

SOCCKER COACHING FOR CHILDREN AGES U4/U6

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INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of teaching soccer to young children is to introduce them to a **fun** game in which they have a chance to learn and build skills used in every day life as well as on the pitch/field.

The program described in this packet has been proven to work with children ages U4/U6 and can also be of use to anyone with the desire to coach the game of soccer. [A DVD you can buy from www.soccerhelp.com can help guide you through the coaching process if you are interested.] No experience with soccer or coaching is required to teach young children the game.

What is required? **Enthusiasm!**

Spring Season (Approx. 10 weeks): Dribbling is the most important skill! Include dribbling games at every practice and add shooting into weeks 4 or 5 (dependent on your group) and incorporate defense in weeks 7 and 8. Please do not discuss passing at this age. We recommend introducing passing at U8.

Fall Season (Approx. 10 weeks): Dribbling is the most important skill! Include dribbling games at every practice and add shooting into weeks 4 or 5 (dependent on your group) and incorporate defense in weeks 7 and 8. Please do not discuss passing at this age. We recommend introducing passing at U8.

FUN

The key to coaching children is to emphasize fun. If you're not having fun, the children won't either. Always remember to be genuinely enthused when coaching children. Sixty-minute practices are typical and are recommended.

- 🎯 Always start with a team cheer. Come up with a team name too.
- 🎯 Celebrate goals and praise them for doing well.
- 🎯 Do **NOT** punish children for losing a game or playing poorly. These are children; not adults. (For example: no lecturing or having them do laps).
- 🎯 Do **NOT** hold scrimmages for your team at this age (U4). The weaker players will often feel left out and will not get enough touches on the ball. **Touches are the most important thing at this age.** At U6, possibly incorporate, if you deem appropriate, a mini-scrimmage for no more than 10 minutes. Remember, the more touches, the better! ... A ball for every child is the best way to learn to play soccer!
- 🎯 **Abolish lines at practice.** They will get bored. Instead, place a ball at everyone's feet and have them practice/play, together, **at the same time.** [Coach Sergio will be monitoring this over the course of the season and course correct.]
- 🎯 Minimize one-on-one coaching at this age level. If one player needs specific coaching, try to limit it to breaks, before or after official practice times.
- 🎯 Try not to use cones to dribble around. Why use cones when you can dribble around other players, coaches or parents; like a real game? We use cones to mark a spot/area on the field.
- 🎯 **No Lines, No Laps, No Lectures**

FEET

Soccer is a game that is always played with the feet. (At a later age [U10/U14], we will incorporate throw-ins and/or heading). In order to help children, learn the fact that no one is supposed to ever touch the ball with their hands, **NEVER LET ANYONE**, touch the ball with their hands (including you, the parents, the children, etc.). Remind them to, "please use your feet, not your hands."

The three rules I had when I was coaching U4/U6 were:

1. Have fun!
2. Never touch the ball with your hands.
3. Have fun!

Some helpful tips for helping children distinguish this fact are:

- 🎯 Put air in balls prior to practice, so the kids do not see you touching the balls with your hands, ever.
- 🎯 Play games such as "Carrot Soccer", "Animal Soccer", and "Balls in the Bag". (described below)

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Feet games (3): Tips to enforce No Hands!

1. **Carrot Soccer** – Since carrots resemble a straight line, stand with arms by your side and pretend you're a carrot, so you are physically unable to touch the ball with your hands. Try to look like a carrot top..... 😊 Maybe use an orange cone...???
2. **Animal Soccer** – Have your players pretend to be animals while dribbling the ball. Birds are a good example of an animal to pretend to be while dribbling the ball because they don't have arms. Flap your arms like they're wings while running around while dribbling the ball. Incorporate animal/bird sounds to make it fun! 😊
3. **Balls in the Bag** – To help clean up the balls at the end of practice, hold the ball-bag up in front of a player while a ball is at their feet and have them kick a ball into the bag. As they improve, move further away.

