

# The FA Guide to Grassroots Youth Football



Let's give young players the best start in football.  
Here's how you can help.

2020/21

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# Keeping everyone in football safe

**There is nothing more important in football than keeping players, coaches, spectators and everyone involved safe. If we can do that we can all enjoy the game we love.**



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KEEPING THE  
FOOTBALL FAMILY SAFE

## COVID-19



**COVID-19 has changed the way that we live safely together. We have been able to resume grassroots football.**

To continue to enjoy the game we must carry out the required safety, hygiene and social distancing measures. ‘Spikes’ in the transmission of the virus may mean that FA guidance may change at short notice.

To keep up to date, check regularly the information for participants at:

<https://www.thefa.com/news/2020/jul/17/grassroots-guidance-for-competitive-football-restart-in-england-170720>

## HEADING THE BALL

**In February 2020, in response to concern at a potential link between heading and the incidence of degenerative neurocognitive disease, the FA announced updated heading guidance for all age groups between under 6 and under 18.**

This guidance provides grassroots clubs, coaches and players with the recommended heading guidance for training sessions only.

It does NOT make any changes to the way matches are played. There is no current evidence to suggest that heading the ball was the cause to the link with incidence of degenerative neurocognitive disease.

However, to mitigate against any potential risks updated guidance has been produced in parallel with UEFA's medical committee.

# Creating the environment so we can all enjoy the game

**F**ootball is the greatest game in the world. It is played by more people across the globe than any other sport. For a privileged few, it is how they earn a living. But for the vast majority of people who play the game, it is a fun, leisure activity for all ages, to be enjoyed.

We can all help our children enjoy the game more, by creating the right environment. By allowing them to play with freedom. By letting them make mistakes. By encouraging them to make their own decisions. We can *#LetThemPlay*



CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT  
SO WE CAN ALL ENJOY THE GAME

*“Enjoyment is central to football, particularly for children. While some set out on the pathway to becoming a professional, the vast majority play the game for fun. It’s important that everybody involved in the sport helps maintain a positive environment that allows children to play freely.”*

**Gareth Southgate**  
England Senior Team  
Men's Manager

A large, white, cursive signature of Gareth Southgate's name.

*“Children have a massive capacity to think and behave creatively. An effective coach will support and encourage this in the football and Futsal games that they play. We want our players to play with freedom and enjoyment.”*

**Peter Sturgess**  
FA Technical Lead Coach 5–11

A large, white, cursive signature of Peter Sturgess's name.

# How to make match day enjoyable for everyone

**There is nothing better than the excitement of match day for young players. We can all make sure the game is played in the right spirit. Greeting the opposition and the referee, putting on refreshments, appointing a Match Day Manager, are all ways in which any club at any level can make a difference on the day. Once the game is underway, let the players play, let the coaches coach and applaud both teams.**

*“The fact is that kids learn to make good decisions by making decisions, not by following directions.”*

**Alfie Kohn**

Lecturer in Education and Psychology

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**GOOD PRACTICE**



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**RESPECT**



# HOW TO MAKE MATCH DAY ENJOYABLE FOR EVERYONE

## GOOD PRACTICE

**The following good practice should be implemented taking into account the latest FA Guidelines on COVID hygiene, social distancing and limits on the number of people allowed to participate or spectate at any one time.**

**This guidance can be found on [TheFA.com](https://TheFA.com)**

- ✓ Issue a Code of Conduct to everyone involved at the start of the season and have a process for responding to unacceptable behaviour.
- ✓ Whatever your role – coach, parent, player, referee – turn up in good time.
- ✓ All players play a minimum 50%.
- ✓ Coaches to stay in the technical area, unless social distance cannot be maintained, or a player is injured and requires treatment
- ✓ Spectators should be behind barriers on the opposite side of the pitch maintaining social distancing.



## HOW TO MAKE MATCH DAY ENJOYABLE FOR EVERYONE

### GOOD PRACTICE

- ✓ Applause for good play for BOTH teams.
- ✓ Only the coach to issue instructions to the players.
- ✓ Handshakes prior or after the game should not be offered whilst COVID measures are in place. Teams should agree other ways of demonstrating Respect.
- ✗ No spectators behind the goals.
- ✗ No shouting at the referee.



