

PLAY PHASE

BY ENGLAND FOOTBALL

PLAY BOOK





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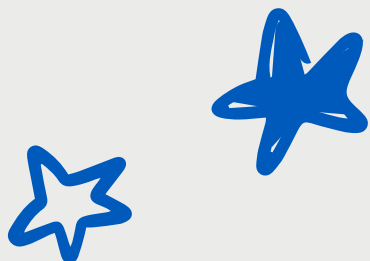
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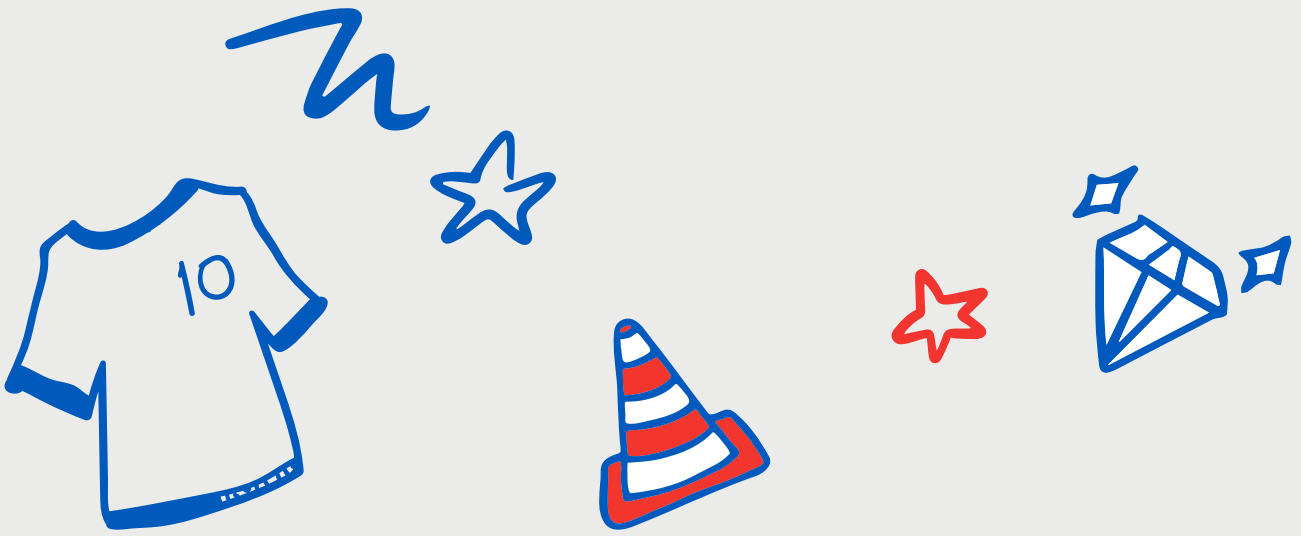
Introduction

Play Phase is an approach created to give children a great start in the game of football. Over the course of your learning experience, you'll develop your understanding of children of this age, how to create the best environment for them to learn and grow, and much more.

In this playbook you will find key information and resources that will support you as you complete the Play Phase offer. You also have your journal to make notes and capture reflections, and a community to support you along the way.

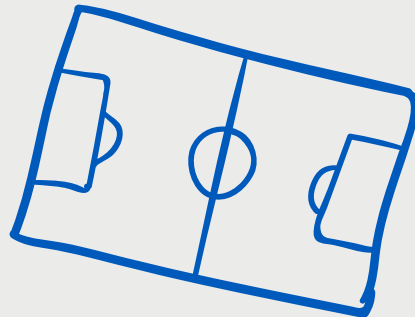
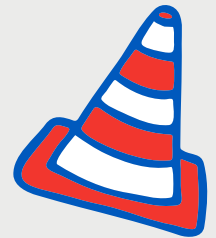
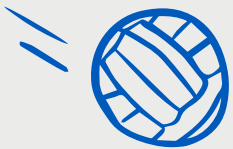
Your goal is to create a safe space where the children can play. As the Captain of Play, your sessions should engage and involve them, allowing them to have fun whilst being physically active.

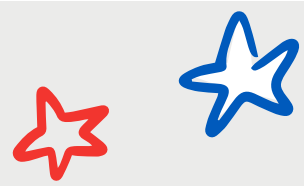




Chapter one

What is Play Phase?





Play Phase philosophy

Play Phase is all about giving children aged four to six the best possible start, both in terms of their development and their first steps into football. So needs committed, enthusiastic people, like you!

We want to give children aged four to six a positive, engaging and fun-filled first experience in sport via play. Research has shown that a positive first start will encourage them to remain fit, healthy, and active throughout their lives. Play Phase is on a mission to help children:

- gain confidence
- develop a positive sense of self
- create strong relationships
- understand their own emotions and how to regulate them
- become critical thinkers and problem solvers
- develop better control over their mind and body
- work out how to achieve goals.



There are five core elements of Play Phase



Voice and choice

Children's views and ideas are valued, and we actively encourage them to share these. The children should be involved in shaping their learning opportunities – they are, of course, the best judges of what is fun!



Memorable experiences

Memorable experiences of being active and playing sport are shared with their parents and carers, and other children.



Safe environment

A safe, supportive and positive environment is created for all children.



Celebrate individuality

The individuality and potential of each child is celebrated.



Fun activities

Children are given opportunities to engage in fun activities that encourage creativity and experimentation.

More than football

Although Play Phase acts as an introduction to football, it is about so much more. The approach is geared towards creating a new generation of sports lovers, as well as future players.



Safeguarding requirements

Play Phase is all about giving children aged four to six years a fun-filled first experience of sport via play. As a Captain of Play, your goal is to create a safe space where children can play. Here's some information about how to get started, and please do read the 'Play Phase Safeguarding Requirements and Guidance'.



Please note: The FA does not affiliate activity designed for children younger than four years of age. The FA requires parents/carers to supervise their child(ren) of this age during each session.

All affiliated clubs with youth teams are required to have:

- a safeguarding children policy and procedures
- safer recruitment procedures including FA DBS checks
- safeguarding trained club and team officials
- a club welfare officer.

In addition, there should be clear guidance on the use of social media, photography and ideography, managing personal data, medical and development needs, travel and overnight stays, and giving children a voice.