HELP GETTING STARTED: THINGS YOU NEED

- 🚫 Always have at least one #3 ball for each player and remember to include yourself as well. You should bring more balls than there are children. Please encourage them to bring their own ball as well.
- 🚫 Players **MUST** wear shin guards at every practice.
- 🚫 Have children bring their own water or drink to practice
- 🚫 Bring cones to set up as goals only if you do not have goals or nets (real goals are best as they're visually better for a child to develop the fact that you're supposed to score into nets). – If you are using a practice field you should have goals available.
- 🚫 Portable goals/nets are also great to use in place of cones.
- 🚫 ALWAYS have a great attitude! ALWAYS have a great attitude!
- 🚫 Have a plan prior to your first practice. This may change; however, it's best to have a plan in place. Please see examples of practice plans in packet or at end.

Reminder – Encourage them to use both feet. Skilled soccer players are comfortable with their right AND left foot.....

DRIBBLING POINTERS

Dribbling the ball with the feet is the most important skills to acquire. Dribbling is essentially a series of small touches on the ball with your feet. Practicing this skill should be incorporated into every session. Some tips to remind players are:

- 🚫 Make sure that players keep the ball close to their feet by reminding them that it's like "keeping a puppy on a leash." Tell them that they don't want to let their puppy run away.
- 🚫 Keep your head up / try not to run into anyone – This builds field awareness. If a player is staring at their feet, they will run into someone at some point (remember that accidents do happen, so just encourage them to keep their head up at all times). Give players space on the pitch to help them avoid others while learning to keep their head up.
- 🚫 Dribbling is **NOT** kicking and chasing the ball.
- 🚫 Always remind them to:
 - Keep the ball close
 - Please keep your head up
 - Don't run into anyone (find space)

Reminder – Encourage them to use both feet. Skilled soccer players are comfortable with their right AND left foot.....

DRIBBLING GAMES (14): Encourage them to use all parts of the foot (outside, inside, laces, sole, heel)

1. **Carrot Soccer** - Since carrots resemble a straight line, stand with arms by your side and pretend you're a carrot, so you are physically unable to touch the ball with your hands.
2. **Animal Soccer** - Have your players pretend to be animals while dribbling the ball. Birds are a good example of an animal to pretend to be while dribbling the ball because they don't have arms. Flap your arms like they're wings while running around while dribbling the ball. Incorporate animal/bird sounds to make it fun!

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- Balls in the Bag** – To help clean up the balls at the end of practice, hold the ball-bag up in front of a player while a ball is at their feet and have them kick the ball into the bag. **Use at the end of every practice.**
- Go Score** – Have everyone score goals at the same time. Place a portable goal on the field and have everyone score at the same time. Once all balls are in the net, pick up the goal and put it somewhere else to have them do it again; alternatively, if the goal is stationary, this is where I teach them to pull the ball back by stepping on the ball and drawing it back. This emphasizes the use of no hands by forcing them to use their feet to pull the ball out of the net (it also helps prevent fingers being stepped on while someone is picking up a ball). They can then dribble back towards the other goal or back to the starting line and start over.
- The Big Pile** – Place a fair amount of balls in one spot and tell the kids to score as many goals as they can at the same time. Have them dribble the ball into the goal. Let everyone move at-their-own-pace. It doesn't matter if one player scores five times while another only scores twice. They're going at their own pace. That will happen. Try to have them score the goals within a given time period (for example: 3 minutes). Everyone is involved regardless of who is fast and who is slow. Then have them break their record...
- Race** – Two teams. Each group has their own pile of balls and they will race each other to see who scores their big pile of balls first. Dribble into the goal.
- Driving School** – Make sure every player has their own ball and tell them that you're a driving instructor that goes in many different directions such as forward, backward, right, left, etc. Call out those directions and have them do as you do. You can also have a child lead – they love this and follow them too.
- Treasure Hunt** – Take an old sheet or something similar and cut it up into pieces (or use disc cones). Place pieces scattered throughout the field. Place cones in a square which becomes the "treasure chest". Set it up during a break as it could take a few minutes. Have the children dribble the ball to and from the treasure chest while going out and picking up the treasure (pieces of sheet, etc.). Repeat until all pieces of treasure are picked up and placed in the treasure chest. Each player is only allowed to pick up one piece of treasure at a time.
- Treasure Hunt with Pirates** – After they've figured out the basic treasure hunt game, tell them to watch out for "pirates", who are coaches or parents that can help run around and chase the kids while they're searching for treasure to build their dribbling and shielding skills. Remind them to keep their head up, so they can see the pirates & the other players.
- Treasure Island (sheet/treasure not required)** – Set up a circle of cones which becomes the "island". Kick all balls away from the island. When you say "go", have them run out and get a ball to dribble back to the island until all balls are cleared from the field (back on the island). Make them stop the ball by putting their foot on it (step on the ball), before they go get the next one. Add "pirates" after the game is complete. Yell "aarrgghh" like a pirate when chasing them. You can instruct them to dribble with a certain foot or a particular part of the foot....
- Monster Invasion** – Tell kids to dribble around the balls while parents and coaches enter the field to try and chase or steal the balls from the kids. This teaches kids to shield the balls from attacking players on opposing teams. Ideas: drag your leg like Frankenstein, make monster noises, make a face, and say things like "Don't let me get your ball!!" But don't actually scare them. The idea is just to have them try to get away. Don't catch the players, just have fun.

