

# ONTARIO SOCCER ASSOCIATION

## Grassroots Soccer - Provincial Curriculum

FOR COACHES OF LEARN TO TRAIN PLAYERS

LEARN TO TRAIN



L.T.P.D.  
long term player development



VERSION 1



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# Introduction

This LTPD resource has been created for Districts, Academies, Clubs and coaches to follow a provincial coaching curriculum that is physical literacy stage-specific for players from u4 to u12.

The information within this document will allow members to create programs and coaching sessions that are appropriate for the development stage of each player. By implementing the curriculum, along with good coaching methodology, players will benefit from and enjoy practice sessions more. All sessions will focus on player development in a low stress, supportive, positive, fun filled and safe environment. By coaches creating this environment the players will be excited to learn and be anxious to return.

In general terms a curriculum consists of everything that promotes technical, personal, social and physical development of the players. In addition to activity examples and sample session plans it includes approaches to teaching and learning. The curriculum helps to remove the 'guess work' in choosing developmentally appropriate content and enables coaches to work on their methodology and coaching style.

## Coaching Philosophy

Coaches of players in the Physical Literacy stream will benefit from a sound, well thought out coaching philosophy. We would strongly recommend that coaches follow a "player centred" coaching philosophy. Player centred coaching allows the player to make decisions within the practice session and/or game. The coach has to be confident enough to empower his/her players to become assured decision-makers during their session. As soccer is a game based on making numerous decisions it's vitally important that the coach allows the young player to practice and develop the decisions that they make. Initially many young players decisions will be unsuccessful but only through support, time and patience, will our young players develop the skill to make better decisions.

**“To apply the future game philosophy we need coaches who can develop environments in which players are encouraged to be creative and expressive without the fear of failure.”**

*Sir Trevor Brooking*  
*FA Director of Football Development*

# Physical Literacy Complimentary Sports

Sports can be classified as early or late specialization, and the seven stages of LTPD are based on this concept. Acrobatic and artistic sports such as figure skating, diving and gymnastics are early specialisation sports while other sports such as basketball and soccer are late specialization sports.

Because soccer is a late specialization sport, LTPD actively discourages early specialization (i.e. prior to the age of 10 years) since premature specialization contributes to imbalanced physical development, overuse injuries, early

burn out and inadequate development of movement and sport skills.

The first three stages of LTPD, Active Start, FUNdamentals and Learn to Train, encourages physical literacy for all players, regardless of their abilities or disabilities. The diagram below shows examples of sports and activities (not exhaustive) that are complimentary and will support physical literacy and soccer. Soccer volume can increase but participation in other sports is important to all round balanced athletic development.

## THE CANADIAN PHYSICAL LITERACY FAB FIVE



*Promoting full physical literacy by learning fundamental movement skills and fundamental sports skills on land, in the air, in water, on ice and on snow.*

## COMPLIMENTARY ACTIVITIES FOR LEARNING TO TRAIN



*Each category has a unique and collective impact on all-around development and it is important that children ages 4-12 sample activities from all three.*

# Four Corner Development Model

The Four Corner LTPD model consists of technical, psychological, physical and social/emotional components. Each corner of the model reflects a wide aspect of a player's development that has to be considered. The gradual progressive development of players is fundamental to the enjoyment, technical competency and retention in the game. The Four Corner approach places the player at the center of the development process with soccer experiences that meet the four key needs of the player.

Although priorities will vary during the player's different ages and phases of maturity, the model provides a basic framework for coaches to work within. In addition to the four main components, there are a number of additional 'contributions' from a wide number of people, such as parents, teachers, schools and local clubs. The model is deliberately interlinked, which means that activity in any one corner will produce a reaction throughout all aspects of the model. For example, a practice technique may impact physical balance and co-ordination while producing

increased confidence and enhanced social standing within the group. The key message to coaches is not to consider any of the programme's aspects in isolation.

