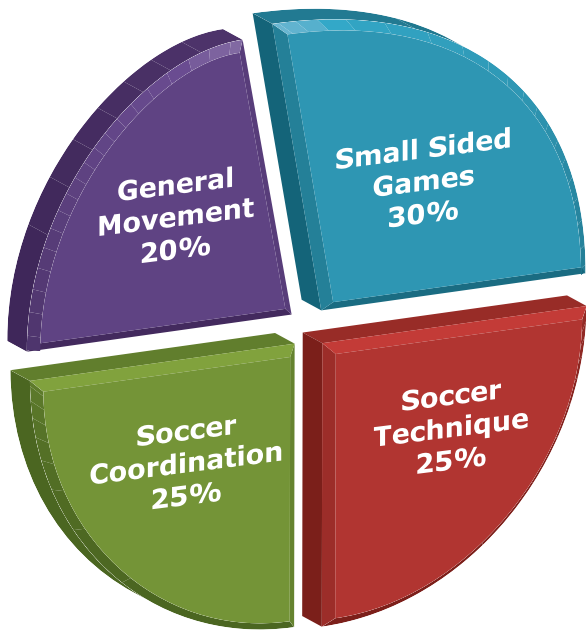
#### Organization

Players have a ball each. Players must keep ball within a defined area. Players are encouraged to kick other balls out of area. When a player gets their ball kick out of the grid, they must leave the grid and practice a skill (3 juggles, toe taps etc) and then they are allowed to return to grid.

#### Alternatives

Progress to last man standing (King/Queen of the ring). When a player gets their ball knocked out of the square they are now "out" and are not allowed to return to the grid. They remain outside the grid cheering for their team-mates. Continue this until everybody is knocked out and there is only one player left. This player becomes the King/Queen of the Ring.





FUNdamental PRACTICE OBJECTIVES	
<b>TECHNICAL</b>	Introduce basic individual techniques
<b>PHYSICAL</b>	Develop agility, balance, coordination with/without the ball
<b>TACTICAL</b>	No tactical objectives at this stage
<b>SOCIAL</b>	Increase confidence with the ball and playing with teammates
<b>PSYCHOLOGICAL</b>	Create positive, learning environment

FUNdamental PRACTICE CONTENT DISTRIBUTION			
<b>TECHNICAL</b>	<b>PHYSICAL</b>	<b>TACTICAL</b>	<b>SOCIAL</b>
50%	30%	0%	20%

	<b>U6</b>	<b>U7</b>	<b>U8</b>
Game	3v3	4v4 or 5v5	5v5
Practice	45 min max	45 min max	45 min max
Prc x/week	1	2	2



## FUNdamental PRACTICE PRIORITIES TECHNICAL/PHYSICAL

*"I enjoy seeing when youth teams try to play Futbol not just kick and run. Play with a purpose, not always just to win but develop the kids".*

*Dwayne De Rosario  
Canada National Team*

# FUNDAMENTAL PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS

Although sometimes we may mistake 6-8 year-olds for little adults, they are clearly not little adults. They have many years of childhood and development to enjoy before they are able to look at life in a similar fashion to adults. The reason for this is that they need time to intellectually, emotionally, and physically develop. Although we do live in the same world, when seen through our own eyes, the world both adults and children experience is quite different. In order to fully understand these wonderful children and to make practices run as smoothly and happily as possible, it is extremely important for us to understand the following characteristics about U6 children.

## TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U6 PLAYERS

- Focused on themselves – reality to them is solely based on what they see and feel
- Unable to see the world from another’s perspective – it is “the world according to me” time. Asking them to understand how someone else is seeing something or feels is unrealistic
- Everything is in the here and now – forget about the past and future, they live in the moment.
- Heating and cooling systems are less efficient than adults – we need to give frequent water breaks (every 8-10 minutes) or they may just run until they cannot run anymore
- Enjoy playing, not watching – they feel no enjoyment from watching others play when they could be playing too. Make sure every player has a ball in practice so every player is always playing
- Limited attention span (on average 15 seconds for listening, 10-12 minutes when engaged in a task) – keep your directions concise and to the point. When in an open environment, such as a park, their attention span will dwindle towards 10 seconds
- Effort is synonymous with performance – if they have tried hard, they believe they have done well. This is a wonderful quality and we should be supportive of their enthusiasm
- Active imaginations – if we utilize their imaginations in practice activities, they will love practice!
- Look for adult approval – watch how often players look to you for approval or to see if you are looking. Also be encouraging when they say “Coach, look what I can do!”
- Unable to think abstractly – asking them to think about spatial relations or tactical formations is unrealistic
- Typically have 2 speeds -- extremely fast and stopped
- Usually unaware of game scores – we should keep it that way
- Often like to fall down just because it is fun – they are just children having fun
- Often cannot identify left foot vs. right foot – they know which foot they use most and if they point to their feet you can help teach them left and right