Clubs delivering Play Phase must:

1. Apply the safeguards required for youth teams.
2. Complete a [safeguarding risk assessment](#) for the specific needs of four to six-year-olds including, but not limited to:
 - a. the suitability of facilities and access to toilets
 - b. adult supervision and staff ratios
 - c. personal and intimate care
 - d. medical and development needs
3. Have a process to register children in and out.
4. Have a minimum of two FA DBS checked adult Captains of Play (18 years+).
5. Have a 'missing child' protocol.
6. Inform parents/carers they must supervise their child's personal and/or intimate care needs.
7. Ensure parents/carers are aware to give advance notice if they're unable to attend.
8. Have a process to obtain children's medical needs, medicine(s) required, ensure parents/carers are aware they remain responsible for administering their child's medication.
9. Have a procedure for responding to children who are unwell or infectious.
10. Communicate effectively with parents/carers.

Understanding children

As a Captain of Play, it's important to take the time to understand the children in your group. **Remember:**

- Each child is a unique individual, with a different personality.
- Even if children are the same age, they will develop at different stages.
- Each child's ability to self-regulate is different, which can impact your activities and sessions.
- The children will see you as a trusted adult. Make sure you make them feel safe, protected, and encourage them to speak out and get involved.

The three key areas to focus on when it comes to the children's development are:

Physical development:

Physically, they are refining their motor and movement skills (movement of muscles) and becoming more coordinated.

Remember your fundamental skills - ABCs!

Agility is the ability to change direction, at speed and under control, of your own body.

Balance is the ability to stay upright and in control of body movements.

Coordination is the ability to move two or more body parts under control smoothly and efficiently.

And... **Speed** is the ability to accelerate, decelerate and stop while in control and in relation to a ball or a player. Although it's not a fundamental skill itself, speed can complement these movements.

Social development:

Socially, they are learning how to interact with others and navigate social situations.

Emotional development:

In terms of emotional development, they are beginning to understand their own feelings and the feelings of others.

Knowing that these factors can impact the children helps you to understand them more. Remember, all of these influences will differ from child to child, contributing to their uniqueness.

Power of play

From make-believe games to hopscotch, your children will love to play and explore new things. But how much do you really know about the power of this, and how you can use it?

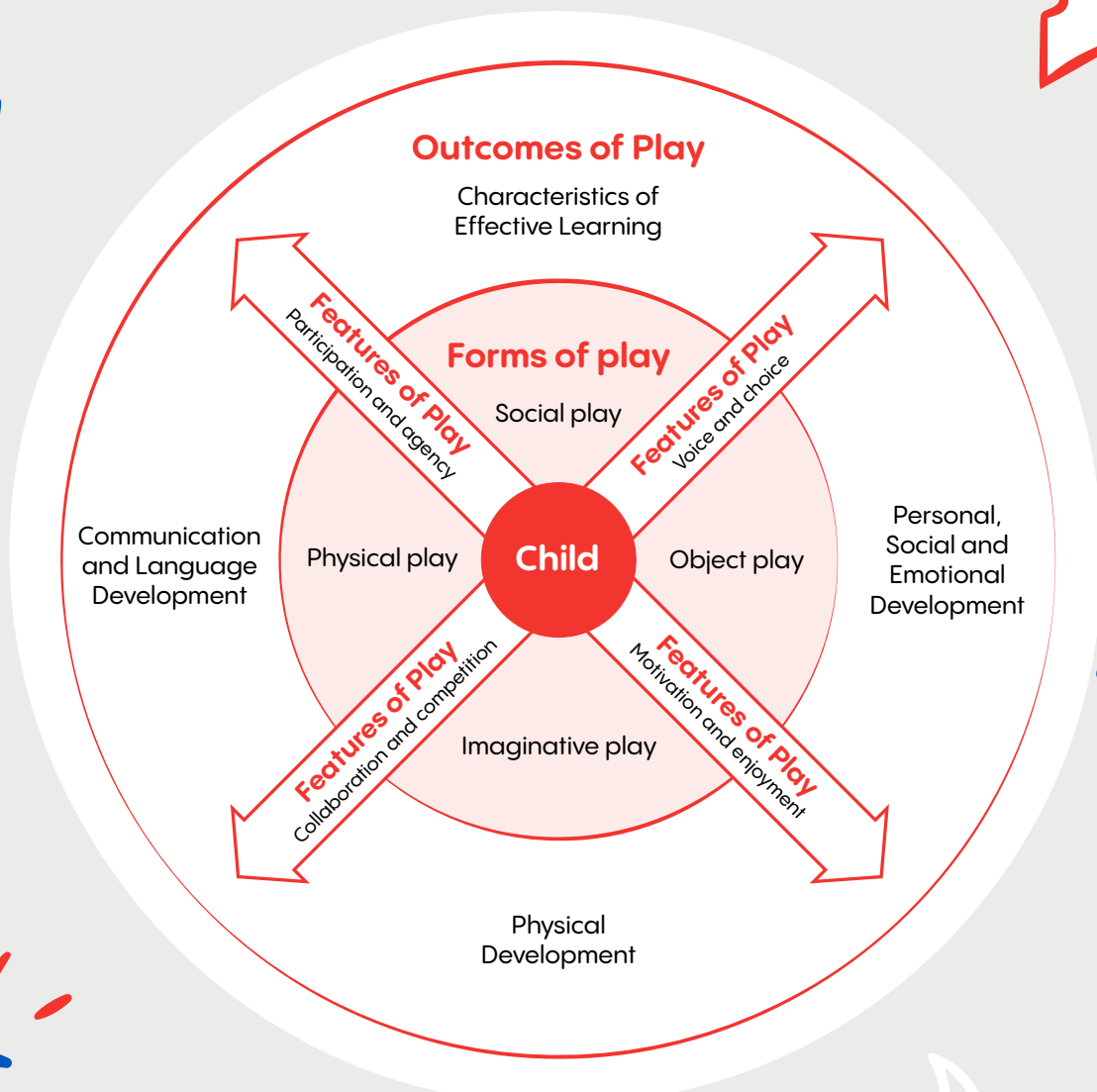
Let's begin by defining the term – to play is to be engaged in any activity for enjoyment and recreation with no predetermined outcome.

The Play Framework

This is The Play Framework. It provides structured support, so that you can plan your sessions with a child's development in mind. This framework builds on how young children best learn and develop their skills.

The Play Framework has a three-step structure:

1. Forms of play
2. Features of play
3. Outcomes of play



Forms of play

These are the different type of activities that children take part in.



Social play

This is when children collaborate in pairs or groups, with a focus on communication, collaboration, and teamwork.