As the development pathway for each individual player is unique and diverse, the needs of each player will ebb and flow in all of the 4 corners. And, whilst the need for added support for some players will be minimal, others will require much more applied and specific support.

A player's performance in practice and matches can be influenced by the following factors, nearly all of which need to be considered when forming an opinion of a player's progress and true ability: date of birth, relative to the rest of the group; body types; adolescent growth spurt in all the four corners; physical maturity; psychological maturity; social maturity; previous experience; opposition; position suitability; instructions given to the player; and recent playing activity.



*The Four Corner development model is referenced throughout this resource using the colour codes found above in the diagram. Tactical information is shown using white.*

# TECHNICAL/TACTICAL:

Players improve by playing lots of soccer and being active in other complementary sports and activities. That said, without a skilled mix of guidance, challenge, appropriate questioning, demonstration and teaching, it's unlikely that players will reach their true potential.

## TIPS FOR TECHNICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Use the coaching activity to challenge and develop players technically. Encourage players to try new skills.
- Appropriate challenges may be set for the whole group or for individuals within the group. For example in a passing practice some players may be challenged to play one-touch passes whenever they think it's appropriate.
- When appropriate, practice activity should replicate the demands of the game, encouraging players to think and make decisions just as they would in a game. Clever practice design should allow players to repeat and re-visit elements of the game without experiencing boredom.

# PHYSICAL:

To become an effective soccer player there are basic physical movement skills that need to be developed. Agility, balance, coordination, and speed (ABC'S) are all essential qualities for players; between the ages of 4-12 young players have a "window of opportunity" to develop these attributes.

Addressing the state of physical literacy of children is one of the biggest challenges we currently face in society and coaches should help communicate the benefits of physical activity and a healthy lifestyle.

## TIPS FOR PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Children are not mini adults and shouldn't be subjected to running laps of the field and doing push ups.
- Through well-designed practice all coaching activities can include physical outcomes.
- A shooting practice may include a physical challenge which is realistic to the demands of the game. E.g. a defender and an attacker may have to turn and race onto a through ball before taking a shot at goal. In this way the players are working on turning, acceleration and deceleration as well as the technical elements of the exercise.
- Coaches working with young players should be aware of the key windows for physical development and which aspects of a players development can be improved and when.
- Appropriate movement skills such as tag games and activities which develop agility, balance and coordination should be encouraged through enjoyable games.
- Don't expect too much from young players too soon!

# PSYCHOLOGICAL/MENTAL:

Creating learning environments that challenge players to be imaginative, creative and reflect on their performance—both during and after practice/game—is fundamental to the development of the future player. Coaches should adopt different coaching styles and methods to meet the individual needs of young players, understanding that there is more than one way for players to learn the game.

## TIPS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Use different methods to communicate with different types of learners.
- **Visual (seeing):** tactics boards, posters, diagrams, cue and prompt cards as well as arrangements of cones on the pitch are some ways in which coaches can communicate with players visually.
- **Auditory (hearing):** As well as speaking with the players and asking questions, coaches can encourage players to discuss aspects of the game in pairs, small groups and also with the whole group. Through communication with others, players can help solve game-related problems and learn more about the game.
- **Kinaesthetic (doing):** physically 'walking through' positional arrangements and freeze-framing parts of the game can help paint pictures in the mind of the players and contribute to the understanding of the game.
- Help players learn the game and develop their decision-making skills by setting game-related problems for players to solve. For example "in this passing practice try and turn with no-touches whenever possible; try and work out when you will be able to do this and when you won't"

# SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL:

Playing soccer can help children learn many life skills: cooperation, teamwork, communication and friendship are some of the benefits of joining a team and playing the game. To allow these social skills to develop, players should be allowed a safe and supportive environment and given encouragement to learn the game.