Although U8 children may begin to be far more physically and maturationally advanced than U6 children, we must remain patient and not try to force them to develop too quickly. Dribbling still needs to be the primary focus of our efforts, though passing and shooting should be introduced at this age as well. U8 players tend to work best when in pairs and we should allow them to work in pairs (coach selected) often. Similar to the U6 children, we need to make sure that fun is a central theme in practice. Player development will occur most appropriately and expeditiously if all players are enjoying themselves

## **TYPICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF U8 PLAYERS**

- Tend to play well in pairs – unlike 6-7 year-olds; these children enjoy playing in pairs. Try to set up the pairs yourself to control the games and manage the personalities
- Are now able to take another’s perspective – they now have a sense of how others are feeling
- Still unable to think abstractly – still do not have this capability, be patient
- Heating and cooling system still less efficient than adults – still make sure to give frequent water breaks
- Still prefer playing to watching – keep everyone active during practice and remember, no lines
- Limited attention span (on average 15-20 seconds for listening, up to 20 minutes when engaged in a task) – this may vary greatly on any given day depending on school, diet, etc. Try to get a gauge each day and do not fight crankiness
- Have an understanding of time and sequence – they now understand “if I do this, then that happens”
- Many have incorporated a third or fourth speed into play – not all players, but many players now have incorporated a speed or two between stopped and as fast as possible
- Extremely aware of adult reactions – be very aware of your verbal and nonverbal reactions, as they look for your reaction frequently
- Seek out adult approval – be supportive when they ask about their performance or try to show you skills. They very much need reassurance and you need to help build their confidence to try new things at this age
- Begin to become aware of peer perception – a social order is beginning to develop. Be sensitive to this
- Wide range of abilities between children at this age – children all develop at varying paces. You may have an 8 year-old who seems more like a 10 year-old and one that seems more like a 6 year-old on the same team. Your challenge is to manage this range in your practice in a way that challenges each player at a level that is reasonable for that player
- Some will keep score – the competitive motors churn faster in some than others. Surely some parents are fueling the motors with their own. Regardless, we do not need to stress winning and losing at this age. Results should not be important at this age
- Beginning to develop motor memories – by attempting fundamental technical skills they are training their bodies to remember certain movements
- Less active imaginations than U6 players – still have active imaginations by adult standards, but some of the silliness that 6 year-olds allowed will not be appreciated by this group. Still use their imaginations; just watch their reactions to games to read how far you can go with things

## **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS – FUNDAMENTALS**

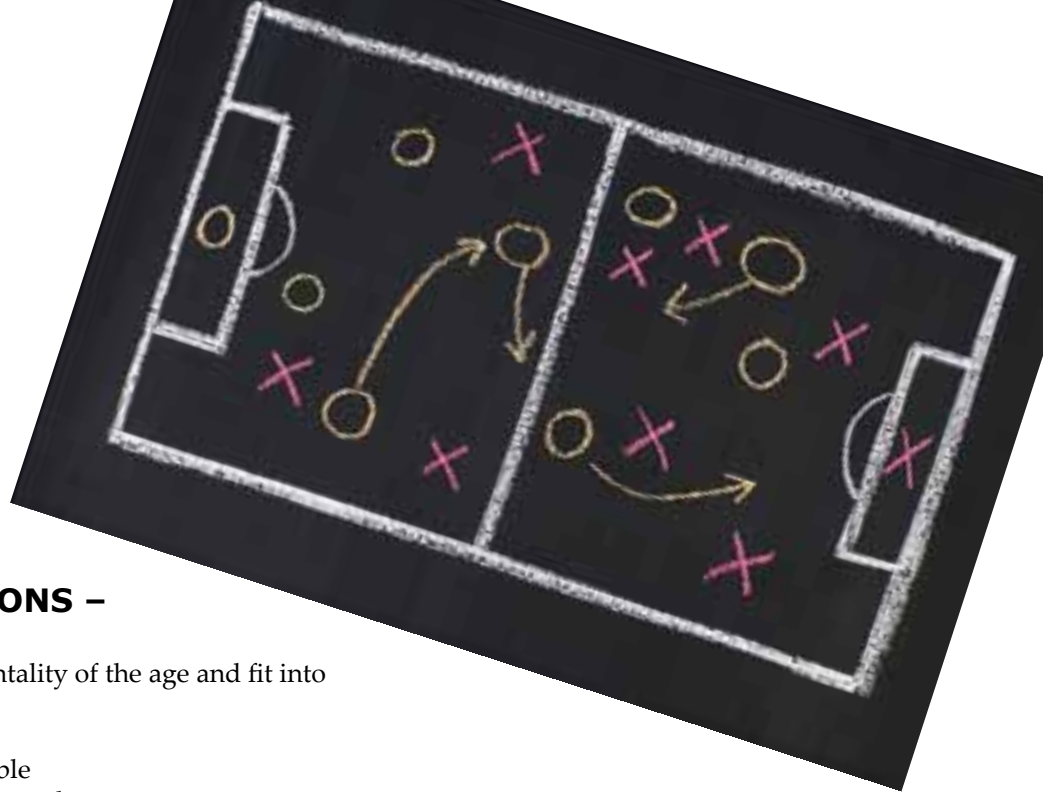
- Create a stimulating learning environment where the atmosphere is freedom and FUN
- Organize your practice to have all the children active, all of the time.
- Playing situations work best for teaching understanding and basic game sense
- Game formats can progress from 3v3 to 5v5 as the children grow
- During small-sided games everyone should play all positions.
- Let your players make decisions, expose them to working out problems and coming up with solutions.