# HOW TO MAKE MATCH DAY ENJOYABLE FOR EVERYONE



**Building society with mutual respect**

**If we do not have Respect for the opposition players and coaches, and especially for the referee, then we do not have a game of football.**

- ✓ Support and encourage players.
- ✓ Treat the opposition how you would like to be treated.
- ✓ Let the coaches coach.
- ✓ Remember that the referee may be learning the game.
- ✓ You are a role model to children at all times during the game.
- ✓ Applause for both sides.
- ✓ Make the game fun at all times.
- ✗ Do not encroach onto the pitch.
- ✗ No angry postmortems after the game.

# Development football

**The FA's Youth Review in 2010 changed the way that Youth Football was structured in England.**

- ✓ Teams were moved into smaller formats of the game.
- ✓ The age group formats are the maximum allowed.
- ✓ At ages 5-11 the FA strongly believes there are technical benefits to be gained by playing formats of the game using smaller numbers such as 4v4, 3v3, 2v2 during development games.
- ✓ One long league season has been reorganised into a range of different playing experiences. Leagues should be flexible with fixtures and coaches should look to provide these different challenges.

**Since these changes, youth football has boomed in popularity.**

## TROPHY EVENTS

**Children from U7–U11 do not play in leagues. They can however play Trophy Events during the season.**

This allows them to learn about winning and losing in a competitive but time limited environment. Trophies can be awarded to the winners and the results of mini-event published.

Trophy events for U7s to U11s should be structured so that they can be completed over the recommended number of weekends and take notice of the maximum playing durations for the age groups concerned. Trophy Events can be configured in a variety of different ways to cater for the number of teams involved.

**U7s & U8s**

**40**

minutes

**U9s & U10s**

**60**

minutes

**U11s**

**80**

minutes

**The environment created for the children by coaches and parents should not differ from a normal week of development football.**

# Key Laws and Regulations

Your at-a-glance guide to grassroots youth football



ALL SIZES, TIMES OR NUMBERS SHOWN ARE THE MAXIMUM ALLOWED  
UNLESS OTHERWISE STATED (FA SCORY 2020/21)

# U7/8s



**Format:** 5 v 5



**Match length:** 20 mins E/w



**Player game time:**

40 mins/day, 60 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 40yd × 30yd



**Ball size:** 3



**Goal size:** 12ft × 6ft



## COMPETITIONS

Two weeks of trophy events,  
three times a season



## KEY LEARNINGS

- having fun
- playing with my friends

U7/  
8s

# U9/10s



**Format:** 7 v 7



**Match length:** 25 mins E/w



**Player game time:**

60 mins/day, 90 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 60yd × 40yd



**Ball size:** 3



**Goal size:** 12ft × 6ft



## COMPETITIONS

Four weeks of trophy events,  
three times a season



## KEY LEARNINGS

- acquiring skills
- trying my best

U9/  
10s

# U11/12s



**Format:** 9 v 9



**Match length:** 30 mins E/w



**Player game time:**

80 mins/day, 120 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 80yd × 50yd



**Ball size:** 4



**Goal size:** 16ft × 7ft



## COMPETITIONS

Six weeks of trophy events,  
three times a season.  
U12s as U13/14s



## KEY LEARNINGS

- being part of a team
- game play

U11/  
12s

# U13/14s



**Format:** 11 v 11



**Match length:** 35 mins E/w



**Player game time:**

100 mins/day, 150 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 100yd × 60yd



