

coach 

# JUNIOR COACHING CURRICULUM



GUIDEBOOK



# WELCOME

Welcome to the Junior Coaching ranks. The AFL Junior Coaching Curriculum and its subsequent resources have been designed for coaches of players aged 7–12 years.

The prescribed training sessions make it simple and easy for parent and volunteer junior coaches to deliver. The program has been developed with the support of industry experts across coaching and education and has been incorporated into the Rookie Me – RM Coach platform, an activities and training sessions library, available to all coaches through their CoachAFL Membership.

## Why do we need a Junior Coaching Curriculum?

The Junior Coaching Curriculum has been developed to increase player transition and retention from NAB AFL Auskick to Junior football. The key objectives are to:

- A** Improve the quality of coaching at Junior levels and thus subsequent experiences of the kids that play junior footy,
- B** Build on the NAB AFL Auskick philosophy of high energy and high touch sessions using small sided games,
- C** Provide national consistency in the standard and delivery of training content for Junior footy and
- D** Ensure every training session is Safe, Organised, Engaging and Fun.



## The Junior Coaching Philosophy

The overarching reason kids play football is to have fun. There is a significant connection between the level of skills a child has and the amount of enjoyment they experience. The minute kids stop being engaged, is when we are likely to lose them. Ultimately, kids want to get better at the game so they can get the ball more and experience some success.

So, just like NAB AFL Auskick, the Junior Coaching Curriculum is about the growth, development and confidence of the kids that train and play but most of all it's about having fun!

# TRANSITION FROM AUSKICK TO JUNIOR FOOTBALL

## What the research told us

Transition rates from Auskick to Junior football have been incrementally increasing over the last 3-4 years, however, greater improvements can be made. Recent research has identified some key factors which are central to transition from Auskick to Junior football:

- 1 The SKILL and CONFIDENCE of the participants – it's critical that training and games cater for the Skill Developers at one end of the scale and Match Contesters at the other.
- 2 There is a clear connection between SKILL LEVEL and ENJOYMENT - kids want to get better at the game, so they can get the ball more and therefore make it more fun.
- 3 Maintaining the right balance between skill and challenge is critical to keeping kids engaged



## A modern approach to coaching

So, like NAB AFL Auskick, the Junior Coaching Curriculum is designed to maximise participation and enjoyment by incorporating lots of small sided games and fundamental skill activity challenges so that kids get lots of touches of the ball and are active most of the time. In this way, the Auskick to Junior transition becomes a seamless and natural progression.

The research also reveals that coaches are key influencers in creating a positive environment for participants in Junior football. The Junior coaching philosophy, curriculum and additional training resources will enable volunteer coaches and parents to better understand the spirit of junior football and will assist them in delivering training sessions that are safe, inclusive engaging and fun.

**SKILLS = POSSESSION = FUN = RETENTION = TRANSITION**

# THE CURRICULUM

## Three Levels of Progression

Building on the success of the NAB AFL Auskick program, the Junior Coaching Curriculum is based on three sequential levels, designed to extend skill development over three (or more) years of participation.

### LEVEL 4

Designed for players turning 7 and 8 who are transitioning over from Auskick to Junior Footy. This level focuses on skills needed to work as an individual.

### LEVEL 5

Designed for players turning 9 and 10 beginning the transition to working in small groups.

### LEVEL 6

Designed for players who are under 11 and 12, focusing on skills needed to work as part of a team.

Each level consists of a set of 10 training session plans each with a session theme, learning outcomes, activity instructions and diagrams with key coaching points.

For training programs that run for longer than ten weeks, the base program can be supplemented with additional sessions, either by repeating selected sessions or tailoring to meet the needs of the players.

## Curriculum Design

The Junior Coaching Curriculum has been designed around the principles of play which describe the three phases of the game and follows the premise of 'using the game to teach the game'.

### The Three Phases of the Game

#### 1. ATTACK

We've got the ball

#### 2. DEFENCE

They've got the ball

#### 3. CONTEST

Ball is in dispute

Each training session in the Junior Coaching Curriculum targets one or more principles.