Be fun monsters, not scary monsters!

The hardest part of this game is getting them to stay inside the field! Don't worry too much if they go out now and then but keep encouraging them to stay inside the field. I have seen kids run off 50 yards giggling playing this game and the parent monster really has to chase them to get them back to practice!

- Hickory Dickory Dock** – Lightly touch ball with bottom of the foot to hold it in place. Do not stand on the ball. Make sure all weight stays on the foot which remains on the ground. Children will need to step on and off the ball, alternating

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feet, without stopping. Sometimes you will have to physically support a child from falling over until they understand how to do it. Takes a few seconds to learn but incorporate it into every practice. I like to use this as warm-up while singing the nursery rhyme. This is great for stopping balls and changing directions and for pull-backs.

13. **Follow the Leader** – Call out player’s name who becomes the leader. Everyone will have to follow the leader while dribbling ball behind the leader. After a while, blow the whistle and tell them to freeze. All players will have to stop where they are and place one foot upon the ball just like in Hickory Dickory Dock. When you see a player doing a big “kick and chase” without being in control of the ball, this is a great time to tell them to freeze, as it will teach them to keep the ball close. They will also notice that they may be the only one chasing their ball.... Point out that if you always keep the ball close like a puppy on a leash, it will be easier to freeze.
14. **Chase the Kid** – Have one player dribble the ball in any direction and have the other players run behind while also dribbling their balls to try to tag/chase the leader. This teaches them how to change directions and to shake off other players. (Excellent intro to shielding and moves).

SHOOTING AND KICKING POINTERS

Shooting and kicking is the only way to score points in a soccer game, so learning how to properly do both techniques is extremely important. This is also the first time that you may have to work with players in a one-on-one fashion. It is critical to teach the players that you must kick with your shoelaces and NOT with your toes.

- **Instep Drive** – Show players their toes and explain that they can’t kick the ball with that part of their foot. Point to their shoelaces and tell them that they must strive to kick with that spot of their foot.
- **Shoelace Kick** – The easiest way to teach this kick is to show the placement of the non-shooting foot. If the non-shooting foot is placed well behind the ball as the kicking leg comes forward, the toe naturally leads. But, if you place the non-kicking foot directly next to the ball, then the knee naturally comes over the ball, the toe points down, and the ball is struck properly with the shoelaces. You must take time in a one-on-one fashion to teach this skill to your players as early as possible. For some kids, you might have to show them physically how to do it. Have parents help if you can, as it will take some time to have them properly kicking the ball. When you see a kid correctly striking the ball, tell them, “Great shoelace kick!”
- **Balls in the Bag** - To help clean up the balls at the end of practice, hold the ball-bag up in front of a player while a ball is at their feet and have them kick a ball into the bag. Use at the end of every practice.

