



Football Federation South West

GRASSROOTS AGES 4-8

A big thank you for volunteering to take on the Grassroots age group. For many of you this will be your first time taking a team and conducting sessions, what better way to start your coaching journey than the very start of the players journey.

In this phase you will most likely be the players first coach and as such will shape how the player enjoys their footballing. The main objective for you, as a grassroots coach is to grow the love of the sport with all your players.

Video link: <https://youtu.be/J0v1ZEGcHPI>

Role of the Coach

- The role of the coach is to introduce football to new players
- Provide a fun and safe environment
- Be encouraging and player focused
- Be well presented to the players and approachable
- Leave outside issues off the field
- Challenge players in a fun environment
- Improve players love of the game.
- If they continue to play, you are a big factor.

Planning sessions

- Make your plans simple and expand on them when players understand the concept
- **KISS** – Keep It Simple Stupid
- Create plenty of fun games that are enjoyable where players get touches on the ball
- If it's not working, **change it**
- More touches on the ball (limit time spent without the ball)
- Don't be scared to do the same topic, players have their favourite games
- Have a plan before you get to training
- Make sessions engaging, no long lines or long speeches
- Always finish with a game

There is a library of sessions available on the FFA website found at:

<https://www.playfootball.com.au/coach/discovery-phase-sessions>



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“Coaching”

When it comes to coaching children below the age of 8 we have to focus on what coaching these players is all about. Children used to learn football by playing the game on the street or in the park for hours, making their own rules, it was freedom. The challenge today is to create this free feeling, not acting as a coach or dictator, but more as a facilitator for these children’s enjoyment. The drills that are going to be provided, give freedom and fun to these young players, hopefully growing their passion and enjoyment for the game, as well as their own development and skills used in future age groups.

Building on from this you must remember, and encourage that enjoyment is the main focus, not winning. If young players, who are not as confident in their skills, can enjoy soccer and play without pressure they will fall in love with the game. The leader of this group must value the development and welfare of every single player in their practice. Remember these children are likely sampling and playing many sports, hopefully following this guide will convince them to pick soccer and you will be the reason why!

Try your best to get the word “coach” out of your mind. The role that these players need is a leader of fun, safe and engaging practices. It is a too familiar mistake for Grassroot “coaches” to imitate coaches they see on television, but this is not the type of coaching these players need. They need someone to plan, organize and create fun and safe exercises for them to develop and enjoy the game of soccer. You need to be filled with passion and enthusiasm to exceed at your role as their facilitator.

- **Be enthusiastic!** If you look like you are having a good time, the players will generally follow suit.
- **Be friendly.** The kids need to feel that you are on their side as a friend as well as a mentor. If they have questions, listen to what they are asking and help to the best of your ability. This is not a place for frustration.
- **Show your sense of humour,** once again fun is the key word. These children aren’t preparing for a World Cup, let them enjoy their time with you. Letting them see you laugh shows them you are a warm and likable person. Enjoy being their coach. Try small activities where you are in goal and they have to score past you, suggest if they can score 10 goals you’ll run to halfway and back. (The kids always win, plus helps keep you fit)
- **Respect every individual,** the players need to feel valued and that you are approachable. Be someone they ask for guidance and be someone they look to for help and support.
- **Give lots of praise,** not only for doing something well but to also recognise effort/organization.
- **Encourage after mistakes,** don’t let any of their heads get down if they make a mistake. Encourage mistakes, encourage the players to try skills they are not completely comfortable with. Remember, this is somewhere for the players to try things, to see what they enjoy doing.
- **Be a polite, respectful and calm role model to these players.** They will reciprocate these virtues if you provide them.
- **BE PATIENT!**



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BE PREPARED! There will be many sessions that you can mix and match. **EXPERIMENT.** Find out certain exercises that the players enjoy and build from them. **BE CREATIVE,** you do not need to follow these sessions word for word, if there is a transition or twist you want to add to the drill do it! The players, after time, will tell you what they like, keep them engaged and change the session slightly or have a different focus. This is your creativity coming out.

It's best to be prepared. Plan your session in advance and have a great understanding of what you want so you are ready to set up when it comes to training time. Buy into what you are teaching and in turn you will gain a passion for it and so will the players. Before you explain any of your drills make sure everyone is listening. Whether you have a cue of raising both your hands, put a finger to your lips, a small cue will get everyone to listen. This helps you get their attention.

- Games are the focus.
- Coach is a facilitator.
- Player need role models.
- Discrete "coaching". Lots of hidden learning from players doing activities.
- Involve the players. (receive feedback)

Clearly define your playing area, use cones and prepare this ahead of time. Know what cones you need for your next advancement/drill so there isn't too much time wasted during their "practice" time.

Try your best to avoid long lines of 3 or more players. These young players need to be involved constantly, otherwise you will lose their attention and focus.

No elimination games, these are considered a big no-no. You do not want to take any confidence away from players, you want to get everyone constantly encouraged and involved. We don't want the same player eliminated first each time, limits their time on the ball.

Finally, organised chaos is a good thing. If players are running around like crazy, balls flying everywhere and the sound of laughter, your session is going well. Steer this ship so that all players are continuing to achieve the objective and correct direction of the task at hand.

You are most likely going to be the players first coach. Lets make sure you are not their last coach. If a player decides to return the next year, it comes down mostly to you!



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Resources

There are numerous resources you can look up to gain a better understanding and grasp of coaching this age group.

- Contact your club
- Talk to local coaches
- FFSW is always producing content on our Facebook and YouTube channels
 - FFSW Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ffswa>
 - FFSW YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCpRZ-dpfGGx-OCCx3fTyeBQ>
- FFSW regularly hold coach Workshops and Club Development in clubs putting on sessions and opening up to coaches with questions
- Football West is the State body for football in WA
 - Football West Website: <https://footballwest.com.au/>
- FFA is the national body and has a great library of session plans and hints and tips
 - FFA Website: <https://www.playfootball.com.au/coach/resources-home>

The best way to improve is to always be learning. Best way to learn is to attend coaching courses, these courses are regularly run in the South West and will grant you official coaching qualifications.

If you have any questions please let us know, you are not alone in this coaching journey. It is my job to help out the regions coaches and with better coaches we produce better players, having a stronger competition, retain and grow numbers and give the best football experience to the young players wanting to learn this great game.

Link to FFSW skills coaching video: <https://youtu.be/J0v1ZEGcHPI>

You are not alone in this journey, contact your local club or FFSW for support

Yours in football,

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