## Principles of Play Glossary

|         |                       | What does this mean?  | How to explain this concept to children  |
|---------|-----------------------|---|--|
| ATTACK  | <b>Penetration</b>    | Advancing the ball towards the goals  | “Get the ball moving forward”  |
|         | <b>Possession</b>     | Keeping control of the ball by either holding it up or making simple lateral passes until better options are available                                    | “Play keeping’s off until you see a chance to move the ball forward”.  |
|         | <b>Support</b>        | Provide support and safe passing options to the player with the ball  | “Help the player with the ball find space or create a passing option by finding space yourself and calling for the ball” |
|         | <b>Movement</b>       | Moving to create space for both yourself and others   | “Continuous movement to find space and get the ball”   |
| DEFENCE | <b>Delay</b>          | Positioning of the defender closest to the player with the ball to slow the attack by preventing the ball being moved forward                             | “Make it hard for the player with the ball to pass or move quickly”  |
|         | <b>Pressure</b>       | Quickly closing down the player with the ball to minimize the time and space in which the ball can be controlled, with the aim of causing a poor decision | “Get close to the player with the ball to pressure and cause a turnover”   |
|         | <b>Cover</b>          | Denying passing options to the player with the ball by covering attackers offering support  | “If you’re not closest to the player with the ball, your role is to cover the passing options”                           |
|         | <b>Depth Balance</b>  | Helping the defence remain compact by closing gaps as they arise (i.e., zone defence)   | “Cover free space in front of the player with the ball by maintaining a similar distance between all defenders”          |
| CONTEST | <b>Gain Advantage</b> | Anticipate and prepare for the contest through body positioning relative to the ball, teammates and the opposition  | “Move your body so you have the best chance to win possession, support your teammates or defend the opposition”          |
|         | <b>Outnumber</b>      | Identifying opportunities to outnumber a contest by positioning yourself to support teammates to win possession.  | “Move over to the contest so you can support your teammates to win the ball”   |

## What is Skill?

**SKILL = TECHNIQUE + ADAPTABILITY UNDER PRESSURE**

The fundamentals of technique are important! But equally important is the ability to adapt technique to any game situation, and football is a dynamic game with constantly changing situations. Skill is the ability to execute in competitive situations that differentiates players and teams.



## What skills are we aiming to improve?

The aim of training sessions within the Junior Curriculum is to ensure kids have fun and improve their skills so that they want to come back for the next session and season. By 'skills' here we mean touches and ability to get the ball, even in a controlled environment, and at this early stage, does not mean technical football skills.

## But what about the Fundamental Skills?

It is universally agreed that kids need to develop the fundamental skills of sport they are learning to play. So, it is important that we provide opportunities for kids to learn the fundamental skills in isolation and then practice these at training or at home with their parents and siblings.

**Equally important is to ensure the fundamental skills are practiced in context with the game so that they learn to perform and adapt these skills under game-like pressure.**



## A Game-Sense Approach to Coaching?

A key focus of each training session is to teach the fundamental skills of football using game sense and constraints-based learning approaches. Skills that are learned within a game-based context better transfer to the game, and players develop a greater understanding of how to play the game. It also increases energy, motivation and engagement so that kids have more fun and want to come back for more!

## What is it?

- ▶ Playing games to practice skills, rather than only practicing skills in isolation of the game (the traditional approach).
- ▶ Games are carefully designed to emphasise specific skills and strategies.
- ▶ The coach's role is to question and guide players towards a better understanding of the game and the required skills.

## Why use it?

- ▶ Children learn to adapt their technique to game situations;
- ▶ It teaches tactical understanding of the game;
- ▶ It appropriately applies the principle of training specificity.

**Transfer of learning from training to game day depends on the extent to which training resembles game day.**

**Develop a coordinated movement**

**Learn to adapt technique to different situations**

**Learn to identify when to call upon actions in a game**

**SKILL TRANSFER**




## Development at each level

The following tables provides an example of the progression of skills under each phase of the game - across the three Junior Levels.

### Core Skills

|       | ATTACK                 | DEFENCE   | CONTEST                 |
|-------|------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| 7-8   | Goal kicking           | Defending my opponent                                     | 1v1 contested ball      |
| 9-10  | Marking                | Chasing & tackling technique                              | Contest exits           |
|       | Running with the ball  | Winning the ball back in open play (chasing and tackling) | 1v1 contested marking   |
|       | Maintain possession    | Defending the long kick                                   | Outnumber the contest   |
|       | Long kick to advantage | Help defence (2v1 outnumber)                              | Pack marking & crumbing |
| 11-12 | Sharing to score       | Attacking transition                                      | Contest balance         |
|       | Defensive transition   |   |                         |

### Example: Progression of Session 1 across the 3 age groups

| Age        | 7-8  | 9-10                     | 11-12           |
|------------|--|--------------------------|-----------------|
| Theme      | 1v1 contested ball   | Outnumbering the contest | Contest balance |
| Complexity |  |                          |                 |



## Training Session Structure

The junior training session structure is designed to sequentially build kids football skills and confidence over ten training sessions using a game-based approach whilst incorporating fundamental skill development throughout the program. Each training session runs for 70 minutes and is designed around the four quarters of a game with a pre-game activity section for unstructured play.

