

SOCCKER FUN U4 to U6

“Let them Play”

Long Term Player Development Approach to Coaching

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

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 – dribbling, kicking and shooting.

Tactical – None.

Mental – Fun, fascination, and passion for play.

At this age children are ‘playing’ all day long. They can play for a long time, but need short breaks. They may be easily distracted by a butterfly or the dog at the side of the field. 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.

The “Let them Play” program also encourages parents to get involved in the development and learning of their child and strengthen the parent-child bonding through parental interaction at 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, or kick a ball around, establishing a social interaction between the parent and child.

Benefits of the Let them Play concept over Traditional Soccer

- More repeated touches on 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 1
- 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 a positive parent-child bond

Long Term Player Development Model

The Canadian Soccer Association in 2008 produced the “Wellness to World Cup” document to promote the Long Term Player Development (LTPD) to all Canadians. The LPTD 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.



Long-Term Player Development (LTPD)

LTPD is a program for soccer player development, training, competition, and recovery based on a biological age (i.e. physical maturity) rather than chronological age. It is player centered, 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 and 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, fields 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 and 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

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STAGE 1: ACTIVE START

U4-U6 Female and Male
“FIRST KICKS”

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 develop 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, establishing a social interaction between the parent and child.

Game Structure:

No competitive games – adults 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

LET THEM PLAY

- A lot of ball contact for each child
- More enjoyment and excitement
- Maintains motivation and involvement
- Every child is learning and developing

SESSION PLAN LAYOUT

- 45-60 minute session
- Six (6) children per Leader
- Playing modified activities/games with the involvement of parents

RULES AND REGULATIONS

| | U4 and U5 | U6 |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------|
| Playing Format | 3v3 (No GK) | 3v3 (No GK) |
| Game Style | Within team | With other team |
| Field Size | N/A | 25x30m |
| Goal Size | N/A | Pug Nets |
| Penalty Area | N/A | N/A |
| Ball Size | 3 | 3 |
| Goalkeepers | N/A | N/A |
| Offside | N/A | N/A |
| Throw ins | N/A | NO – Pass in |
| Referee | N/A | N/A |
| Substitutions | N/A | Unlimited (on the fly) |
| Squad Size | 8 | 6 |
| Game Duration | N/A | 2 x 15 min |
| Season Length | 4 – 16 weeks | 12-20 weeks |

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 and to keep the player 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.

U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #1

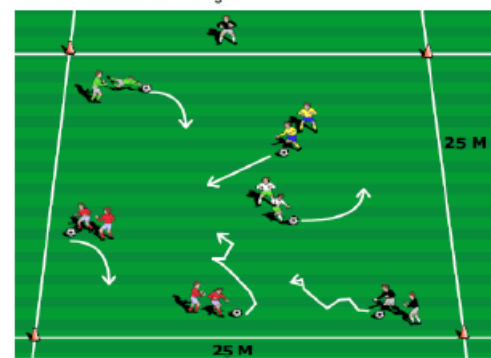
Making friends with the ball.

- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes)

Each child partners with his/her parent and finds space inside the playing area not too close to other pairs. 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 backwards
3. As above but skipping sideways and alternating lead leg every 3-4 strides
4. Walking and taking giant steps
5. As above but backwards giant steps
6. Two footed bunny hops
7. With a ball at his/her feet trying to lose their shadow using little feints and turn



Technical Development (15 minutes)

- Each exercise should last 3 – 4 minutes and is performed alternately by the parent and child.

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.

