

LIL' KICKERS PHILOSOPHY

GUIDING PRINCIPLES: THE 4 C'S

Child-Centered
Non-Competitive
Comprehensive
Creativity

Child-Centered:

Lil' Kickers takes a child-centered approach to sports development. We look at the Lil' Kickers experience primarily from the perspective of children and their parents. We consider the child's developmental challenges and stages as the most crucial criteria for facilitating successful teaching and learning in Lil' Kickers. We also focus on the parent's role in the experience and educate parents about the psychology and dynamics of team sports and the coach-player relationship. Our approach helps children feel safe and supported so they will challenge themselves to grow and learn.

Most youth soccer and sports programs still define the relationship between player and coach in terms of what makes sense for the game of soccer, not the people involved. Many youth coaches in the 9 and under age range are volunteers with little to no coaching experience or training in child development. The typical coaching approach involves training players in specific technical skills and situational awareness, which will help win soccer games.

This approach is satisfying to those young players who have a natural aptitude for skills or are determined to excel. However, for the majority of young children, this type of coaching is not fulfilling. It fails to consider the importance of the parent's role and gives kids the impression that sports are always about winning. It also gives the misleading impression that the coach is the only member of the team that can help the team be a cohesive unit. In Lil' Kickers we redefine the coach-player relationship, and that has been our recipe for success. Please read the table below for a more detailed explanation.

Typical Coaching

Roles Ideas	Player	Coach	Game of Soccer
1	Execute movements and skills according to direction of coach	Lead players to a higher degree of skill and understanding of the game	Most important to master the skills and concepts to facilitate victory in competition
2	Focus on those aspects of the game that involves only players and coaches	Lack of time for or understanding of parent's role in sports experience	Parents can make or break a child's sports experience in this age range
3	Winning is success, losing is failure	Confuse players with inconsistent standards and limits	Unclear standard of success for team and individuals

Lil' Kickers Coaching

Roles Ideas	Player	Instructor	Game of Soccer
1	Enjoy the experience of playing and learning with others	Base coaching style and objectives on players and parents involved	The most important aspect of the game is the people involved
2	Execute movements and skills according to direction of coach	Motivate children to be active and try skills because it is fun	When kids think learning skills is fun, they will progress to higher levels of understanding and ability
3	The important thing is to try, even if I do not always succeed	Set clear guidelines for success and behavior of players and parents	When guidelines are clear and players are motivated to try, winning will become secondary.

Non- Competitive

Lil' Kickers' classes focus on teaching players to love the art of sports. Because we remove the pressure of winning from our curriculum, players can focus on acquiring and building their skills rather than winning games. None of the Lil' Kickers classes keeps score or standings for scrimmages. This is the second ingredient in the Lil' Kickers recipe for success.

How does Lil' Kickers teach soccer without keeping score? To answer this question, we must first acknowledge that sports (and life) are competitive. We recognize this aspect is inseparable from the learning process, but we believe there is an appropriate time and place to introduce competition. Just as you would not test a child on the contents of a book before you teach them to read, it is important to first give a child the opportunity to develop the necessary skills and confidence to succeed, then let the natural progression flow into testing those abilities in a competitive situation.

So the answer to the question is this: First and foremost we believe that young players should learn skills because the learning process is fun and exciting, not because learning skills helps win games. Therefore, Lil' Kickers instructors reward **effort**. Not outcome.

A focus on rewarding effort is actually a complex approach that takes hours of training and a significant amount of practice. We live in a rewards-driven society. We want to see results and often demand it in many situations. To start focusing on the **effort** it takes to make those results often requires a shift in thinking. The **outcome** of that shift however, is the development of a love for learning and an increased self-esteem in the player.

The most easily understood example of this concept is a soccer goal. A child scores a goal (outcome) and everyone cheers (reward). However, we often fail to notice, let alone reward, the hours of practice the player put into developing their shooting accuracy (effort).