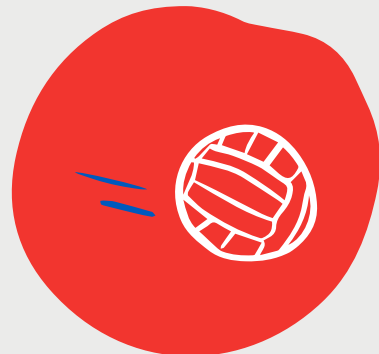
Physical play

This involves movement, such as running, jumping, stopping, starting, and changing direction.



Imaginative play

This is any time that the child is using their imagination to play!



Object play

This is any play that uses physical resources such as bean bags, balls, and hula hoops.



Features of play



In your sessions, you should allow and encourage each of the forms of play, to enable the following features:

Participation and agency

When children are actively involved throughout the play session, either in thinking or physical actions, they have a sense that they are being listened to and their suggestions are acted upon.

Voice and choice

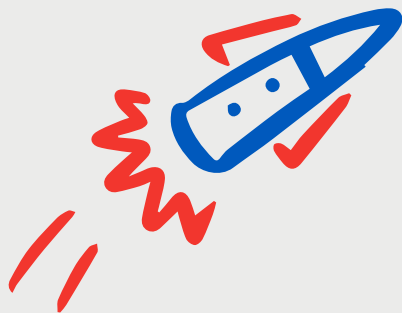
Being offered choices to shape the nature and progress of the play activity means that children get to see how their own decisions can influence an event.

Collaboration and competition

Children are encouraged to work collaboratively with others towards the realisation of a shared goal and to experience the benefits of fair competition.

Motivation and enjoyment

Children have a strong exploratory drive and have a natural, intrinsic motivation to explore and stretch themselves. They thrive and strive in play as it gives them some degree of control (security). Their self-determination is personally meaningful, rewarding and gives them personal satisfaction.



outcomes of play

These are the real results from children taking part and are often the outcome of allowing and encouraging the forms and features of play.

Effective learners

We want to help develop effective learners. This means that they can explore, investigate, and take risks. If they do not succeed, they are motivated to keep on trying, not letting failure negatively impact them. They have the ability to think critically, linking and developing strategies to achieve their goals. They show a strong sense of curiosity and competency.

Physical development

Children are hardwired for movement and activity – this includes coordinating and controlling these movements. Gaining confidence in physical movement will encourage participation in many activities...including football!

Personal, social and emotional development

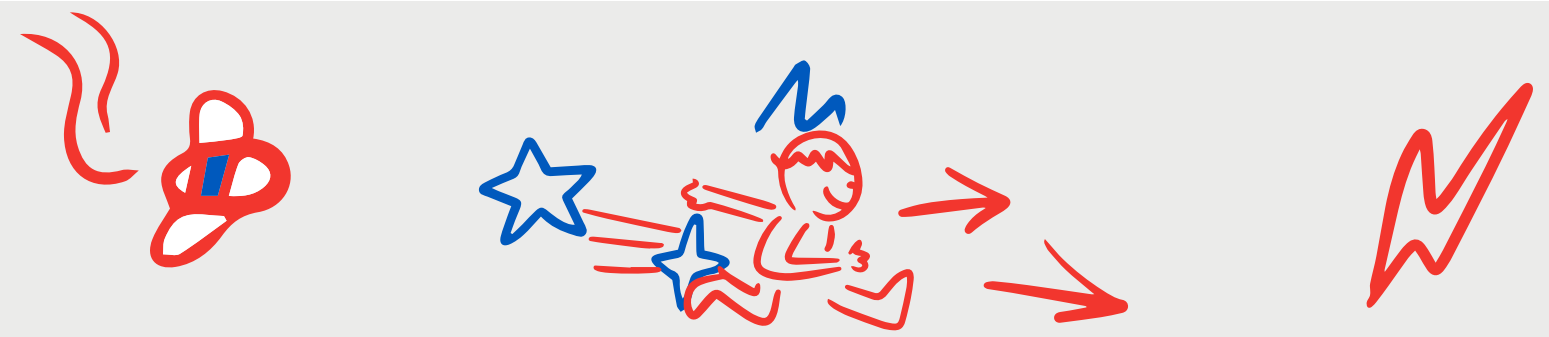
This refers to the development of confidence and ability to create strong relationships with others. Children will learn appropriate behaviours, helping them manage their own thoughts and feelings.

Establishing a positive and supportive environment and then consistently reinforcing this will help everyone understand what is expected and what is not. Remember every child has different influences and is therefore unique.

Communication and language

It's important for everyone to have the ability to express themselves and understand others. Play not only encourages the development of this, but also allows children to gain confidence and experience this in a range of different situations.



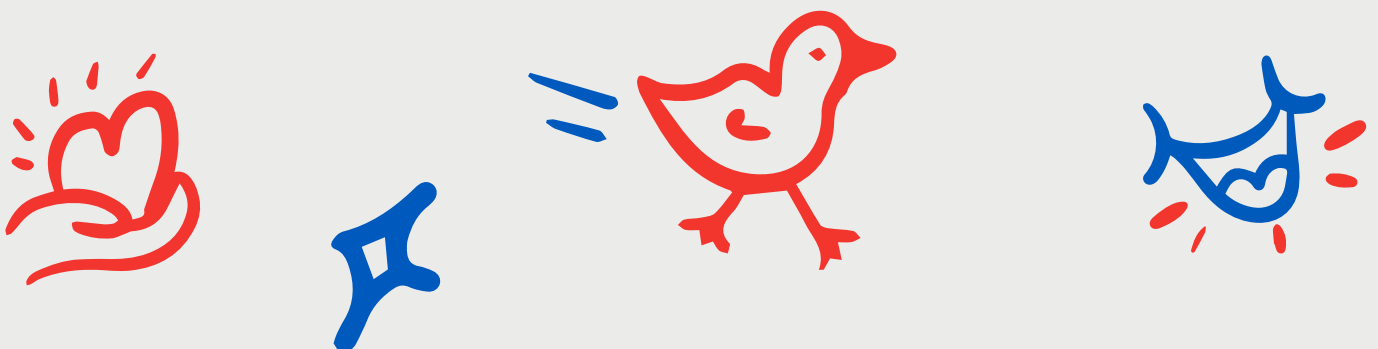


Creating the best environment for play

Creating a great environment for the children in your group is very important. You want them to know that you're happy they've come to the session, you want them to feel welcomed, included and comfortable.

Here are some top tips to help you create a positive environment:

1. Say hello with a smile when the children arrive.
2. Use the children's names.
3. Use open body language, like open arms as opposed to having them crossed.
4. Make eye contact when speaking to children.
5. Think about your tone of voice.
6. Consider different ways of communicating to meet different needs in the group (speech, pictures, signals, demonstrations).
7. Ask them questions and value their opinions.
8. Be enthusiastic.
9. Listen and acknowledge when they speak to you.
10. Notice their successes, big or small, and offer appropriate praise and encouragement.
11. Provide a warm goodbye – make them want to come back!