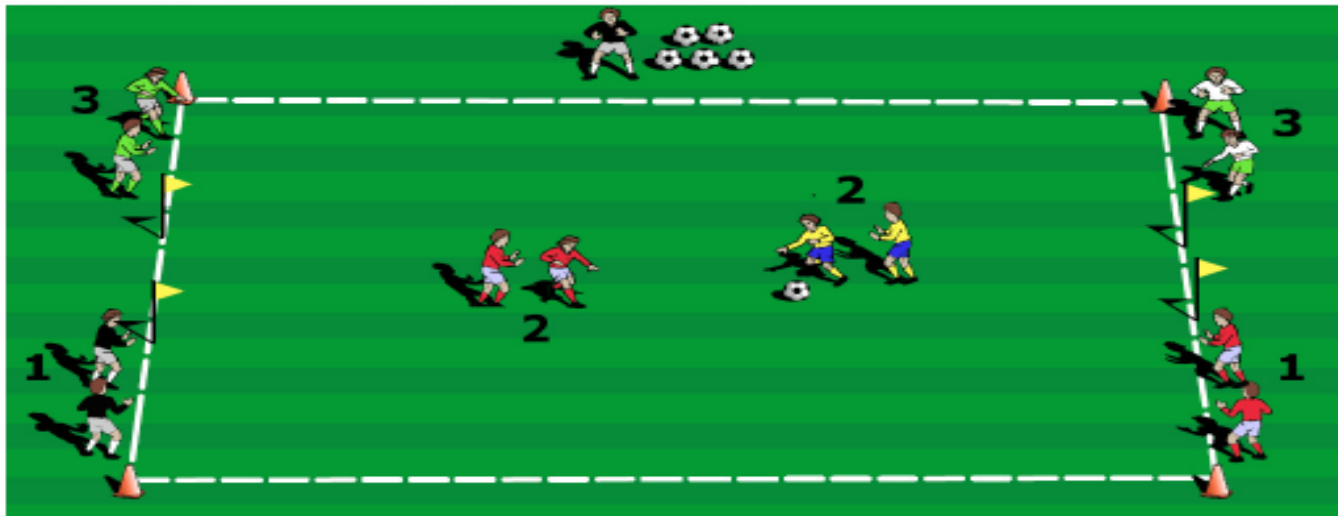
1. Child and parent run side by side round the area as the child guides the ball using both feet. After a few seconds the child and parent switch roles. Repeat.
2. With parent and child keeping approx. 5-6m apart, the child runs with the ball for a few strides and kids the ball to his/her parent. Repeat with the parent in lead role.
3. The parent and child stand together and the parent kids the ball about 5-6m away. The child 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, then by throwing it back and forth. Parent may stand close to their child and move farther apart as coordination is improved



Parent and Child 2 v 2 Fun Game (10 minutes)

- 2v2 Linked Soccer

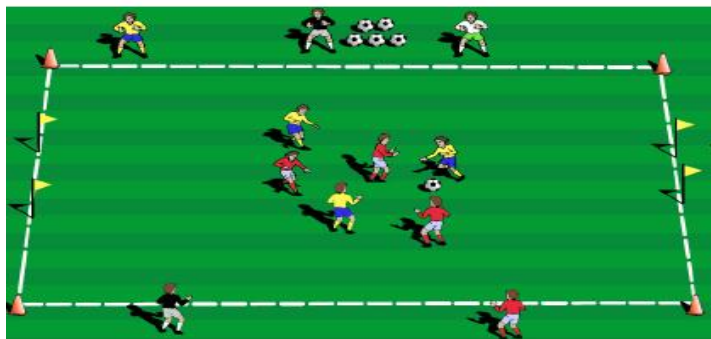
Parent and child form a link by holding hands. Number the pairings on each team 1,2,3 etc. When the coach calls number 1 the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try to score in the opposite goal until the coach says stop. Pairs return to their place behind the goal line and the coach calls another two pairs to begin play. If the ball goes out of play the game can be restarted by a 'kick-in' or a new ball can be just put into play. Parent may kick the ball but cannot score.



- This may also be played without the parent and child holding hands.

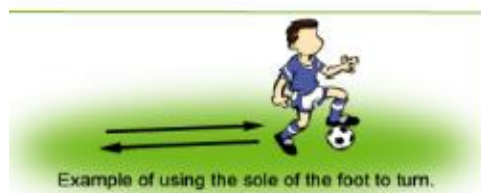
FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

Using the sole of the foot to turn the ball



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #2

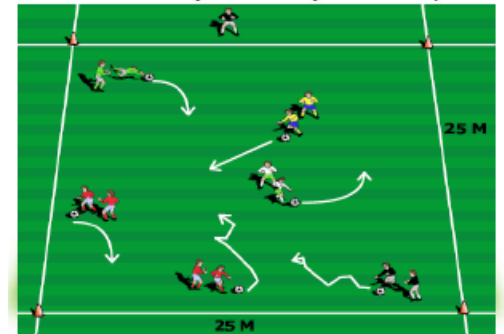
Running with the ball.

- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes)

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 bouncing the ball
3. Run forwards pushing (rolling) the ball with one hand
4. As above going backwards, then sideways to the left and right
5. Roll the ball between their own legs and quickly recover their ball
6. Roll the ball through their partner's legs then quickly
7. Stand, bringing the ball around their waist



Technical Development (15 minutes)

This is a race car game. The cars (kids) race around the outside roads. They start from the pits and finish back in the pits. Four cones mark the inside track and cones are placed in the outer corners. The children need to keep the ball under close control and stay on the "road". If they go off the road, three quick toe touches on the top of their ball starts their engines and allows them back on the track.