Each of these sections are important for player enjoyment, engagement, and overall game and skill development. Refer to the following diagram which outlines the purpose of each section:

|                                   | Duration    | Focus                                  |  |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|--|--|
| <b>PRE-GAME</b>                   | Up to 15min | Fun, Play & Exploration (no coaching!) | ▶ Unstructured play is important for skill acquisition, particularly with regards to developing creativity |
| <b>QUARTER 1</b>                  | 10min       | Energizer (Warm-Up)                    | ▶ The aim is to have a fun warm-up with an emphasis on fundamental movements                               |
| <b>QUARTER 2</b><br>(2 Rotations) | 10min       | Fundamental Skills (High Repetition)   | ▶ The aim is to practice the fundamentals skills of football with lots of repetition                       |
|                                   | 10min       | Decision Making Task                   |  |
| <b>QUARTER 3</b>                  | 15min       | Team Task                              | ▶ Opportunity to practice applying the fundamental skills to game situations when working as a team        |
| <b>QUARTER 4</b>                  | 10min       | Game                                   | ▶ Opportunity to play the game, whilst rules are applied to emphasise specific skills                      |

**TOTAL DURATION**  **MINUTES**

### WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?

- ▶ Ideally, every player has a football or share 1 between 2
- ▶ Each player has 60 touches of the ball every training session
- ▶ All players are engaged and having fun

**REMEMBER: No laps, lines or lectures**



### HELPFUL TIP

If time and space permits, have all your games and cones set-up prior to the players arriving to ensure no time is wasted during the training session. You can then just rotate through activities on the go.

# SESSION ACTIVITIES

Sessions are predominantly made up of game-based activities with Quarter 2 designed so that kids can learn and practice the technique of the fundamental football skills i.e. kicking, marking, handballing etc.

All activities are developed to ensure kids receive the best introduction to junior football, foster an ongoing passion for the game and of course, have maximum fun.

Refer to the various Junior Coaching Manuals for the 10-week session plans and activity breakdowns.



## HELPFUL TIP

Games in the Junior session plans are carefully designed.

It is **NOT** game-only. Your role as a coach is to question and guide.

## Level Manuals



**Level 4 Manual**  
Ages 7-8



**Level 5 Manual**  
Ages 9-10



**Level 6 Manual**  
Ages 11-12

# COACHING BETTER

## Positive Coaching

- ▶ A coaching philosophy focused on fun and development.
- ▶ A group where all players feel they improved their football skills and abilities.
- ▶ A group where all players are excited to return to participate in the following session.



## Plan With Purpose

- ▶ **ORGANISED** – session plan, purpose and context for every activity
- ▶ **SAFE** – enough space, small groups, the right equipment
- ▶ **ENGAGING** – 60 plus touches of the ball for every player, every session
- ▶ **FUN** – lots of games, movement (no long queues etc.)
- ▶ The coach should also communicate the purpose of each drill or games-centred activity so that they can relate it to playing a game of footy

## Good Communication

- ▶ Speak loudly and clearly, and make your voice engaging.
- ▶ Ensure that everyone can hear you before commencing your instruction.
- ▶ Focus on 'what to do', rather than 'what not to do.'
- ▶ Highlight the main points of the activity. Try not to give players more than two or three main points at a time.

## Group Management

- ▶ Face the group away from distractions such as the sun, traffic or other groups.
- ▶ A simple semi-circle pattern is effective or using features such as marked lines.
- ▶ The group can be standing or, if conditions allow, kneeling or sitting. Both you and the group must be able to see each other.
- ▶ Making eye contact is an effective way to hold attention, and it helps you judge if your players are still engaged and listening.

It is essential to wait until the group is ready before communicating to reduce the need to repeat instructions.

## Coaching Approach

- ▶ Good coaches work with players to set goals, to challenge them and to provide motivation.
- ▶ The coach who always tells players what to do, or gives instructions all the time, is more likely to lose their players' interest and engagement in the game.
- ▶ The aim is to work with the players, rather than being directive all the time.

