

U5-10 Practice Tips

Age-Based Tips and First-Time Parent Questions

Core coaching mindset: Fun first, development second, winning third. Kids who enjoy the sport are more likely to keep playing.

Quick Rule of Thumb

Age Group	Main Priority
4-6	Fun and ball familiarity
6-8	Skill development and confidence
8-10	Skill development plus basic game understanding

Ages 4-6

Primary Focus

- Fun and enthusiasm
- Basic coordination
- Getting comfortable with the ball
- Listening and following simple directions

What to Teach

- Dribbling with both feet
- Stopping the ball
- Running with the ball under control
- Basic shooting toward a goal

Avoid

- Positions
- Formations
- Complex rules
- Long periods standing in line

Practice Structure: 45 Minutes

- Fun tag game with a soccer ball - 10 minutes
- Dribbling game such as Red Light, Green Light - 10 minutes
- Shooting activity - 10 minutes
- Small-sided game, such as 3v3 or 4v4 - 15 minutes

Coaching Tip

Use imagination. Try games like Sharks and Minnows, Pirates and Treasure, or Race Cars. At this age, if everyone is smiling and touching the ball a lot, practice was successful.

Ages 6-8

Primary Focus

- Ball mastery
- Confidence
- Basic teamwork

What to Teach

- Dribbling moves
- Inside-foot passing
- Receiving the ball
- Basic defending
- Spacing, or not all chasing the ball

Coaching Phrases

- Can you find space?
- Can you beat one defender?
- Look up before you pass.

Practice Structure: 60 Minutes

- Ball mastery warm-up - 10 minutes
- Dribbling or passing activity - 15 minutes
- 1v1 or 2v2 game - 15 minutes
- Small-sided game, such as 4v4 or 5v5 - 20 minutes

Coaching tip

Do not stop play every 30 seconds to coach. Let them play and learn through the game. Keep coaching points short and positive.

Ages 8-10

Primary Focus

- Technical skills
- Decision-making
- Basic tactical understanding

What to Teach

- Passing and moving
- First touch
- Shielding the ball
- Supporting teammates
- Basic positions
- Attacking versus defending concepts

Introduce Simple Concepts

- Width
- Support

- Transition
- Team shape

Practice Structure: 60

- Technical warm-up - 10 minutes
- Passing and receiving activity - 15 minutes
- Small-sided game focused on one skill - 15 minutes
- Conditioned scrimmage - 10 minutes
- Free play scrimmage - 10 minutes

Coaching Tip

Keep it simple: Spread out when we have the ball. Get compact when we do not. Help players solve problems themselves instead of giving every answer.

Top 10 Tips for Any First-Time Recreational Coach

1. Try to recruit an assistant coach.
2. Don't be shy to ask for help. Reach out to us and encourage parents to be engaged
3. Learn every player's name quickly.
4. Praise effort more than results.
5. Keep instructions under 30 seconds.
6. Minimize lines. More touches means more learning.
7. Use lots of small-sided games.
8. Rotate positions.
9. Communicate regularly with parents.
10. Do not focus on winning at young ages.
11. Make sure every child leaves wanting to come back next week.

Questions Coaches Should Expect from First-Time Parents

Most first-time parents want to know if their child is safe, having fun, developing, and being treated fairly. These sample responses can help coaches set a positive tone early.

Parents of Ages 4-6

My child has never played before. Will they be okay?

Absolutely. Most kids at this age are learning the basics. Our focus is on having fun, building confidence, and getting lots of touches on the ball.

Should we be practicing at home?

Nothing formal is needed. Even 5-10 minutes of kicking the ball around the backyard or park can help.

Why is my child not paying attention?

That is completely normal at this age. We expect short attention spans and design practices around movement and fun.

When will they learn positions?

At this age, we focus more on dribbling, running, and enjoying the game rather than teaching specific positions.

How can I help from the sidelines?

The best thing you can do is cheer for effort. Leave the coaching to us and simply encourage them to have fun.

Parents of Ages 6-8

Why does everyone get equal playing time?

This is a recreational league, and our goal is player development and enjoyment. Every child deserves an opportunity to learn and play.

What skills should my child be working on?

Dribbling, passing, receiving, and confidence with the ball are the biggest priorities.

My child wants to play striker all the time. What should we do?

We will rotate positions so everyone can learn different parts of the game and develop as an overall player.

How can we practice at home?

Keep it simple: dribble through cones, pass against a wall, play 1v1 in the backyard, or try juggling if they are interested.

Why are we not focusing more on winning?

We are focusing on skill development first. Learning the game properly now will help the players be more successful later.

Parents of Ages 8-10

What position is my child best suited for?

We are still evaluating strengths and helping players experience multiple positions. The goal is to create well-rounded players.

What can my child do to improve?

Consistent touches on the ball can make a big difference. Even 15 minutes a day of dribbling, passing, and shooting helps.

Why is my child playing defense instead of offense?

Playing multiple positions helps players understand the game and develop more complete skills.

Should my child play year-round?

Not necessarily. Playing multiple sports can be healthy for young athletes and may help prevent burnout.

How can I support my child after games?

Instead of asking, Did you win?,

try asking, Did you have fun?, What did you do well today?, or What did you learn?

Questions Coaches Should Ask Parents at the Start of the Season

Player Information

- Has your child played soccer before?
- Are there any medical concerns, allergies, or important needs we should know about?
- What does your child enjoy most about sports?

Parent Expectations

- What are you hoping your child gets out of this season?
- Is your main goal fun, exercise, skill development, social interaction, or a mix of these?

Communication and Support

- What is the best way to communicate schedule changes?
- Are you interested in helping as a team volunteer, assistant coach, or team parent?

Simple Message for the First Parent Meeting

My goal this season is simple:

- Make soccer fun
- Help every player improve
- Build confidence
- Teach teamwork and sportsmanship

We will compete and try our best every game, but player development and enjoyment will always come first. If the kids leave the field smiling and wanting to come back next week, we are doing our job.

The best recreational coach is not the one who wins the most games. It is the one who gets the most kids excited to play again next season.