Reminder – Encourage them to use both feet. Skilled soccer players are comfortable with their right AND left foot.....and all parts.

SHOOTING & KICKING GAMES (5)

1. **1-2-Kick** – Break players up into small groups of two players per parent/coach. Line up five balls in front of net. Call out, “1-2-Kick” – On “kick”, they must kick the balls. This teaches them to kick the balls quicker without having them think about it.
2. **Monster Kick** – This game is best for practicing powerful kicks. Set up cones in a row as a shooting line and when you blow your whistle, have the kids kick the ball as far as they can. Do not let the kids chase the ball until you instruct them to do so. Have them get the ball and dribble it back to the starting point. This game can be done in a variety of ways. Use your imagination to help kids shoot further and better. They can also re-kick from another spot.
3. **Through the Hoop** – This combines dribbling with monster kicks. Use a hula hoop and have the kids do a shoelace kick through the hoop and into the goal. You will need a lot of balls, so time isn’t wasted picking them up and bringing them back to the starting point.
4. **Hit the Coach** – If a player can hit the coach with a ball while you try to dodge them, imitate an animal or anything else to keep kids entertained. Anyone else can be a target. Kids love this game!
5. **Balls in the Bag** - To help clean up the balls at the end of practice, hold the ball-bag up in front of a player while a ball is at their feet and have them kick a ball into the bag. Use at the end of every practice.

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SHOOTING & DRIBBLING GAMES (10)

1. **Soccer Bees** – Set up a circle of cones which becomes the “bee hive”. Have all the parents become “wasps” that invade the bee hive. The bees (kids) have to sting (hit with ball) the wasps, while dribbling, to protect their hive. Every time they sting a wasp they will yell, “Sting!” When a parent is stung, they must leave the field. They can come back in and attack again as a wasp. Parent participation is the key to making this game work well.
2. **Snowball Fight (or “Splat”)** – Every player will have a ball. The object of the game is to hit another player’s ball with your own ball. Call out “splat” when it happens. Have parents participate. This teaches them to dribble, protect the ball, and attack other balls/players. It’s a great lead-in to accurate passing and shooting at a later age. Eventually, have them try to get the kids to attack the coach’s ball.
3. **Inside of Foot Turn (more like a skill than a game)** – Have players watch coach dribble the ball, go past the ball, and block the ball with the inside of the foot. Then push it and dribble away in other direction. Show them once or twice before beginning.
4. **Turn-around Game** – Have another coach or parent on hand to position them on the opposite side of the field from the coach and tell the players to dribble towards coach-1. When they approach coach-1, the coach will do a big circular arm movement, call the players by name and tell them to turn-around and run towards coach/parent-2. They should only turn-around when they hear their own name. This teaches them to listen to the command to turn-around (from coach) in a match. This will prevent scoring in their own net, especially at a later age.
5. **Ring Around the Parent** – Set up a shooting line, place a ball at the feet of every player, put a parent or cone in front, and when you blow the whistle, have kids dribble around cone/parent and come back to where they started. Have them stop where they started by placing foot on ball (like Hickory Dickory Dock). Combine with Animal Soccer for great results. Be sure to have all players do activity simultaneously.

ADVANCE DRIBBLING GAMES (9)

