

At Under 9 & Under 10, children play 6 v 6 with goalkeepers for the first time. Developmentally, children at this age are moving on to small group play. We continue to teach them to shoot and pass, and to receive the ball on the ground and in the air. Our lesson plans develop individual soccer techniques in pairs, and we play 3 v 3 and 4 v 4 activities to introduce tactical complexities such as keeping a fluid team shape up & down the field, and combining passes in a continuous sequence.

With so much to teach, we focus on one skill each week to build their abilities through the season. We provide our volunteer coaches with lesson plans, so the players develop their abilities in a curriculum-based atmosphere. The weekly plans are designed so the coaches can use the later part of their weekly session to work on team-specific needs they've identified at the previous weekend game.

The most important tactic is to maintain some semblance of team shape as the ball moves up & down the field. When the team has the ball, everyone is on offense, and when the other team has the ball, everyone is on defense. This includes the goalkeepers in both instances.

On offense, the front line (forwards) and back line (midfielders) should be in the attacking half, and goalkeepers should be up in the defensive middle third of the field in support. This shape has several important tactical lessons:

- It's game-like as in 11 v 11 soccer.
- It allows the attacking team to maintain pressure on the goal.
- It puts all players on the defending team on defense, so they're in a stronger shape to quickly transition to offense.
- It reduces open spaces for breakaways.
- It involves all of the players in the whole game which develops their decision-making to instantly choose whether to dribble, pass, shoot, run to space...based on what they see as it happens.
 - *NOTE - the players have to learn to make these decisions instinctively and instantly based on what they see at the moment. Please avoid the temptation to shout instructions such as, "Pass!" as this interrupts that growth process. We prefer that our coaches use a Guided Discovery technique at practice. Then, they can try to play in the game what they learned at practice.*

We start to teach kick-off and restart plays for goal kicks, corner kicks, and throw-ins for restarts. We don't teach offside as that is too complex and interferes with the teaching of team shape. (We expect Fair Play from the coaches. We want the kids to play actively for fun and score goals as soccer players rather than position isolated players up field as "cherry pickers" or keep one or two back as "tree-like" stationary defenders.)

"Rules" mean much more to kids at this age also. So we also introduce direct kicks for the most egregious physical fouls to teach fair play and sportsmanship within the Laws of The Game.

Children at this age are still little learners who are now suited to a group setting, so our goals and expectations rise to that level. First and foremost, they have a lot to learn, so we want them to learn through play rather than through "lines, laps, and lectures". We want to teach physical education in a fun, relaxed

setting rather than a classroom. Letting children explore new skills, and encouraging them to try, fail, and try again is an attribute they will need as soccer players at the older ages.

If your child has fun at practices and games, we've succeeded meeting the Number One reason children play games - to have FUN. Over the course of the season, we also see them improve their individual touches and control on the ball, so the games they play are more like soccer and less like kickball.