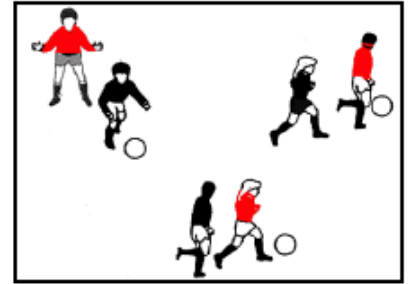
1. Players run with the ball in a clockwise direction and once back in the pits the parents take a lap on the track
2. As above, but in a counter clockwise direction
3. Parents and players each take a turn and run with the ball from the pits along the middle and turn left or right on the outside track and back to the pits. Half will go clockwise, the remainder counter clockwise.
4. As above, but switch directions.



Me and My Shadow Fun Game (10 minutes)

This fun game teaches dribbling with a change of pace and direction. It also introduces disciplined marking.

1. Parent and child pair each have a ball
2. On the signal the player with the ball tries to lose his/her Shadow (parent)
3. Shadow must be bothersome
4. After a few seconds the coaches shouts/whistles 'change' and the Shadow becomes the dribbler
5. Keep switching every 30 seconds or so to keep the fun level high



Teaching:

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

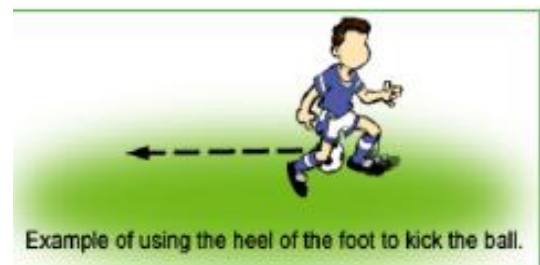
FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

How many different ways can you kick a ball? Take a few minutes and find out.



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #3

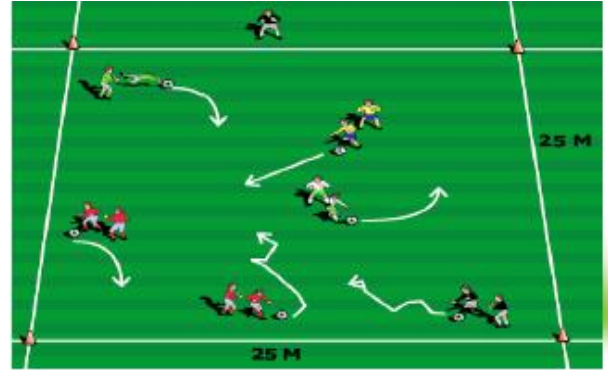
Running and changing direction with the ball.

- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes)

Parents and children spread out inside a designated area to play various games of tag.

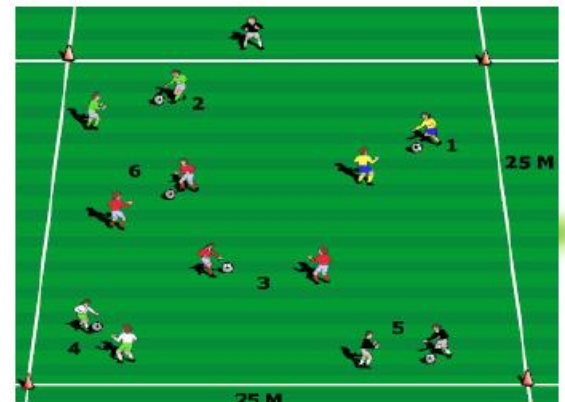
1. Tag game with one ball. Child/Parent holds a ball in both hands and tries to tag others with it. Tagged players must pick up the ball and become the player tagging others
2. As above but everyone holds a soccer ball in both hands, except the child who is it. If tagged you switch roles and give your 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 for you to take your foot off the ball and must go after someone else. Change roles when tagged.



Technical Development (15 minutes)

Each child/parent 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.