1. **Tag** – Every child dribbles a soccer ball in the space defined while trying to tag other players with their hand. Players cannot leave their own ball. Have them keep count of how many people they have tagged and, if playing twice in a row, see if players can tag more people than they did in the first game.
2. **Hospital Tag** – Same as tag, in that each player dribbles a soccer ball and that they try to tag each other with their hands. In this game, each time a player is tagged, he/she must place their hand on the spot on their body at which they were tagged. Obviously, if tagged a third time, players have no more hands to cover those spots, so they must go to the hospital to see the doctor. The coach acts as the doctor and performs a magical task (pretend) to heal all the little soccer players so they can continue playing the game.
3. **Red Light / Green Light** – All players have a ball and dribble in a limited space (or towards the coach). When coach says, “red light”, players must stop the ball and put a foot on top of ball. When coach says, “yellow light”, players must dribble very slowly. When coach says “green light”, players dribble fast. Coach controls this game with frequency of light changes and variety of speeds. Once players catch on to this game, add light of other colors and affix different actions to them (i.e. purple light = hop back and forth over ball; orange light = run around the ball; black light = dance, etc.)
4. **Freeze Tag** – Break up the group into two teams. Everyone must dribble their soccer ball, but one team tries to tag (freeze) the other team. If they do tag a player on the other team that player must freeze and spread their legs. Another player on their team must kick his/her ball through the frozen player’s legs to unfreeze them. If all players are frozen, the game ends and the frozen team becomes the taggers. Otherwise, stop the game after a few minutes and have the

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team's reverse roles. Version 2: Coach can be the freeze monster and try to tag all the players with the players unfreezing each other in the same fashion.

5. **Planets** – Set up cones into multiple squares or triangles that serve as planets (or cities). All players must follow coach's order and dribble into the planet he calls out. Coach can have all players follow same directions, or break up team so they start at different planet and then have them dribble through the solar system in clockwise or counterclockwise fashion. Coach can also have groups dribble in opposite direction through the solar system.
6. **Kangaroo Jack** – All Players except two or three begin with a ball. Players without balls are kangaroo jacks and must hop like a kangaroo and try to tag players. If a player gets tagged, he/she become a kangaroo as well until all players are turned into kangaroos.
7. **Snake** – In an appropriate space for the numbers you have, have all the players dribbling soccer balls except 2-3 players to start. These players hold hands and work together as one snake to tag the other players; the players with the balls try to avoid getting tagged by the snake. If a player is tagged, they join hands with the players making up the snake, and the snake grows until all the players are part of the snake. The snake MUST stay together as one animal and NOT break off into little parts. Encourage fun by having the snake hiss.
8. **Capture the Balls** – Set up three or four "home bases" (squares) with cones, roughly 2-3 yards wide. Break up the players into teams and have each team get together in their home base. Place all the balls in the center of the space between the home bases. On the coach's command, the teams are free to gather as many soccer balls as they can into their home base. Players cannot use hands and there is no pushing each other or sitting/laying on the balls. Teams try to gather as many balls as possible into their home bases. Teams can steal balls from each other's home bases. Coach will call time and counts how many balls are in each space to determine a winner. Coach allows team 1 minute to make up a new strategy before playing again.



9. **Moving Goal** - Two coaches use a pennie or an extra piece of clothing to form a movable goal, with each coach serving as a post and the shirt serving as the crossbar.

DEFENSE POINTERS

Once you have them turning around, dribbling, shooting and scoring, it's time to start them on how to stop the other team/players from doing the same thing.

Be aware that when you start teaching defense, emotions run very high. It's okay to steal the ball from another player. Have them steal the ball from each other, and if a player gets mad, have them steal the ball back (of course no pushing or fighting). It's okay to steal the ball from the other team, but not your own teammate.

DEFENSE GAMES (2)

1. **Everybody Against the Coach** – Place all balls and kids at far end of the field while coach defends his goal. Have them all try to score at once. Have players join to play defense with coach. Need more attackers than defenders at all times. Every attacker needs a ball.

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2. **Sharks and Surfer Dudes (variation of Sharks and Minnows)** – Set up with one or two players in the middle (shark alley). All other players have a ball, when you say go, surfer dudes try to dribble past the sharks while the shark(s) try to stop them (stealing ball or kicking out of the alley). If surfer dude loses ball, they become a shark for next round. Continue back and forth until the last surfer dude/dudette is standing. **Make it fun. Have the sharks as the surfer dudes if they are ready (“Are you ready surfer dudes?”) Surfers reply in surfer voice “Hang Ten Dude!” while making the Hang Ten hand sign. Surfers then ask sharks if they’re ready (“Are you ready sharks?”). Sharks reply by growling. Then coach yells go.**

PASSING

Passing is NOT a priority for very young players. Focus on dribbling, shooting, scoring, defense before teaching passing. Don't expect much as passing isn't the easiest technique for young players to learn. Plus, they don't like sharing at this age. We will introduce passing in U8.