## **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS – FUNDAMENTALS – U6**

- Individual Technical work, player and the ball
- General movements skills, jumping, running, hopping, skipping, should be incorporated into games and activities
- Introduction of basic skills (dribbling, running with the ball, etc.)
- Introduce play in one direction, going towards a goal or target
- Everybody with a ball as much as possible
- Comfortable moving the body and ball together
- Dribbling – feet - rolling the ball, pushing it, stopping it, introduction of surfaces, running with the ball
- Passing Introduction (limited) – short passing, inside of foot, right and left
- Receiving –with feet, from ground only
- Ball Mastery with more movement, creativity, and all surfaces
- Games, activities, exercises should always be fun with lots of movement and activity
- Small-sided games are fun and challenging, 1v 1- 2v2 – 3v3

## **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS – FUNDAMENTALS – U7**

- Individual Technical work, player and the ball
- Continue general movements skills, Jumping, running, hopping, skipping, should be incorporated into games and activities
- Everyone with a ball as much as possible
- Dribbling, running with the ball, striking the ball etc.
- Introduce play in one direction, going towards a goal or target
- Everybody with a ball as much as possible
- Comfortable moving the body and ball together
- Dribbling – feet – rolling the ball, pushing it, stopping it, introduction of surfaces, running with the ball
- Passing Introduction (limited) – short passing, inside of foot, right and left
- Receiving –with feet, right and left from ground only.
- Ball Mastery with more movement, creativity, and all surfaces of both feet
- Games, activities, exercises should always be fun with lots of movement and activity.
- Small-sided games are fun and challenging, 1v1- 2v2 – 3v3



## **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS – FUNDAMENTALS – U8**

- Individual Technical work: take the mentality of the age and fit into activities developing technique
- Dribbling, passing, shooting
- Everybody with a ball as much as possible
- Comfortable moving the body and ball together
- Dribbling – feet - rolling the ball, pushing it, stopping it, introduction of surfaces, running with the ball, intro of specific moves (fakes, feints and turns) using above skills
- Passing – inside of foot, outside of foot, under the ball, techniques with movement, head up
- Receiving – feet, thighs, chest, – catching, receiving ball w/feet, preparing
- Finishing – both feet, volleys – all very introductory and basic
- Tackling – Introduction -basic techniques, block tackle, toe poke
- Ball Mastery with more movement, creativity, and all surfaces
- Individual Tactics –they are starting to conceptualize, so just allow for games/activities bring out decision-making opportunities.
- Games, activities, exercises should mirror the game and tactical implications are within the game, but keep objectives on technical development.
- Small-sided games are fun and challenging, 1v1-2v2-3v3-4v4 and 5v5
- Simple Tactics – get away, keep ball, get ball back, and pass it – all focusing at an individual stage that is about all they can understand, with no pressure to play
- Basic goalkeeping introduction e.g. catching, diving, jumping - for all players

## **PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS – METHODOLOGY**

- Keep information brief and positive.
- Show them what you want. Demonstrate the activities and games
- Player Centred Coaching – let them make decisions, solve problems based on what they see and experience
- Keep the environment positive and happy
- Allow and encourage creativity and improvisation. Create the freedom to express themselves
- Keep the practices flowing, with limited stops
- Encourage and celebrate success
- Be flexible, allow the players to deviate and be creative.
- Keep it safe.