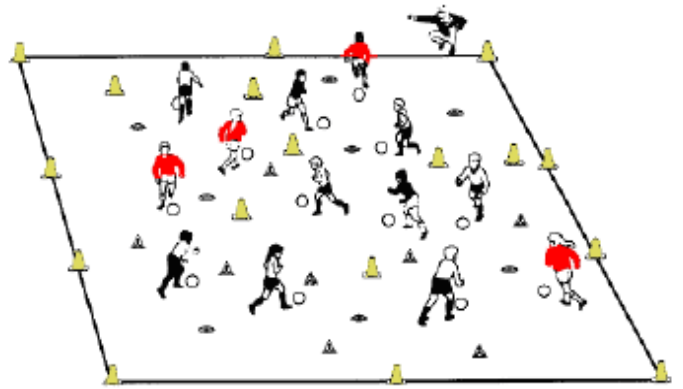
1. 'Stop'- players freeze like statues with one foot on the ball
2. 'Change'-players stop the ball with the sole of the foot and move backwards dragging the ball with the sole of the foot
3. 'Turn'-players make a half turn using the sole of the foot then progress to using the inside of the foot
4. 'Toe 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 toe-touches can return to the game



Jungle Run Fun Game (10 minutes)

Make an area using cones/discs. One ball per child and parent.

1. Players will dribble the ball through the jungle without touching a tree (cone)
2. They have to throw (and kick) the ball over the jungle to get the parent across
3. They may be chased by lions, tigers or elephants (parents). Use your imagination.
4. They can 'clear' the jungle by knocking down the cones with the ball
5. Cones are poisonous and cannot be knocked down with feet, only by kicking the ball against them
6. Later reforest the jungle by putting the trees (cones) back up using only feet not hands.



FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

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



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #4

Kicking the ball.

- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes)

Cones positioned 15 meters apart. Parent and child work together in pairs taking turns to:

1. Run forward
2. Run backward
3. Skip forwards/sideways
4. Hop on one leg
5. Hop on two legs
6. Caterpillar walk
7. Walk on all fours, etc.



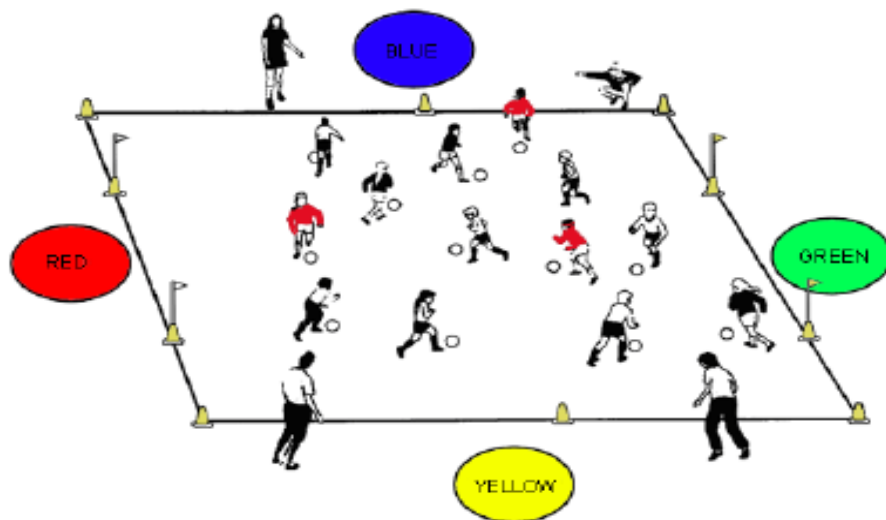
Technical Development (15 minutes)

Each parent and child works together in the practice area and goes through the following exercises:

1. Standing approx. 6m apart with a cone between them they take turns trying to 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 make with two markers. How many times can you shoot it between the two cones?
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.



Four Sides Fun Game (10 minutes)



1. Have your parents set up along each side of your practice square with cones set up for goals, each parent being a different colour.
2. When 'red' shouts their colour all players inside the grid dribble or pass/shoot the ball through the 'red' goal and wait outside the square until all the players have 'scored' Explain what a goal is.
3. Mix it up, but not too much or the children will get 'mixed up'
4. Progression – Shout 'Red' – go through the Red goal, around the square and re-enter at the green goal

FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

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



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #5

Passing and Shooting

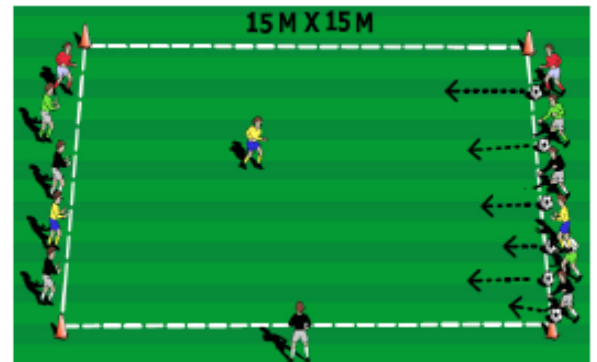
- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up, coordination and agility (10 minutes)

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.