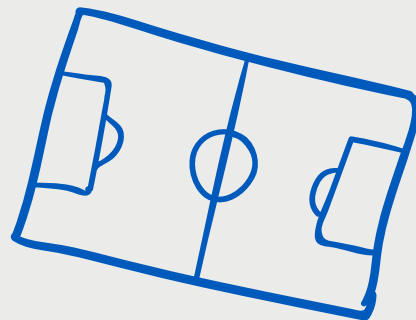
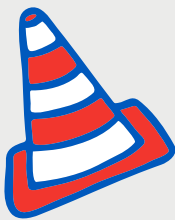
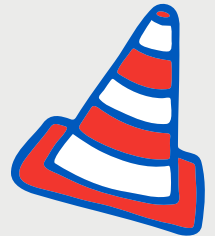
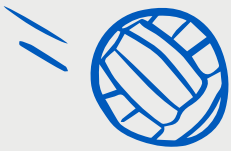
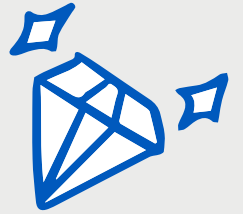


Chapter Two

Delivering

Play Phase

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Captain of Play

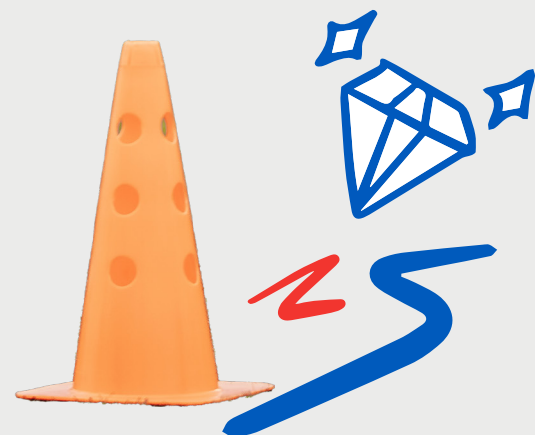
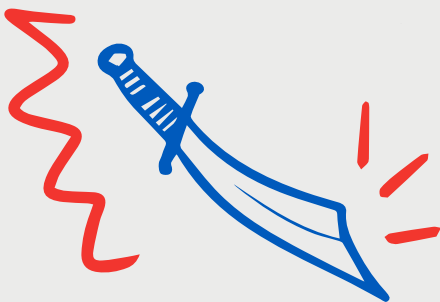
As we mentioned before, as a Captain of Play, your goal is to create a safe and supportive space where children can play. Your session should engage and involve the children, allowing them to have fun while being physically active.

Let's recap on your responsibilities:

Firstly, you play a key role in creating a positive and safe environment for the children to explore, develop and play. This will allow the children to thrive.

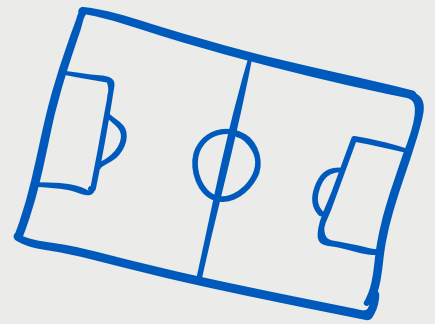
Secondly, connect with them. Be confident and clear, using simple language when talking to them. Make sure you actively listen to them and value their opinions, this will help you connect with the children.

Lastly, have fun yourself! This will encourage the children to play and have fun too, creating a positive experience for everyone.





Session structure



As a Captain of Play, you are responsible for creating great sessions for the children in your team. As you know, The Play Framework supports you in creating sessions with a child's development in mind. But when it comes to structuring your sessions, there's three components you should consider:

Movement:

In each session, the children should be moving and understanding how their body works. This could be running, jumping, dancing – the possibilities are endless!

Skills:

The children should be developing their skills – this could be catching a ball, creating imaginary scenarios or, of course, improving their dribbling skills.



Play:

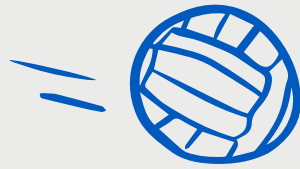
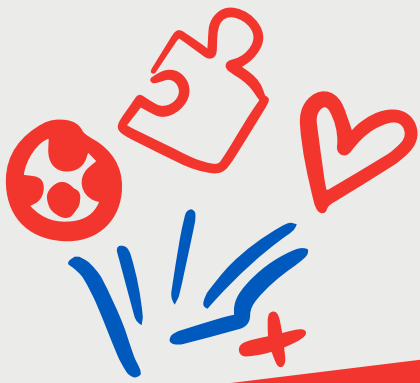
Each session should have play at its heart – aim to bring out all four types of play over the course of a few weeks.

This may not look like football to start with but through a series of games/ activities it will take a scaffolded approach to provide them with an appropriate introduction to the game.

To get you started, we have resources available such as game cards, activity cards and idea generator. These can help you plan and structure successful sessions for the children in your group.

Let's find out a bit more about how each of these can help you create a great session!



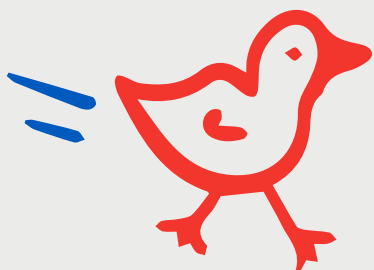


Types of games

In Play Phase we refer to six different types of games:

- Tag games
- Open Loop games
- Closed Loop games
- Copy and Follow games
- Individual games
- Team games

Let's dive into each game to find out more. If you want further information, please head to the [England Football Learning](#) website.



Types of games



Tag

Tag is a game most children know. It can be played in lots of different ways.

Copy and Follow

Copy and Follow uses the power of demonstration to support children to develop new skills.

Open Loop

Open loop is a non-stop game that only ends when you want it to end.

Closed Loop

A Closed Loop game is when children are playing for a set amount of time, or to achieve a particular goal.

Individual

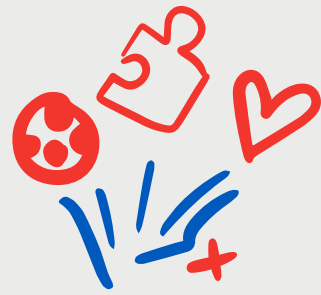
Individual games help each child improve their abilities and meet their individual needs.