**Ball size:** 4



**Goal size:** 21ft × 7ft



## COMPETITIONS

Any varieties including one season-long league table

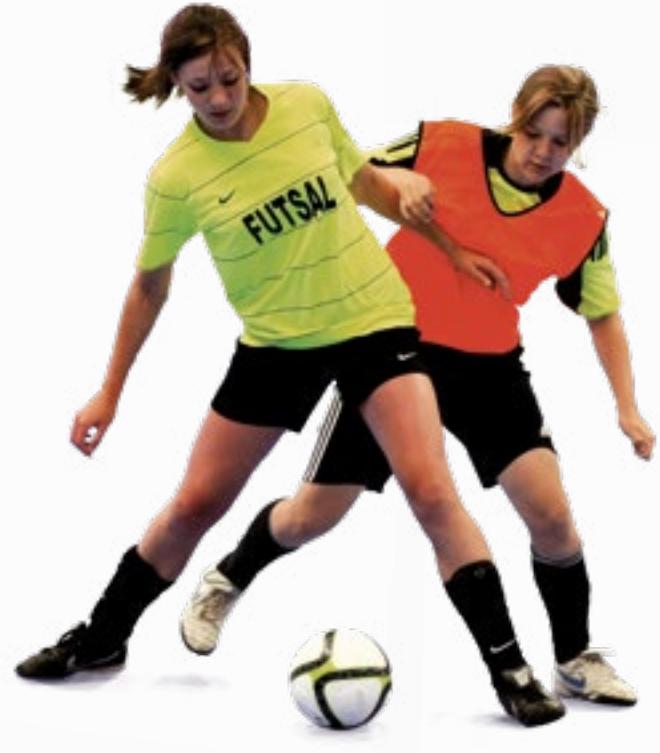


## KEY LEARNINGS

- taking responsibility
- positional awareness

U13/  
14s

# U15/16s



**Format:** 11 v 11



**Match length:** 40 mins E/W



**Player game time:**

100 mins/day, 150 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 110yd × 70yd



**Ball size:** 5



**Goal size:** 24ft × 8ft



**COMPETITIONS**

any varieties including one season-long league table



**KEY LEARNINGS**

- in-game decisions
- tactical appreciation

U15/  
16s

# U17/18s



**Format:** 11 v 11



**Match length:** 45 mins E/W



**Player game time:**

120 mins/day, 180 mins/comp



**Pitch size:** 110yd × 70yd



**Ball size:** 5



**Goal size:** 24ft × 8ft



## COMPETITIONS

any varieties including one season-long league table



## KEY LEARNINGS

- in-game decisions
- tactical appreciation

U17/  
18s

# **Match day best practice for coaches**

**Every coach at every level can play a huge part in creating the match day environment that everyone can enjoy, not only the players, but the match officials and those watching too.**

**A good coach can be a positive role model that youngsters will remember for the rest of their lives.**



## MATCH DAY BEST PRACTICE FOR COACHES

**There are lots of different ways you can create that positive environment.**

**Here are just a few:**

- ⦿ All players getting at least half the available game time is a great way to create good team spirit. You could plan your substitutions before the game.
- ⦿ The score line is only one way to measure development. You could set team and individual player targets.
- ⦿ Some coaches think they are not involved unless they continually offer instruction. But instead of doing a running commentary throughout the game, let the players make decisions, allow them to make mistakes and learn from them.
- ⦿ Advanced technical coaching terms can confuse young players. Try to use appropriate language.



## MATCH DAY BEST PRACTICE FOR COACHES

- ⦿ Instead of getting anxious and uptight on match day, try and relax and enjoy it. Remember don't shout at match officials, children could copy your behaviour.
- ⦿ Reward effort rather than just ability.
- ⦿ No one enjoys it when a game ends with an angry post mortem. You could ask the players for their view of the match.

Or you could save your feedback until training night. Always try and be constructive whatever the result.

**These players are starting on their football journey, remember how much you enjoy the game and pass it on to them!**



# Match day best practice for parents

**Whether you played yourself, or if you are new to football, the game is a great activity that can be enjoyed by all the family.**

**Kids love playing, and they like their parents to take an interest. What they don't like is when mums and dads get too involved from the touchline, or put too much pressure on them to do well.**



## MATCH DAY BEST PRACTICE FOR PARENTS

**The FA asked young players up and down the country why they play the game.**

**Here are the top six reasons:**

*Trying my hardest is more important than winning.*

*I love playing football because it's fun.*

*It helps keep me fit and healthy.*

*I like meeting new friends through football.*

*It's a really good game and I love it.*

*I like playing with my friends.*



## MATCH DAY BEST PRACTICE FOR PARENTS

### Match day tips

- ✓ Do offer praise, encouragement and applause – for both sides.
- ✓ Do stand in the designated area for spectators.
- ✓ Praise for effort and attitude not just talent.
- ✓ Focus on the process not the result.
- ✓ Focus on your child's enjoyment.
- ✗ Don't issue instructions from the touchline.
- ✗ Don't follow your son/daughter up and down the touchline.
- ✗ Avoid pressuring your child about winning or losing.