In Lil' Kickers, people still cheer when goals are scored. We do not think rewarding outcomes is detrimental to players. But if our focus is only on the obvious rewards like scoring goals and winning, it undermines the ability to create an environment where all players can feel successful. It also undermines the art and the finesse of the game. It takes many interactions between players to score a goal. There are also defensive aspects of the game that we need to appreciate. If we persist in only recognizing and rewarding outcomes, we run the risk of alienating the other important players who work tirelessly with no obvious outcome, and in the end will likely lose interest in an athletic lifestyle.

Outcome focused coaching can also hinder true comprehension. Learning is a process by which a child can progress from basic levels of skill and understanding to more complex levels. Learning often happens by making mistakes and always happens through hard work and determination. Focusing on that effort honors the sweat and tears involved in the learning process, and leads to true comprehension.

In Lil' Kickers we believe the process of learning is more important than the actual accomplishment. Consider this simple argument: All children can learn. Learning new skills requires effort. If a child's effort is rewarded and treated as an accomplishment, he or she will continue to make efforts. In making efforts the child will succeed, acquire new skills and gain the confidence to try new things. In succeeding the child will grow as a person and a player.

Our bottom line: In Lil' Kickers, we believe all players who "give their all" have succeeded in the spirit of sports and competition.

Comprehensive

The 3rd and final ingredient to the Lil' Kickers recipe for success is taking a broad perspective with regard to teaching soccer. We look at how the impact of our teaching goes beyond the game. Yes, Lil' Kickers teaches soccer to kids, but it goes deeper than that because we use soccer as a tool to teach kids about life. In Lil' Kickers classes children get exercise, develop their skills and have fun. Plus they get the added benefit of learning important concepts that will help them deal with life: cooperation, sportsmanship, teamwork, listening skills, and respect for others.

The global nature of the world today makes relating to others in all contexts (sports, relationships, business, education) a necessity. Lil' Kickers begins with children as young as age three teaching the concepts of cooperation and teamwork. Children learn that as a team works together it becomes a better experience for everyone if all the members contribute. Our teaching also helps youngsters realize that in any group we must respect the needs of all its members. Listening skills are also key in this formula. Without the ability to understand directions and guidelines, any group activity would degenerate into chaos.

This all sounds great, you might think, but how do we actually do it in the context of soccer? One word: Creativity. Lil' Kickers instructors have a huge arsenal of fun activities, games and props to help children work through these important concepts—without the kids even realizing they are working on them. We combine sports, exercise, fun and behavioral and cognitive skill development into one Comprehensive child development program.

Philosophical Summary

To summarize our philosophy we emphasize physical, cognitive, and social development in a safe, fun and noncompetitive environment.

- The most important reason to play team sports is to have fun.
- The most important part of any game is the people, so safety and fair play are always our first priority.
- Skills instruction is a part of every game, so players can begin to master basic individual skills and team play.
- Children are allowed to choose their own level of participation.
- Classes will foster and support a sense of positive self-esteem and accomplishment.

Ground-rules

- Good listening is needed to help everyone learn and have fun.
- You can ask questions any time you don't understand something.
- Always keep your hands to yourself.

- If you hurt someone, say sorry and make sure they are OK before starting to play again and shake hands.
- If you can't follow the rules, you will be asked to take a short break.
- Safety will always be a primary focus. Classes will never combine children more than 2 years apart. For example, we will not put a 5-year-old in a class with children older than age 7.

Creativity

Instructor Creativity

Creativity is woven through out our curriculum for a purpose. It makes learning fun and reaches children on a level that conventional coaching cannot. One of the greatest resources in Lil' Kickers is the creativity instructors bring to the field. The use of creativity is important in working with different ages and skills, and it is encouraged as long as all activities and games follow the designated skill emphasis and progression appropriately. Creativity at the expense of curriculum consistency and organization is not acceptable.