Team

Introducing teamwork is ideal for children who may go on to play in a team.



How to use the game and activity cards



The idea generator gives you all the different elements you need to develop the different types of games. It encourages you to build your sessions from scratch. But sometimes it's useful to have access to ready-made games and activities.

The basic game cards are available to help you start your sessions. They give you all the information you need to not only play the game but how you can evolve it.

To help you evolve it even further, we also have a range of activity cards. An activity card tells you how the game works, what's expected of each player and what the aim of the game is, as well as a top tip.

Let's take a look at some examples!

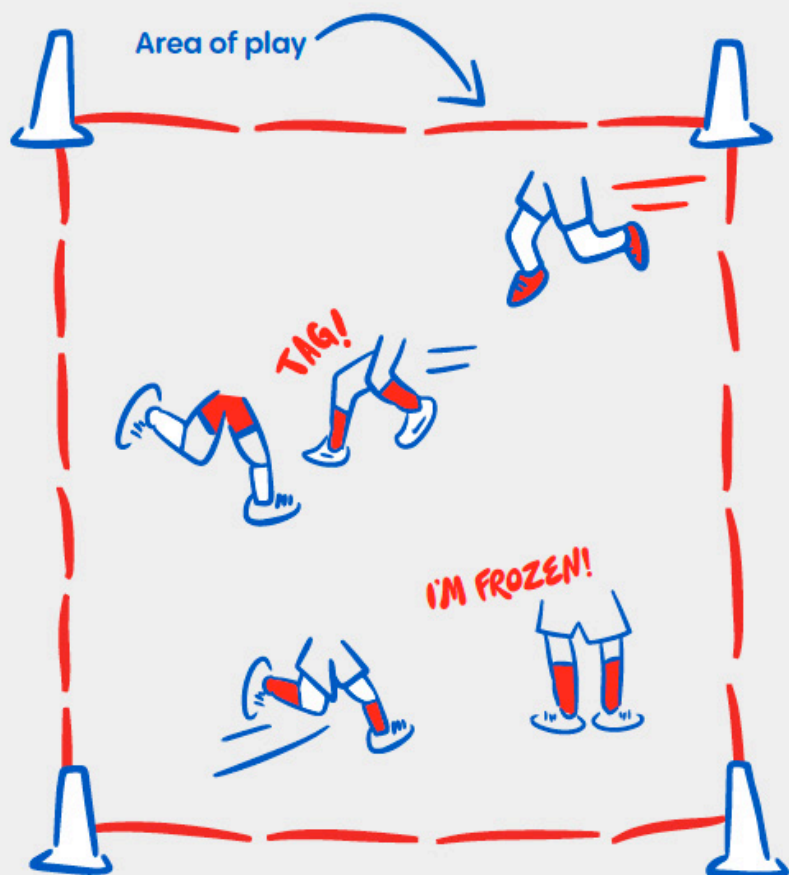




LET'S PLAY TAG!



Tag is a game most children know. And you can play it in lots of different ways.



How does it work?

Someone is trying to tag someone else as they move around an area.

Who's the tagger?

It could be one child. Perhaps a small team of children. Even everyone. It's your call!

How do they tag?

Usually by touch, but it could be by another way. Like stealing a ribbon, running a circle around the player, or by tackling away their football. Again, it's your shout.





★ Ask the children to get involved either with new ideas or with the setting up.



What happens when they're tagged?



You've plenty of choice. It could be that the player who's been tagged then:

-  has to perform an action to release themselves
-  takes over the role of tagger
-  joins the tagger to become a tagging team
-  is frozen from the game until released – by doing something themselves, or by being untagged by their teammates

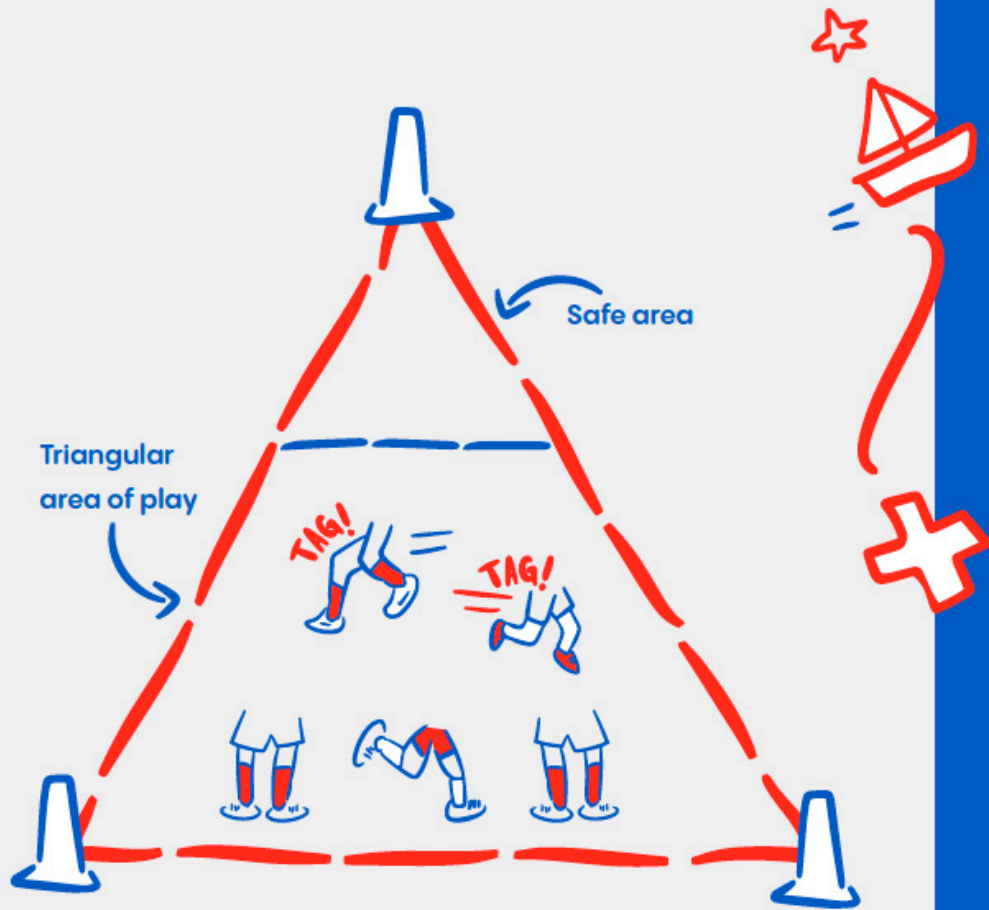
What's the aim of the game?