Variations:

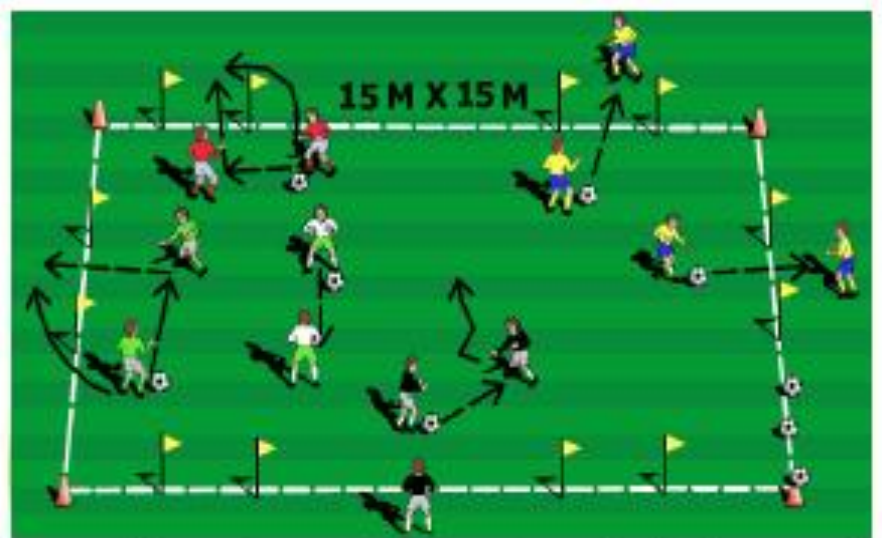
1. Game is played without a ball
2. Players must hold a ball in front of them with both hands
3. Players must hold a ball behind their backs with both hands
4. Players must dribble the ball with their feet.



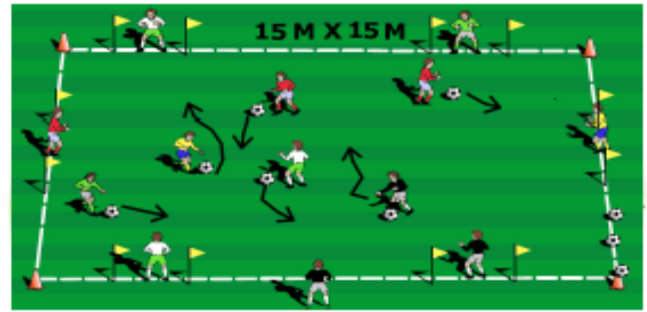
Technical Development (15 minutes)

Six goals are set up around the perimeter of the playing area.

1. Each parent/child group 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 each with a ball. 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 player. Players must retrieve any ball that misses the goal.

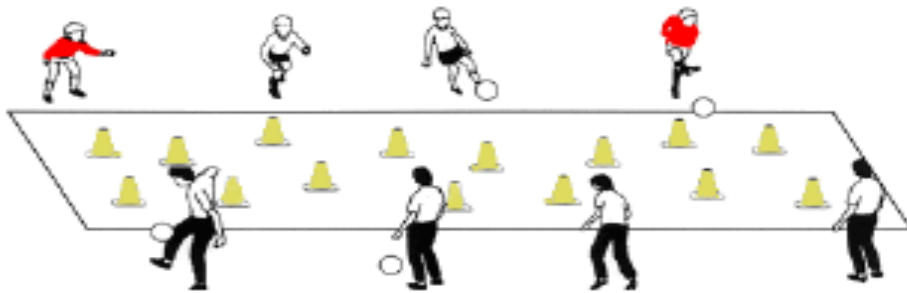


Variations:

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

Four Sides Fun Game (10 minutes)

- 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 may go into the cone area to retrieve any balls that get stuck there.



FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

Hold the ball in your hands and kick it in the air so you can catch it again. Give it a try and see how you do.



