



Age Appropriate Coaching

Developmental Characteristics and Coaching Strategies

Knowing where your players are emotionally, physically, and developmentally, will help you coach them more effectively. Most youth of the same age share common characteristics. Being familiar with these characteristics can help you:

- Understand what youth are capable of at different ages so you can make sure your activities are not too easy or too difficult
- Avoid judging age-appropriate behavior as bad or immature

The following developmental information will help you think about age appropriate ways to coach your players.

Note: Although there are predictable stages of development, remember that young people are individuals. They move through these stages at their own pace. Getting to know your players will provide information about their needs, abilities, and limits.

The following charts are courtesy of Success in Soccer magazine. For more information, visit www.successinsoccer.com (please note that references to 'soccer' have been replaced with 'sports')





Ages 6-8 (1st-2nd Grade)

Characteristics

- Self- centered perspective
- Strong urge to move
- Short attention span
- Desire to try out new things
- Desire to play
- Powerful curiosity and desire to learn
- Need external positive reinforcement

Coaching Strategies

- Make sure all players are moving the majority of practice
- Keep group games to small numbers (e.g. 1v1, up to 3v3 max)
- Keep rules to a minimum
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, or lectures)
- Give lots of praise and encouragement; avoid criticism
- Reinforce fair play; stop unfair behavior with brief explanation
- Vary activities, providing something new every 10-15 minutes
- Give clear and concise instructions
- Explain then immediately demonstrate
- Implement no win games
- Be a strong leader, give clear signals and instructions
- Treat all players the same with equal attention
- Keep games flowing; (e.g. have a pile of balls ready to play so there is minimal down time)



Ages 9-10 (3rd-4th Grade)

Characteristics

- Continued belief in own importance
- Increasing identification with teammates
- Desire for lots of activity and movement
- View coach as a role model

Coaching Strategies

- Keep group games to small numbers (3v3 to 5v5)
- Start to incorporate games that include teamwork (e.g. relay races, partner exercises)
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, or lectures)
- Support risk taking without any focus on winning
- Keep activities simple with few rules
- Give brief explanations followed immediately with a demonstration
- Start to ask players basic problem solving questions



Ages 11-12 (5th-6th Grade)

Characteristics

- Team mentality is becoming more important
- Experiencing the game is more important than winning
- Increased ability to focus
- Desire to start taking individual responsibility
- Improved problem solving
- Onset of puberty means kids are becoming more physically mature
- Some kids will be bigger, faster, and have better coordination than others

Coaching Strategies

- Begin to teach basic principles of the sport
- Encourage group problem solving
- Incorporate no win games and keep the focus on the fun of playing
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, or lectures)
- Introduce positions and let all players try each position
- Let players discover and try out their own solutions
- Incorporate activities that require a little more concentration



Ages 13-14 (7th-8th Grade)

Characteristics

- Desire for more personal responsibility
- Increasing identification with team
- More likelihood of being influenced by peers and boundaries
- Need for individual improvement and development
- Emotional variation (moodiness)
- Recognition expected and demanded

Coaching Strategies

- Start treating players as partners
- Be tolerant of mood swings
- Act as an advisor, providing clear rules
- Model expected behavior
- Give players more responsibility on and off the field
- Treat everyone equally, but provide individual encouragement and support
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, lectures)



Ages 15-16 (9th-10th Grade)

Characteristics

- Increasing mental maturity
- Increased ability to self-assess
- Development of individual identity
- Desire for individual responsibility
- Searching for the right lifestyle

Coaching Strategies

- Treat players more as peers
- Let players help structure parts of practice
- Train players to assess their own development
- Be exemplary in your behavior
- Provide structure in a very clear way, being explicit with clear rules and boundaries
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, lectures)



Ages 17-18 (11th-12th Grade)

Characteristics

- Fully responsible
- Capacity and need for communication as equals
- Desire for support in sports and life
- Identity more firmly established
- Increased ability to deal with stress

Coaching Strategies

- Set common rules and expectations and encourage the team to regulate themselves
- Speak to players as adults
- Be available to give advice
- Promote positive team play while providing opportunity for individual expression
- Remember the 3 L's (no lines, laps, lectures)