Perhaps you could finish when the last player is tagged. Maybe when every player has been 'untagged'. Or you could just keep going for a fixed time. The players will let you know when they get fed up, either through their actions or by telling you.





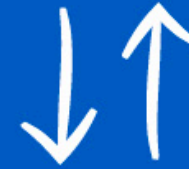
WHERE CAN YOU TAKE THE GAME?



You can mix The Tag Game up in lots of ways:



Mix it up by changing the size and shape of the playing area.



Make the game directional – players try to move from one place to another without being tagged.

★ Don't forget to use **STEP - Space. Task. Equipment. People -** to make the game work for everyone.



Have safe zones, where players can't be tagged but have to do something else in this zone.



See more ways to take the Tag Game somewhere new with the Idea Generator in your Play Book or with the Play Phase Activity Cards. Find them at Learn.EnglandFootball.com.

Idea generator

The idea generator is here to help you introduce The Play Framework to the basic game types. It focuses on the forms of play. Remember the play framework highlights the forms, features and outcomes of play. See page nine for more information.

FORMS OF PLAY				
TYPE OF GAME	SOCIAL PLAY	OBJECT PLAY	IMAGINATIVE PLAY	PHYSICAL PLAY
TAG GAME	Tags include social returns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • high fives • rock, paper, scissors • low fives • follow the leader • balancing in half a rainbow – find another person to complete the rainbow 	Objects to tag with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how to tag - use a balloon or soft ball, throw a bib or take someones bib • how to release - a player can give them a new bib 	The shape can become: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • boat, castle, racetrack, city etc The children/adults can become: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • characters • objects • animals Use objects creatively e.g. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bib waggles as octopus tentacles used to tag 	Change the shape to get different returns <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • circle – continuous movement • square – corners to hide or get stuck in • rectangle – opportunities to sprint • triangle – opportunities to change direction at speed under control • small space - quicker decisions, faster pace, less distance covered • large space - more space to develop speed over distance, more rest opportunities



TYPE OF GAME	SOCIAL PLAY	OBJECT PLAY	IMAGINATIVE PLAY	PHYSICAL PLAY
OPEN LOOP GAMES	Increasing social returns: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • play in pairs, threes, groups 	Objects you could use: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • buckets • cones • balls • bibs • gym ball 	Combining theme and activity: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • cones and balls = eggs in nests • buckets and balls = gold in a treasure chest • dishes and dome = mountain and valley Creative use of equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • socks and gloves: stepping-stones and climbing walls 	Tell a story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • add targets, safe zones, or obstacles
CLOSED LOOP GAMES	Choose your own adventure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children decide what happens next • provide free play opportunities to ensure exploration occurs 	Variety of equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • tyres • ropes • tunnels • hurdles • buckets • bean bags • balls Creating the environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • children use the equipment to create the scene (for example a boat) 	Tell a story: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create an adventure, mission, or story to work through with the children 	Movement Discovery: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • opportunities for children to discover new ways of moving.





TYPE OF GAME	SOCIAL PLAY	OBJECT PLAY	IMAGINATIVE PLAY	PHYSICAL PLAY
INDIVIDUAL GAMES	These games provide an opportunity to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• children to try on their own whilst still increasing social play• share and show what has been achieved	Engagement with equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• provide specific areas for solo play• increase or limit equipment provided to challenge creativity and curiosity	Create exploration examples that encourage movement or engagement with a specific task: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• going through the jungle• flying through space	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• moving higher and lower• throwing and catching• target games• counting games• obstacle courses• pushing and pulling activities• crawling and rolling games
COPY AND FOLLOW	Increase social returns: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• change partners• involve parents and carers• share and celebrate successes	Equipment to connect children together: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• woggles• balls (variety)• bean bags• ropes• balloons• bibs	Theme the children's roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• horse and jockey• truck and trailer• surfer and water Place the theme in a landscape: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• forest• city• beach Add equipment in the landscape as obstacles to navigate.	Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• faster, slower, stopping• left and right• zones to play in• objects to collect (Grasping)



TYPE OF GAME	SOCIAL PLAY	OBJECT PLAY	IMAGINATIVE PLAY	PHYSICAL PLAY
TEAM GAMES	Add tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• counting• team songs• team dances• actions (linked to the theme)	Equipment: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• woggles• balls (variety)• bean bags• ropes• balloons• bibs	Theme the teams: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• cops and robbers• rockets and stars• dogs and cats Place the theme in a landscape: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• bank• space• park	Movement discovery: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Opportunities for children to discover new ways of moving. For example, crossing a river cartwheeling• Include games that encourage physical returns. For example, tug-of-war for pushing and pulling, balancing on a wobble board or gym ball



To encourage the features of play, these ideas can be used across all of the basic game types.

FEATURES OF PLAY

VOICE AND CHOICE	COLLABORATION AND COMPETITION	MOTIVATION AND ENJOYMENT	PARTICIPATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ask questions, remember to use simple words provide options tell part of the story and let the children decide the rest let the children be Captain of Play for a session/part of a session 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> find opportunities to involve parents and carers encourage the children to work in different sized groups give the opportunities to discuss and problems to solve together <p>Competition can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> based on a task collecting points against another child, pair, group <p>Competition can scaffold as the children become familiar with a game.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> change the pitch and pace of your voice change your body language to be exciting make sessions memorable enjoy play be flexible don't rush have fun 	<p>Each child will partake in a way that is right for them – that's ok!</p> <p>They don't have to be doing the same thing – exploration and engagement will vary significantly at these younger age groups</p>



MAGIC TAG



Tag is a simple game where a player is trying to tag another player as they move around an area. What's great about Tag is that there are endless possibilities to take it somewhere new.

You can find the Basic Tag Game Card in the Play Book or for more ideas visit: Learn.EnglandFootball.com.

Magic Tag is great to play!

One child is the Great Wizard, although it could be several children. They can have a pretend wand, or using their finger is fine.

The Great Wizard runs after the others. When they get close to another child, they tag them by touching their shoulder or back with the magic wand.

The Great Wizard could also shout out a spell when they tag.

Like **AbraCadabra! Hocus Pocus! Shazam!** Or anything the children make up.

When a child has been tagged, they freeze. All the children keep on running until there is just one left unfrozen, and they are the champion.