## Player & Game-Centred

- ▶ Use player & game-centred activities to set a playing environment that will focus on a skill, set of skills, or tactical component of football. The players make decisions within the game, rather than the coach telling the participants where to run or kick to.
- ▶ Coaches should remember that the primary benefit of using a game-centred approach is that it is FUN!

## Questions

- ▶ Questions are a key element of a game-sense approach. 'How can you get more kicks? What can you do to move the ball more quickly downfield?'
- ▶ Each activity in the Junior Curriculum provides sample questions a coach can ask related to what they see as the activity plays out.

## Specific Feedback

- ▶ Keep to small doses and be specific.
- ▶ 'Keep your arm straight' is better than a negative statement.
- ▶ 'That was good because'... is better than a 'feel-good' statement like 'great shot'.

## Timely

- ▶ Make sure feedback is delivered as soon as possible, while the memory of what they were doing is still fresh in the player's mind.

## Two-way feedback

- ▶ Hone your active listening skills during training. Ask players what they think is breaking down in a game or how an activity or skill could be improved rather than you providing feedback that is always one-way.
- ▶ Also, ask for feedback about how you can improve as a coach - what they liked in the session, what they didn't like so much and what sort of coaching style they like best.

## Safeguarding Children: Code of Conduct

- ▶ It is important that we ensure we are providing a safe environment for our children and young people.
- ▶ Further information on this can be located in the [Safeguarding Children Code of Conduct](#) booklet.

# SESSION PLANNING

If your session is well constructed, you won't hear 'When can we play the game?' That's because participants will have a chance to get into the game-centred activities early and often.

Use the 'Playing for Life' principles which emphasise:

- ▶ Games before drills & skills
- ▶ High-activity levels that are disguised within fun and challenging activities
- ▶ The CHANGE IT approach to modifying the activity for inclusion, challenge and skill development.

Effective session management has a significant impact on starting activities, forming groups, activity levels, safety, setting new tasks, including all and your ability to maintain an engaging session.

Here are some tips for successful session management:

- ▶ Session plans help to guide the flow of your session.
- ▶ Continually review, modify and experiment.
- ▶ Rehearse in your mind, things like:
  - ▶ Starting an activity
  - ▶ Transitions
  - ▶ Forming participants into groups
  - ▶ Finish up



# CHANGE IT

## **C** Coaching style

Use questions to set challenges for specific aspects of a game, e.g. 'When should you move to receive a pass?'. Provide discreet coaching, without interrupting the game, where required, use player role models to highlight skillful play. Vary how you communicate (simple or more complex language; visual, auditory or kinesthetic cues) according to player needs (such as age, cultural background, intellectual and sensory ability).

## **H** How you score/win

Increase opportunities to score, e.g. allow passing to a player to score or pass into an end zone, instead of shooting at a goal; vary the size of/ distance to a target.

## **A** Area

Increase or decrease game difficulty by changing the shape and/or size of the playing area, e.g. long and narrow, short and wide, smaller/larger.

## **N** Numbers

Consider using different team sizes or varying the number of turns, e.g. decreasing team sizes can increase player involvement by maximising participation. When introducing defence into a game, 3 v 1 or 4 v 2 gives attackers more options to deal with an added defender, increasing the number of turns helps players develop new skills.

## **G** Game Rules

Change the rules slightly, e.g. introduce a no-tackling rule to give children more time to dispose of the ball; allow 2 bounces before catching or stopping the ball; specify that 3 team members must touch the ball before scoring a point, allow a player to roll rather than throw the ball, or walk rather than run.

## **E** Equipment

Vary the size and type of equipment used, e.g. change to a larger and/or softer ball if a player is having difficulty catching or to a smaller ball if they are having problems throwing; introduce a stationary ball if a player is having difficulty kicking a moving ball.

## **I** Inclusion

Engage individuals in modifying the activities using any of the outlined game elements (or others) to maximise their involvement. Ask individuals what would improve the game for them and/or how their involvement could be increased; or provide options they could choose from to encourage ownership.

## **T** Time

Reduce or extend the time to perform actions, e.g. see how many passes players can complete in 5 or 30 seconds. Increase possession time to allow players more time to make a decision about what to do next.

## CHANGE IT

Vary any one or more of the game elements to maximise participation and better meet player needs and game objectives.



## HELPFUL TIP

It is more important to remember the concept of CHANGE IT than to remember what each letter represents. If it's not working...CHANGE IT!

**Refer to Coach.AFL  
for further information**

**coach** 