

Tips for Coaching Young Kids

Coaching young kids can be a challenge regardless of the number of years experience you have had. All kids are different and all kids learn differently and at different stages. This is your chance to revert back to being a kid and coaching in their world. Here are a number of tips to help you adapt your training sessions.

1. Remember they are here to have fun

Don't use drills designed for adults - they are too repetitive and boring for kids.

2. Work on a 5-10 minute on/off program

Concentration spans are short at this age, so break the games up every 5-10 minutes and do something really different (such as simply kick the ball and get them to chase it or a game of tag) then bring them back to the game and start again with a short recap on technique.

3. Keep your explanations short and clear

Again they are not here to listen to your worldly experience, they are here to have fun!! Get the points to them quick and use clear language.

4. Draw the key technical points out of them through questions

Ask the kids questions that make them think about why they are doing what they are doing? What are the important points to make the activity work? (only work on 3 points)

e.g. Q. Can I stand in front of the ball carrier? A. No - Q. Where can I stand? A. Behind him/her
Q. Can I tackle from far away? A. No - Q. Then what do I have to do to make a good tackle? A. Get close to the ball carrier.

5. Re-enforce the 3 technical points constantly

For each game choose 3 technical (teaching) points and ask questions that re-enforce them. e.g. Tackling has 3 key points - get close, tackle low, and grip and squeeze around both legs.

6. Work in progression

All games or skill development should build or follow on from previous the previous games or drill. Always start as simple as possible and then build on from to the next level.

7. Use Language they will understand

Here is your chance to be a kid again. Use creative names and analogies (Don't use the latest technical jargon you might have learnt in you advanced coaching course or on-line Super 14 website).

e.g. Cleaners should be called assassins whose job is to take out any opponent trying to steal their ball (or gold for really young kids).



Here are a number of game styles kids enjoy playing.

- Chasing
- Throwing - especially rugby balls at each other
- Kicking - especially rugby balls at each other
- Rumbling or wrestling
- Evasion

Designing Skills Games

Designing a skills game is not as hard as it sounds. There is an easy formula and it goes like this;

Step 1 – begin with your objectives, what are the key learning points? Limit them to 3 only. Choose only the aspects that will directly affect the skill. Lets take tackling for example. The 3 key aspects of a good tackle are

1. **Get close to the ball carrier**
2. **Get low**
3. **Squeeze tight around both the legs**

Step 2 – **Choose or design a game** that could help teach the players these 3 learning points. Don't be scared to modify games the kids already know or you can remember from your childhood. We decided to use the bear hug as the base for our game development.

Step 3 – **Simplify the rules** to begin with, if possible start in pairs. At this point we want them to discover the 3 key learning points themselves. So think of the easiest rules for the game, more rules can be added later to increase the difficulty.

We chose a bear hug challenge. Split the players into pairs, tell them to start with their hands on each others shoulders. Once the coach calls go the players are to attempt to bar hug the opponent and lift him off the ground.

Step 4 – **Question and answer** is the best way to drag the key learning points out of the players and it also helps them to reflect on what they actually did.

E.g. can you bear hug from far away? When you squeeze around both legs can the player walk or run? To lift someone off the ground what do you have to do?

Step 5 – **Replay the game and speed the process up** adding a couple of slight variations. Make sure the players challenge other players. Add any progressions you think could embed the key learning points.

E.g. rotate the players after each successful challenge and make them find another partner. Finally, continually reiterate the 3 key learning points until they can tell you each one.

