



Indiana Soccer Association

Grassroots Coaching



Session Plans are organized by Player Age Groups and by Training Themes. Each Practice Plan is designed specifically to be age appropriate. Age groups are designated in even years (i.e. U6, U8, U10, etc.) but the sessions are also appropriate for the odd year preceding the age group listed (e.g. U6 practice plans are appropriate for U5 players). If you believe that your players need more or less challenge, feel free to try Practice Plans in an older or younger age group. Click on an age group button to view our session plans!

Play, Practice, Play

The (Initial) Play Stage – Considered “Deliberate Play”. Empirical data has shown that children learn best when they get to experience periods of unstructured play where they can experiment on their own, it promotes enjoyment, inclusion and development. These three factors have been proven to increase motivation to continue playing. The coaches role during this Play stage is to ensure safety, monitor the games and “take the pulse” of the players. Monitoring the games includes making sure the games are not lopsided and providing adequate stoppages to allow the players to stretch and rehydrate. During the stoppages the coach is encouraged to ask guiding questions to lead the players towards the goal and objectives of the session. “Taking the pulse” refers to checking the player’s involvement and gauging their emotional state through active or in some cases avoidance of participation. In short showing the players how much you care about them right from the start of a practice.

The Practice Stage – Considered “Play – Practice” using activities to create game-like situations that create problems for the players to solve and the coach to assist with the problem solving process. A simple checklist (provided in the session plans) includes questions such as: Does it look like Soccer? Is it organized? Is it challenging? Are there repetitions? (Of the topic being worked on) and Is there coaching? (Consisting predominantly of positive reinforcement) but should also include the normalizing of errors. (Mistakes are an essential part of the learning process). During this stage coaches are encourage to set up small group activities that focus on the topic being worked on that day. We have also provided a set of Guided Questions that the coach can refer to throughout the practice session.

The (Final) Play Stage – Considered “Contextual Learning” – In this stage we are checking to see how much if any of the practice stage has transferred with each player into the game. It is recommended in this stage that the coach sets up 2 teams of equal numbers and that one team is set up as close to the starting lineup for the upcoming game as attendance at the practice permits. In ideal circumstances (which rarely occurs) the coach should play in the game format 4 v 4, 7 v 7 etc. that the players will experience in the upcoming game. The players should experience extended periods of uninterrupted play with the coach just monitoring the safety of the players and reviewing the checklist and guided questions to empower the players to solve problems on their own.

Why switch to Play
Practice Play?

It is an approach that gives the game back to the player, that emphasis player development through playing while the coach guides the player through questions that permit the players to solve soccer problems on their own.