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Addendum

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Note from Coach Doug at SoccerHelp

NOTE: Coach Doug now thinks it is better NOT to teach passing to U4 and U6 players because it confuses them and can diminish their dribbling skills and aggressiveness with the ball. Coach Doug writes about his experience with his daughter below, and I had a similar experience with my son Gael, when he was dominating so much at a young age, that I started telling him to pass because I felt bad for the other team. This was a disservice to him, as like Coach Doug says about his daughter, Gael would turn around from a sure goal to look for a teammate to pass to instead of shooting or dribbling the ball in. Coach Doug therefore recommends focusing on dribbling and recommends you DON'T teach them that it's wrong to dribble and score, and DON'T teach them that it's better to pass the ball than to dribble. He recommends teaching passing at U8. For more about this, see below.

(The following was written by Coach Doug)

I now believe it is best NOT to teach soccer passing to U4 or U6 soccer players – instead, focus on dribbling, movement, fun and the basics. I think U8 is the right age to introduce passing.

Trying to teach passing at U-4 had a negative effect on my daughter Mackenzie, and it took almost a year for me to correct it. The problem became that she began to pass the ball too often. The reason that it was a problem was that she would try to pass when she should have been dribbling. What I finally realized was that U4 and U6 players aren't mentally ready to deal with the complex decision-making required to determine "when to pass and when NOT to pass."

Mackenzie is once again a very aggressive 1 on 1 attacker, she has the confidence to beat defenders, but she also knows how to pass and roughly when to do it and not do it.

The age to teach passing is not based on foot skills, it's based on mental readiness to understand the more complex ideas that I discuss below.

Sure, a 4-year-old can stand 6 feet away from another 4-year-old and they can kick the ball back and forth, but that is not passing! That isn't why we pass the soccer ball. That is teaching passing statically, like teaching dribbling by weaving through cones.

Here is the critical thing about teaching passing – you must teach players when NOT to pass!!! Knowing when NOT to pass is vastly more important than teaching them to pass.

I see parents and coaches saying things like "passing is good", and they give the impression that passing is good just for the sake of doing it. I bought into this myself for a while, and I know David did too. This is false! This is the trap that inexperienced coaches fall into when teaching passing. Or "share the ball"- that's the wrong thing to teach U4 and U6 players! Teaching "share the ball" will confuse players and the point of passing will become to "share the ball" – that's not why a player should pass.

A parent will yell out "pass the ball" and one of my good dribblers will stop dribbling, look around and pass it to a kid 3 feet away from him! That does absolutely nothing. The same defender just steps over to the new less-skilled kid that just got it three feet away, and the attacking momentum toward the opponent's goal has been stopped. I often have to tell my parents to NOT tell their kids to pass.

[Below notes will apply to the U8 division, but you can still peruse and use on your second or third season with the same team if you see they are ready]

I teach a decision-making process about passing – what I teach is not a physical skill, it's a mental skill. Teaching the physical skill of passing isn't hard – teaching a kid when it is a good idea to pass is what counts.

Here is the decision process I teach:

- 1. If you have the ball and there is a clear path forward, DRIBBLE forward and take the open space! This is not "being selfish", this is smart soccer!***

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2. If you have the skill and can beat whoever is blocking your path, beat them and dribble forward! This is good on multiple levels, it teaches 1v1 attacking and it builds confidence in skilled players.
3. Only look to pass the ball if your path forward is completely blocked and you can't get through.

The way I look at it, the most important thing to teach young players about passing is how to make the correct decision as to whether they should pass it at all. I don't praise passing for the sake of passing — I praise a good decision to do it and passing at the proper moment. Whether the pass is received by anyone or not isn't the most critical thing and isn't the way I judge progress or success.