# Useful information and contact details

## SAFEGUARDING

For safeguarding guidance, advice, policy and procedures including how to report a concern go to: [www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/  
safeguarding](http://www.thefa.com/football-rules-governance/safeguarding)

If the matter is urgent and you cannot contact your Club's welfare officer, you can call The NSPCC 24-hour helpline on 0808 800 5000 – or if it is an emergency because a child or children are at immediate risk, then call the police or children's social care in your area and let us know via: [safeguarding@thefa.com](mailto:safeguarding@thefa.com)

We'd encourage all parents/carers to check out the guidance in 'Section 8 - Playing your part and questions you should ask'.

Club officials are asked to familiarise themselves with the acceptable behaviour and managing challenging behaviour guidance.



## USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

# FOOTBALL FOR ALL AND ANTI-DISCRIMINATION

At The FA, equality, diversity and inclusion means valuing and celebrating our differences. Every one is welcome and every single participant has the right to play the game with confidence and without prejudice, regardless of ability and background. The FA is proud of the achievements and progress made so far and we continue on the journey to make the game truly FOR ALL, we hope you will join with us.

The FA has a three-year equality, diversity and inclusion strategy that takes us to 2021.

An update and summary can be found here:  
<https://www.thefa.com/news/2019/oct/01/in-pursuit-of-progress-one-year-report-011019>

# #LetThemPlay



## USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

# DISABILITY PLAYER PATHWAY

Did you know that there are **9.4million people** in England with a long-standing limiting disability, illness or condition – **almost one in five of us!** The good news is that there has never been a better time to get involved and play football, whatever your ability level.

There are player pathways in place from grassroots where there are over **2,400 affiliated disability teams**, through to a talent pathway that **600+ individuals** engaged and six impairment specific international squads that compete in World & European Championships.

To find out more visit: [www.thefa.com/disability](http://www.thefa.com/disability)



# #LetThemPlay



## USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

### FUTSAL

Futsal is an exciting, fast paced modality of football that originates from South America in the 1930s. It is played across the world in a format that is officially recognised by both UEFA and FIFA.

The nature of the game places a large emphasis on technical skill and ability in situations of high pressure. Many of the top world class footballers played Futsal in their youth and credit it with supporting their footballing development , when played and coached correctly.

Check: <https://www.thefa.com/get-involved/player/futsal> for more info.



# #LetThemPlay



## USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

# YOUTH FUTSAL & POKÉMON

Pokémon's support of Youth Futsal has the aim of making the game a natural part of children's football development.

Playing Futsal improves technical ability, decision making and the reaction time of players. It will result in more technically confident players whether they choose to play Football or Futsal.



## USEFUL INFORMATION AND CONTACT DETAILS

# YOUTH FUTSAL & POKÉMON

**You can get involved with Futsal by;**

- ⦿ Visiting [thefa.com/pokemonfutsal](http://thefa.com/pokemonfutsal) – here you will find everything you need to get started playing Futsal as well as the chance to compare Futsal skills with some of the best players in the country
- ⦿ Entering your club team into the FA Pokémon Futsal Cup – with categories for boys and girls at 10/12/14 & 16 and qualifying heats being run by your County Football Association there are lots of opportunities to get involved. You can register your interest in entering the competition at [TheFA.com](http://TheFA.com)
- ⦿ Applying for a unique Pokémon Futsal pack will provide you with the equipment you need to get started (kit bag, futsal balls, markers, bibs and a coaches handbook) You can apply for a pack as part of registering your interest in entering the FA Pokemon Futsal Cup.
- ⦿ Enter a youth Futsal League – contact your CFA for details.