## TIPS FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT;

- Coaches should strive to create a positive environment which is welcoming for players both during games and training. How you treat your players is crucial to ensuring this is positive and fulfilling for the young player.
- Players should be praised and recognised for effort and endeavour as well as ability. This will highlight the process of learning and striving to get better rather than just the final outcome.
- As coaches are in a significant position of influence with their players it is important to give consideration to the type of role-model you are. What are your values and beliefs and how is this demonstrated in your behaviour?

*The relationship between the coach and the players is of a significant importance. The ability of a coach to establish a rapport with the players will accelerate the learning process. Coaches should be adaptable and flexible in their coaching methods, changing to the need of the individual player.*

## **COACHING METHODS**

When planning a coaching session the coach should consider the most appropriate coaching method for the group of players that they are working with and the outcome they wish to achieve.

The “coaching methods” table below outlines a range of approaches that can be used to meet players’ individual needs. The use of coaching methods will vary due to the ever-changing process of coaching. Some of the key factors coaches should consider when planning their coaching methods are;

- The group of players/individual player the coach is working with
- The intended outcome of the practice
- The technical content of the practice

Mastery of the different coaching methods and communication styles is the mark of a gifted coach and will be an essential requirement for a coach.

| <b>CONTINUUM</b>           |   |   |  |  |   |
|----------------------------|---|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Coaching Method</b>     | <b>Command</b>                            | <b>Question &amp; Answer</b>                                | <b>Observation &amp; Feedback</b>          | <b>Guided Discovery</b>  | <b>Trial &amp; Error</b>                                      |
| Player/coach interventions | Coach tells and shows required solution   | Coach leads with a question to gain a response from players | Coach and players observe                  | Coach asks a question or issues a challenge                                | Players &/or coach decide on a challenge                      |
| Example                    | “I want you to pass the ball to Rahim”    | “Can you tell me who you could pass to here?”               | “Let’s watch and see what happens”         | “Can you show me how you could get the ball to Anna?”                      | “Try it for yourself...”                                      |
| Description                | Coach determines the outcomes in practice | Coach poses question & players offer a verbal solution      | Players & coach observe & discuss feedback | Coach prompts and player offers a demonstration of their personal solution | Players are encouraged to find solutions with minimal support |

# General Player Characteristics of Age Appropriate Development

| Stage                 | Age        | Characteristics  |
|-----------------------|------------|--|
| <b>Active Start</b>   | <b>U4</b>  | Players at this age have a very short attention span, they are very easily distracted. They all want to play with their ball, the toy. There is no sense of sharing toys, especially with strangers.         |
|                       | <b>U5</b>  | There is no ability yet for team play. As sharing is still an alien concept, passing the ball is not yet comfortable for them. They are only able to understand very simple rules.                           |
| <b>FUNDamentals</b>   | <b>U6</b>  | Able to understand very basic coaching info like stay in the area, attack in that direction etc. Learning through trial and error. Biggest challenge is learning to control the moving ball with their feet. |
|                       | <b>U7</b>  | Players now understand that the game's purpose is to score more goals than their opponents. Still a lot of individual play.  |
|                       | <b>U8</b>  | Players' understanding that acting with the ball purposefully will lead to success is developing. Combining basic motor skills with ball control is now encouraged.  |
| <b>Learn to Train</b> | <b>U9</b>  | Now playing on a 7v7 field the understanding of team play, direction and opponent is developing. Optimum age to work on soccer specific techniques and skills  |
|                       | <b>U10</b> | More and more understanding and feeling for teamwork. Understanding of playing without the ball (running off the ball) develops.   |
|                       | <b>U11</b> | Perfect mental and physical ability for developing motor skills. Preference for specific positions becomes clearer. Developing an understanding of individual roles in relation to team.                     |
|                       | <b>U12</b> | Likes to compete and compare. Socially aware, critical of own performance and that of ???others. Ideal mental and physical condition in this age group. Imitates idols.                                      |

**FOR MORE DETAILED PLAYER CHARACTERISTICS SEE EACH DEVELOPMENT STAGE'S INFORMATION PAGES**