My very best players can beat anyone 1 on 1, so they only get blocked if there are two or three in front of them, which means someone else ought to be open to receive a pass. (Note from David: This ability to "Take on and beat a defender" is very, very important and is one of the keys to Anson Dorrance's success. Coach Dorrance is the most successful college soccer coach ever and has won over 600 games and 19 national championships (UNC)).

What I am spending most of my time on is movement OFF THE BALL. This requires stopping the action, pointing out good places to move to, and demonstrating why.

So, now I am constantly showing kids where to go to be OPEN for a pass, and to CALL for it when open.

Here are some of the things my players tend to do that I try to correct:

1. They come really close to the player who has the ball when they want to be passed to. I show them that when they make a very short pass one defender can cover both the passer and receiver and they aren't moving the ball downfield and they aren't creating "space".
2. They sometimes run really far down the field, beyond the kicking range of the kids with the ball, even not under pressure, so they aren't within distance to receive a pass – basically they are "out of the play".
3. Sometimes they run all the way to the goal, even if the guy with the ball is 30 meters away (keep in mind, these are 6-year olds, so 30 meters is a long distance).
4. They run to a place which has a defender in between them and the kid with the ball, so they have blocked themselves from a clear passing path.

Here are some of the things I'm teaching my players:

1. I am teaching them to run to an Open Space, but they must be able to see the kid with the ball with NO ONE in the way (i.e., no one between them and the passer, so the passer could potentially pass them the ball). I teach them that once they get to the Open Space, they should raise their arm in the air, and call for a pass. One good thing about having them raise their arm is that I know that when they raise their arm it means they THINK they are in a good position for a pass, and I can see if they are learning and correct them if they are wrong.
2. I am teaching them, not to run too far away from the passer, or to be too close to the passer.
3. I never use the word "good pass" for a pass that goes right to the receiver's feet. To me any pass in the general vicinity of an open player or open space that they can run to is a good pass.
4. NEVER use the word "bad pass", if a player makes an appropriate decision to pass it and a reasonable attempt to pass, because it was a good decision to pass. If it's a decent pass, it is the receiver's job to get to that pass at all costs! Receivers make the pass a good one, not the passer! In my opinion, the receiver has as much to do as the passer with whether a pass is a "good pass". The problem often is that a receiver is lazy or not getting open. Now, keep in mind that my players are young, so I teach them in a nice, positive way. I stress to my players that passes often don't come right at your feet and that it's your job to be ready and run to it and get it wherever it is, or if it isn't hard enough to run to it, or if it's passed too hard you still need to stop the ball. (Note from David: Doug is teaching what on SoccerHelp I call "Aggressive Receiving").

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5. Another technique I use to teach “movement off the ball” is this:

First, I ask my kids:

What do you do if you have the ball? Go Score!

What do you do if the other team has the ball? Steal it!

What do you do if your teammate has the ball? Blank stare...

Then, I teach them: “If your teammate has the ball,

First, get out of his way!

Second, go someplace else, but where?

I tell them left, right or behind. Left or right are good for receiving (square), back is good as backup defender or support. I don't teach backwards passing to this age group. I want them to pass laterally and forward.

Coach Doug

SOCCKER COACHING FOR CHILDREN AGES U4/U6

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BEHAVIOR PROBLEMS

Your own behavior must be great. Never argue with anyone, including referees. Cheer for EVERYONE, including the other team. Do not accept any bad behavior from parents. Be polite, but firm.

- 🏆 **Good behavior** – Don't use hands, good hustle, defense, team work, enthusiasm, scoring and sportsmanship. This is encouraged and gets praise.
- 🏆 **Neutral behavior** – Not what you want them to do but not harmful to others. If player doesn't want to participate, don't punish the child. Encourage the kids to play but don't force the issue. That will only make them not want to play even more.
- 🏆 **Negative behavior** – Inappropriate, harmful, hitting, spitting, bad words, etc. Stop action and address those problems right away. Tell them why it's unacceptable and how to correct it. If it persists, have them sit with parents to have them calm down. No punishment. If behavior is corrected, they get praise. Knocking another player over while FAIRLY playing the game is not negative behavior. There's a difference between pushing / hitting a player on purpose versus knocking someone down / hitting them while fairly playing.