# FUNdamentals Coaching Measures

When the young players are moving from the FUNdamentals stage and are ready to progress to the Learn to Train Stage the coach should have exposed them to and taught them in the following Technical, Physical, Social and Psychological skills..

<b>TECHNICAL</b>		
Dribbling the ball	Right foot and left foot	Players are now introduced to dribbling at an opponent, introduce change of speed and direction with the head up
Shooting the ball	Right foot and left foot	Using both feet over short distances, work on accuracy
Running with the ball	Right foot and left Foot	Using both feet, towards goal, away from goal. Vary speeds with head/eyes up
Turning with the ball	Right foot and left foot	Using both feet, introduce inside and outside turns with head/eyes up
Receiving the ball	Right foot and left foot. Introduce thigh and chest	Players are now introduced to underhand served ball to control on thigh and chest. Introduction to inside and outside of both feet to receive
Passing the ball	Right and left foot	Over short distances using both feet

<b>PHYSICAL</b>		
Agility	Moving in quick controlled, movements	Jumping, hopping, skipping, twisting bounding can be incorporated into games and activities
Balance	Right and left foot	Balance is improving with body in a variety of positions, one foot, crouched, on toes, etc
Coordination	Using small-sided games	Ability to twist and turn, change direction keeping movements and body under control
Stamina	Using small-sided Games	Using fun small-sided games and technical activities, endurance will improve
Strength	No weights to be used	Using players own body weight can be incorporated into games
Speed	Multi Directional	Improvement in multi-directional, linear and lateral speed can be utilized during this stage
Suppleness/Flexibility	Dynamic Stretching	Utilize in warm up mimicking soccer movements/dynamic movement exercises
Acceleration	Activities and Exercises	Use fun games to introduce quick change of speed
Reaction	For a variety of starting positions	Reaction speeds improve from laying, sitting, crouching, standing, jogging positions

<b>SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL</b>		
Listening	Listen Quietly	Players will have an improved ability to listen to details. Continue to be brief with information
Cooperation	With Coach and teammates	Although still egocentric, players will start to cooperate at a basic level
Communication	Verbal Communication	Communication with teammates is improving, giving information and encouragement
Sharing	Sharing the ball and ideas	Players will now start to understand that passing can help them be successful
Problem-solving	Working out mistakes	Players will display a basic understanding of working through their mistakes to correct them
Decision-making	Game decisions	Starting to work out simple game-related decisions. Some may still need assistance
Empathy	Assisting others in games	Starting to assist others with their problems in games and activities
Patience	Patience with themselves and others	Displaying an increased ability to show patience with themselves and teammates as they work through mastering techniques and skills
Respect/Discipline		Players are able to respect other players' equipment and space. Behaviour is more social

PSYCHOLOGICAL/MENTAL		
Motivation	Fun, rewarding activities	Improved players' motivation, through involvement in fun, exciting, challenging and successful activities
Self Confidence	Safe and positive environment	Players are now willing to express themselves more. Not afraid to make mistakes
Competitiveness	Displaying desire to be successful	Players are displaying the desire to be successful in practice activities and small-sided games
Concentration	An ability to stay on task	Improved attention span, improved ability to stay on task for slightly longer periods
Commitment	Apply themselves at practice and completing activities	Players are happily attending the majority of practices and games. Will complete activities and exercises during practice.
Self-Control	In control of emotions	While in stressful situations, players are starting to show an improvement in controlling their emotions
Determination	Displays a determination to complete tasks	Starting to not give up easily, starting to display a determination to complete tasks

At the FUNdamental development stage it is again important for coaches to create the correct practice and game environment for the children. Practice sessions should be fun and active. The young players should also feel safe and engaged. One way the coach can start to assist in the young players thinking about and basic understanding of the game is to ask them questions during practice. The questions must be low order questions, simple enough that the children can understand and answer them. By asking the children questions about decisions they have made or may make, the players will start to think about the game and decisions they can make at a deeper level. By thinking more and working out the most basic of game challenges players will start to understand the game more. This will go a long way in assisting them in making decisions during a game.