Setting the game up



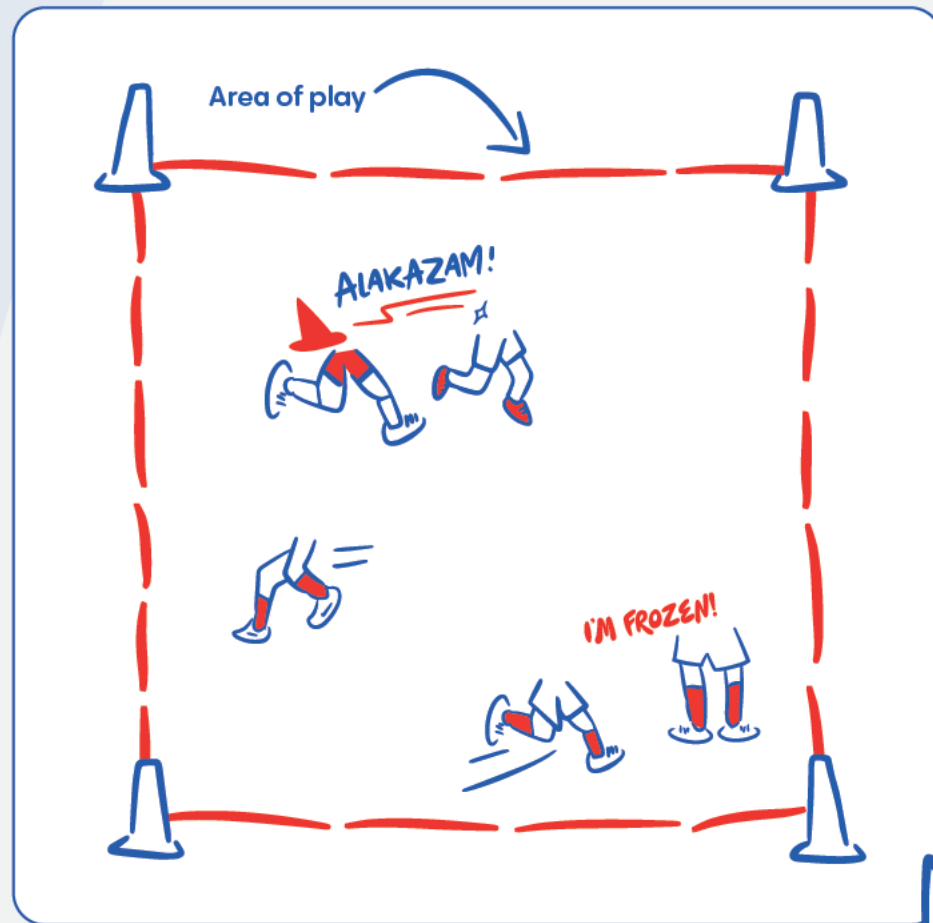
Number of players:
As many as you want.



Equipment needed:
Cones to mark your playing area. Wands and bibs.



Time to play:
Until every player has been tagged or untagged.





MORE IDEAS FOR THE TAG GAME

Making it even more fun

When frozen the children can unfreeze themselves by performing an action that you or they decide, like hopping or jumping on the spot. Instead, unfrozen children can free them by:

- ★ Pointing at a frozen child and shouting a magic word – let the children decide what this is.
- ★ Running in a circle around the frozen child, or another movement.
- ★ Crawling through the legs of the frozen child.

★ Let the children suggest ways to tag and untag players. They're great at coming up with ideas!



More fresh ideas for The Tag Game

While you are with the children we want them to experience all kinds of different ways of playing. So think about:



Imaginative play – add a little imagination:

The Great Wizard might be trying to free a prince or princess locked in a tower.



Object play – introduce equipment:

Children have a wizard's cape (use a bib) tucked into their waistband. The tagger has to take it to tag them.



Social play – bring everyone together:

Encourage children to release as many friends as possible, or to tag everyone as fast as they can.



Physical play – get more physical:

If tagged, children run, hop or jump out of the area to get back in the game.



Give it a football focus:

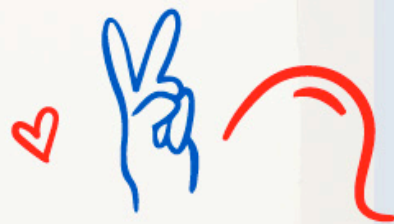
Each child has a ball. If tagged, they pick up the ball, drop it onto one knee and catch it.





Top Tips

Here's a few ideas to think about when using the Basic Game Cards:



Be enthusiastic and encouraging. Remember it's all about children having fun!



Ask the children to come up with their own game ideas. They're imaginative thinkers, so they'll have lots of fun ideas.



Get the children to help with setting-up, but allow time for this.



Make the rules simple and easy to understand.



Add other elements once they've played a few times. If it's not working, feel free to change it.



Change the size and shape of the play area depending on how many children are involved, how difficult it is and how you want them to move.



Walk through how the game works with other Captains of Play before the children have a go.



Avoid games where children are 'out' so everyone is always involved.



Look closely for any child who is not having fun. Find a way to get them involved.



Think about how you might engage parents and carers – as helpers or participants.



Try using the power of storytelling to bring all the basic game types to life in fun ways.



Include all the different types of play across your sessions – imaginative, social, physical and with equipment.





STEP

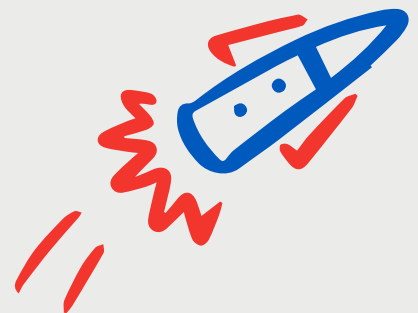
Your children's individual needs will vary a lot. Not everyone in the session needs to be doing the same thing – you can have adaptations of the same exercise or different ones running at the same time, taking everyone into account.

You can use the **STEP principle (Youth Sport Trust, 2002)** to achieve this.

What does **STEP** stand for?

- **Space:** Change spaces, shapes, and sizes, like making the area smaller in a tag game to help the taggers.
- **Task:** Give different children different tasks, like playing with the ball at their feet, in-hand or bouncing it as they move.
- **Equipment:** Use different equipment for different abilities, like different sizes of football, or a non-bouncing ball to practise dribbling.
- **People:** Change numbers within activities, for instance, in tag, you could have four people against one tagger, or change to three against two taggers.

With **STEP**, your activities can be fully inclusive and accessible to all children at all ability levels. Adapting the level of challenge can mean more enjoyment and motivation, and better learning.