PATCHES

[This is entirely optional, but something I did with all my teams (U4/U5/U6 and U8). I used to order patches out-of-pocket and then explained to the parents why I was using them and asked them to pitch in to cover the costs. It usually ended up being \$5 - \$10 per child. Soccerhelp.com has a good set of patches to use. – Coach Sergio]

Use iron-on patches as a motivational tool. Give players a patch after a practice or a game. Don't give them more than one per practice / game or they'll lose their value. Use them however you deem fit for your team. If they participate properly, give out a patch. NEVER give out patches for scoring goals! Goals are reward enough and this encourages selfish play in the long run.

I used patches to get children motivated to participate in practice and/or games. I explain this to the parents first, and it will stink seeing your child be upset for being the only one not to receive a patch at game or practice, but it only takes 2-3 times of this before they start participating. If they are "rewarded" even though they did not participate, then they will have no incentive to try next time.

I also used them to reinforce skills we are working on. Some ideas for patches are:

- 🏆  **T-Patch** Turn-around patch – Given when a player executes a proper turn-around. As they get the hang of it you will see that they do a turn-around without the need for your verbal cue. When you see this, really praise them!
- 🏆  **B** Bravery – I used to hand these out when players would take a hard fall, sometimes even crying from it, but then got back in the game.
- 🏆  **D** Defense – Given when a player is doing awesome at defense. Hustling back and stopping a goal or stealing a ball.
- 🏆  **Spirit (Participation)** – I would give these out to players that didn't necessarily show any of the skills above, but at least got into the game to play instead of sitting on the bench the whole time. Passive participation. These are the ones I used to motivate players to at least get in the game. Sitting on the bench the whole time did not earn them a patch. I had both pink and blue for the usual gender clichés, but I gave plenty of pink ones to boys and blue to girls. I let them choose.
- 🏆  **A** Attitude - This was a step up from the Spirit patch. I used Attitude instead of the word Aggressiveness to symbolize confidence. While the Spirit patch earner got in the game, they never really got in the mix or touched the ball. If they then showed some attitude and got in there and actually kicked the ball a few times, or had some good dribbles, (without necessarily showing a specific skill) then they would graduate from a Spirit patch to an Attitude patch. It's amazing how motivating it is to try to get another patch besides the same Spirit patch every game.

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 Behavior – If I had issues with negative behavior during a game (hitting/pushing) I would pull the child aside and offer this up if they corrected the behavior; however, they would not get this patch if they did the negative behavior at least one more time during the game. They might still get a skill patch but not this one. Also, remember if you give this patch out, do not give a second one.

      Practice Patches – You want them to come and participate in practice. This is where they will get the most touches as everyone will have a ball at their feet and where they will learn the most. This will drive them to want to come to practice. Soccer Help has several colors to choose from. I used to go with the standard black/white soccer ball for practice. Again, only give the practice patch out if they had no behavior issues and participated. If they sat with Mom/Dad the whole time, or were extremely disruptive after you tried to correct (use your judgement here), do not give a practice patch out.

Make sure if you give out patches for assists to keep it scarce as it will be desired and will encourage selflessness. [Again, not something to use in U4/U6]

Never give out a patch if they didn't earn it.

EXTRAS

Pressure and traffic – If you teach a kid to dribble by himself and at his own pace, he learns limited skills. Have kids play together in a competitive situation, with lots of traffic, so it creates pressure. Kids will learn to deliver appropriately in traffic.

Touches – Players need hundreds of touches per game or practice. The more touches, the better and faster they learn.

The Soccer Help Method

http://www.soccerhelp.com/Basic_Info.shtml

Practice Plans – http://www.soccerhelp.com/Soccer_Practice_Plans.shtml

www.soccerhelp.com