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #6

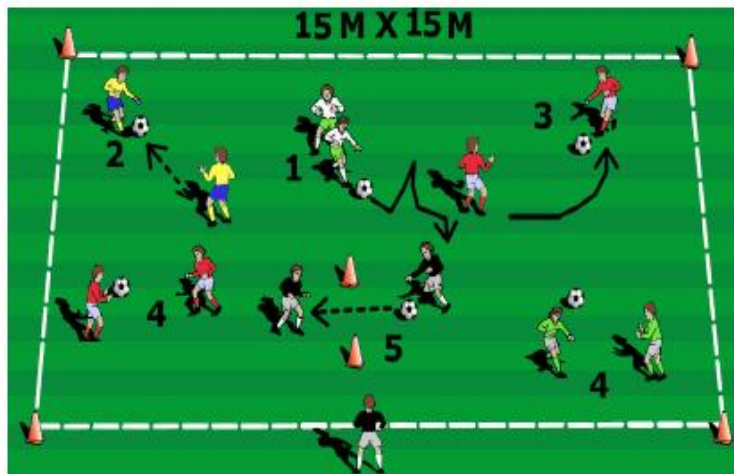
Running with the ball, Passing and Receiving

- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up and agility (10 minutes)

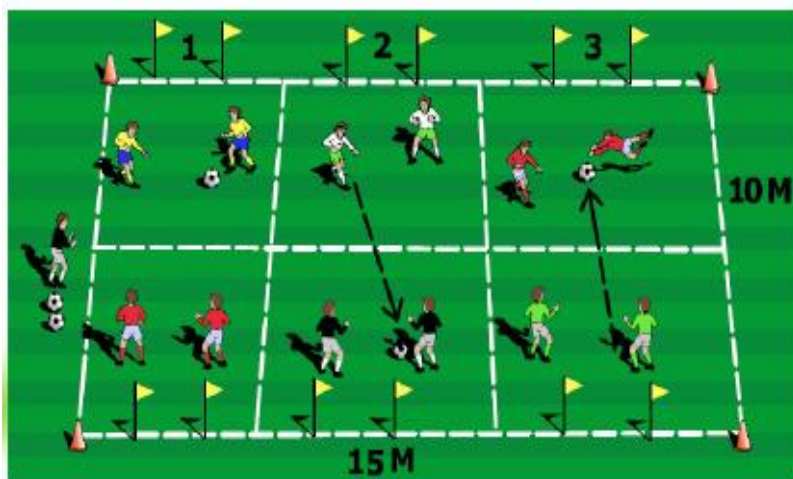
Each child partners with his/her parent and finds space inside the playing area not too close to the others with one ball between them. Each exercise described should last approximately 2 to 3 minutes and is performed by both the parent and the child.

1. Child and parent run side by side around the area as the child guides the ball using both feet. Parent and child switch roles and repeat.
2. With parent and child keeping approx. 5-6m apart the child runs with the ball for a few strides and kicks the ball to his/her parent. Switch roles and repeat.
3. The pair stands together and the parent kicks the ball about 5-6m away. The child then runs after the ball and brings it back using the feet. Repeat 5 times then 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 may stand close to their child until their coordination is improved.
5. Each parent makes a small goal between them using markers and they both try to score by kicking the ball through the goal



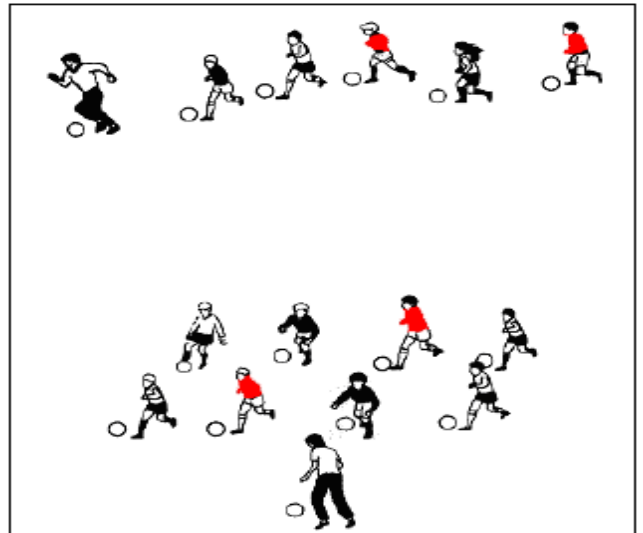
Technical Development (15 minutes)

1. Parent and 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 with another pair.
2. If the ball rebounds across the half way line or out over the side line when a save is made, possession goes to the opponents.