This question and answer methodology, along with guided discovery helps to improve the learning environment for the players. It is strongly recommended that coaches adopt this style of coaching.

*Each young player is on their own unique journey of growth, maturity and change; all of which is difficult to predict; both in terms of when it starts, when it stops and what the final outcome will be.*

DO	DON'T
Appreciate that all young players are growing and maturing at a different rate	Mistake levels of physical maturity for maturity in other areas
Be patient, supportive and encouraging with ALL the players in your squad	Assume that the current success of a player is an indicator of ongoing proficiency
Understand that all some players need is "time"	Over burden the players that represent the extreme early or late developer

Goalkeeping represents a specialized array of skill sets that include abilities in ball handling (i.e. using the hands to catch, punch or deflect the ball), diving, throwing receiving, kicking, passing, foot movement and agility.

At the younger ages introduce goalkeeping to all your players. Don't be in a rush to select a GK, there is lots of time for all players to play all over the field including in goal. To improve foot skills goalkeepers should join in with all players during practice.

<b>GOALKEEPING - TECHNICAL/TACTICAL</b>				
<b>TECHNIQUE</b>	<b>ACTIVE START</b>	<b>FUNDAMENTALS</b>	<b>LEARN TO TRAIN</b>	<b>NOTES</b>
	All players participate in the activities below.	All players should take a turn in goal using small-sided games with correct sized goals.	All players still take turns in goal. Some will show a preference for the position. Resist the temptation to limit GK to only a few players.	Be patient. All players take turns in goal.
Footwork	All players are Introduced to moving side to side to get in line with the ball.	Moving in different directions using different types of runs to get in line with the ball.	Footwork is developing. Agility and coordination are ways to improve GK ability. Introduce SAQ program.	Footwork is to be focus at all sessions.
Ball handling	All players are introduced to catching a ball at various heights (no high balls)	From ground, waist, chest and head high and above. With simple serves only.	Intro balls from different angles and trajectories while standing and diving. Intro deflecting, not punching. 2 fist punching is intro later in the stage, thrown serves only.	Be careful, balls can be served with hands in place of shooting towards GK's, be safe!
Throwing	All players are introduced to throwing a smaller ball with 2 hands, then 1 hand.	Introduce over arm and underarm throws. Short distances only.	Further develop the throws and introduce the javelin and side arm throw. Distances increase.	
Shot stopping	Introduction of "diving" from a kneeling position.	Intro correct basic diving technique. Intro diving at feet with no opposition.	Develop jump, roll and fall. Intro side dives and later forward, aerial, power and high.	Safety is paramount
Positioning		Introduction of correct body shape, stance, ready position.	Intro reading the space behind defenders and sweeper/keeper role is developed later in this stage.	
Distribution		Kicking/passing from the ground and from the air.	Increase distance with kicks/passes/throws, from short to mid to long.	
Observation		Encourage GK to push out when ball is at other end of the end of the field.	GK is now able to see the ball and the opponent who is in a dangerous position.	
Communication		Intro basic communication- "keeper", "away".	Start adding words based on situations around the penalty area, picked up during the run of play.	
Set pieces		Basic technique for goal kicks	Develop goal kicks. Introduce different tactical options.	
Decision-making			Intro based build up and counter attack and selection of technique.	

*The Goalkeepers' Psychological/Mental/Social/Emotional and Physical development will follow alongside the other players in their stage of development. This information is shown in previous tables in this document.*



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<b>Canadian Soccer Association</b>	Wellness to World Cup Volume 2
<b>Canadian Sport For Life</b>	CS4L Documents
<b>Belgian Football Association</b>	Developing Grassroots Football
<b>The FA</b>	Child Friendly Football Program and the Future Game
<b>Australia Football Federation</b>	Optus Small Sided Football
<b>Scottish Football Association</b>	Emerging Talent Program
<b>United States Soccer Association</b>	US Soccer Curriculum
<b>US Youth Soccer</b>	Youth Development Document
<b>German Football Federation</b>	Youth Development Program
<b>Bryst Football Academy</b>	Curriculum
<b>European Club Association</b>	Report on Youth Academies
<b>New Zealand Football</b>	Whole of Football Plan

## OSA LTPD Resources

Recreation and Development matrices  
A Guide to Festivals in Ontario  
Game Organization Guide  
Field Organization Guide  
League Management Guide: Learning to Train  
How Soccer in Ontario is Changing

These resources along with others  
are available on the OSA website  
[www.soccer.on.ca](http://www.soccer.on.ca)

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