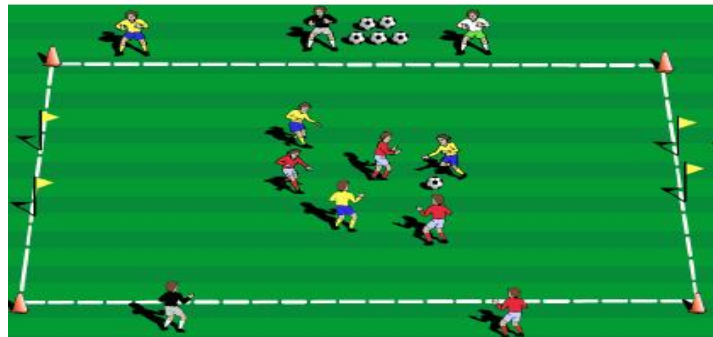
Simon Says & Pied Piper Fun Game (10 minutes)

1. Children and parents follow the Pied Piper (leader) in single file, and then form a line facing the Pied Piper who has become Simon.
2. Everything Simon says the kids (and parents) have to copy but in reverse. If Simon goes to the left, kids go right, if he goes forwards, children go backwards, if Simon puts his left foot on the ball, kids and parents use their right foot, etc.



FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

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



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #7

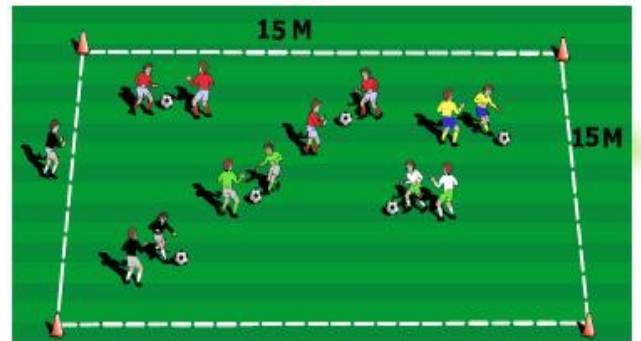
Dribbling and Shooting

- Treat these exercises as fun, and are they to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up, coordination and agility (10 minutes)

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.

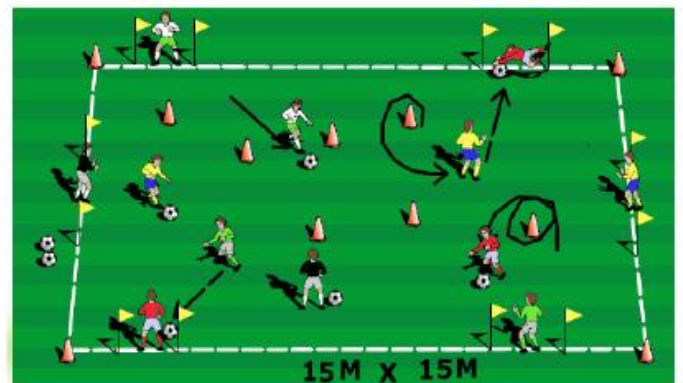
1. 'Stop'-players freeze like statues with one foot on the ball
2. As above but when the coach shouts 'stop' the players must stop the ball and sit on the ball, or touch the ball with one knee or an elbow, etc.
3. 'Change' - players stop the ball, leave it and quickly go and get another's ball and continue 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 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)

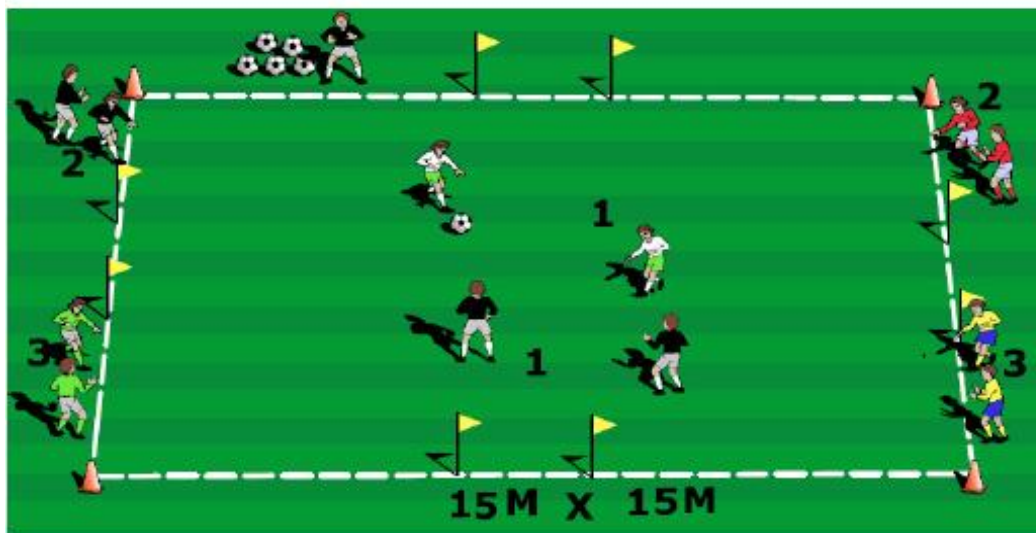
A parent plays as a goalkeeper in each goal. Six pairs of markers approx. 2m apart are laid out in the playing area. Six children are in the middle of the playing area with a ball each. The children move around the area trying to score as many goals as possible in any, and all of the goals after carrying 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 a 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.



Four Goal Fun Game (10 minutes)

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, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and shoot 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.



FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

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



U4/U5 AND U6 SOCCER FUN

LET THEM PLAY Session #8

Running with the ball and shooting

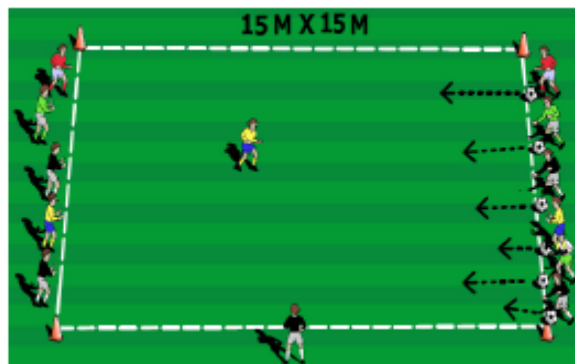
- Treat these exercises as fun, and they are to be performed by both the child and the parent.

Warm up, coordination and agility (10 minutes)

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.

Variations:

1. Game is played without a ball
2. Players must hold a ball in front of them with both hands
3. Players must hold a ball behind their backs with both hands
4. Players must dribble the ball with their feet.



Technical Development (15 minutes)

Set up four squares (houses) by placing cones in the corners of the playing areas. A parent/child team is stationed inside each house. Place all the balls in the middle of the playing area. On the coaches 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 ball in each house.

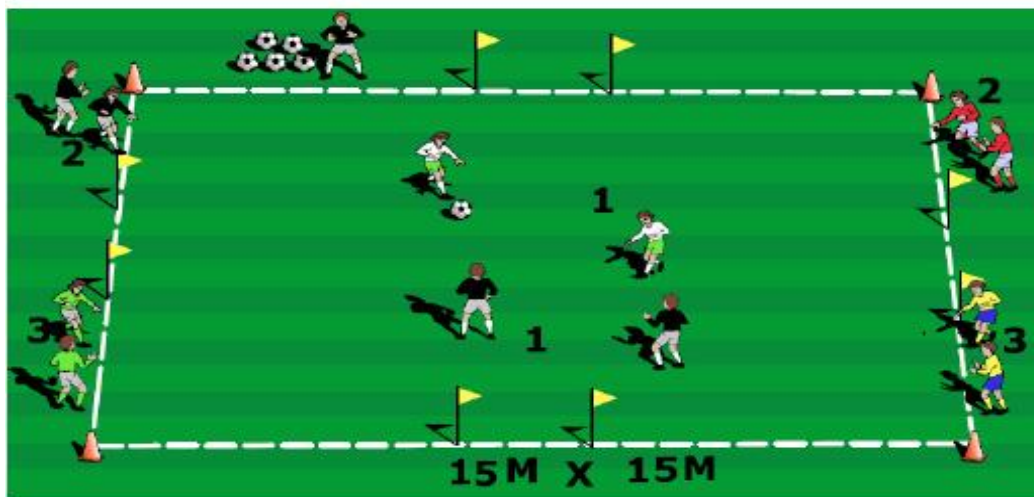
Variations:

1. As above but all ball are placed inside the house. Players try to bring as many balls as possible inside their house by taking the balls from other houses.
2. 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 houses with another team diagonally etc.
3. Players must dribble around the outside square before returning home.



Four Goal Fun Game (10 minutes)

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, the pairs with that number run onto the field and play against each other and try and shoot 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.



FOR THE U6 SOCCER FUN ONLY CONTINUE WITH A SMALL SIDED GAME (15 minutes)

1. 3v3 game
2. No goalkeepers
3. Pop up nets
4. No keeping score
5. Frequent rotations
6. Pass in's



Something to practice.....

Can you turn a circle with the ball at your feet?
Can you do it with the inside & then the outside of your foot?
Can you do it using the right foot, then the left?
Let's practice together.