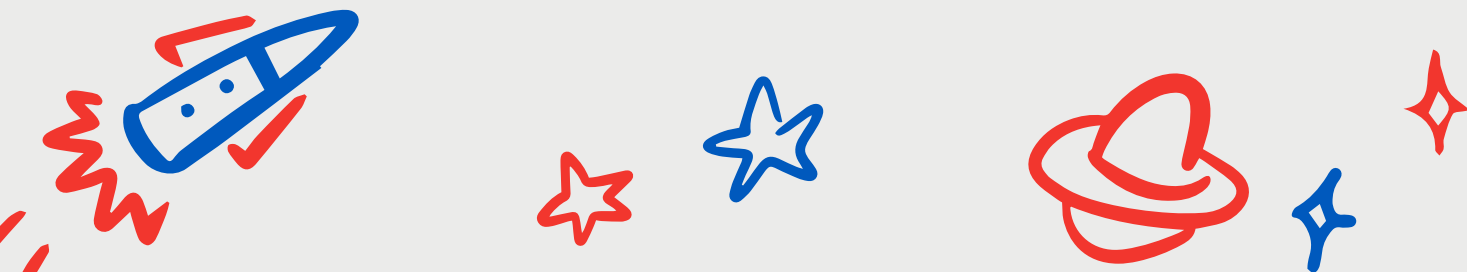
Introduction of gameplay

Play Phase - how to introduce matches to children.

Match-play is seen as the most exciting and exhilarating element of football. However, when you are four years old that isn't always the case. Before coming to a session, you may have played for hours in the garden and park with your family, while for others this could be their first ever experience of a match. We need to remember that football is a complex game with equally challenging rules.

How we introduce children to matches is important, especially if we consider the potential impact on their long-term engagement with our sport. This section of your playbook will show you how to introduce children to matches. It will provide you with the necessary steps to ensure all your children will be able to play and enjoy a 2 v 2 version of the game.





Where to start

The rules of football are complex. A child needs to understand direction, recognise that there are goals to aim at, respond to the ball going off the pitch and recognise the part they play in a team. All of these parts are challenging concepts for a four-year-old to understand and demonstrate during match-play.

You may be familiar with children who just stand still, go and sit at the side of the pitch, stand in the goal, whack the ball, or only want to play with their ball. All of these are signs that the game is overwhelming.

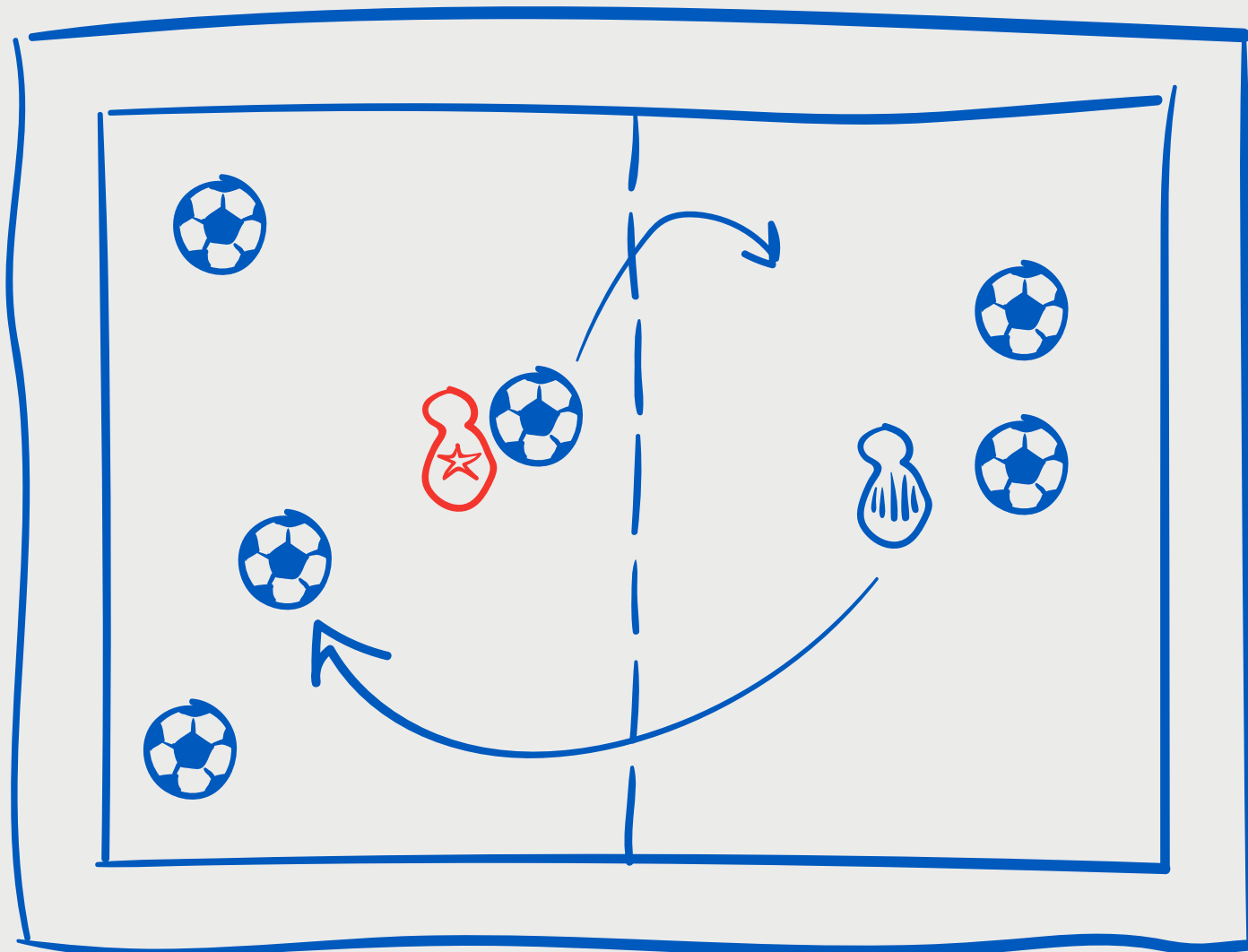
What can we do to help our youngest players understand how to play the game?

Let's go back to basics and look at the rules. With any game, the starting point of learning how to play are the rules. When football matches are introduced, our approach shouldn't be any different. We need to remember that demonstrating our understanding of these rules takes time. For a four-year-old starting with all the rules at the same time is too much. Therefore, our job as a Captain of Play is to break these rules down into stages. By doing this the children can understand each element and have the time they need to be able to demonstrate the required actions, such as stopping if the ball goes out of play.



Step one: Start with direction

Step One introduces the children to the concept of direction. There are four stages that you can work through, hitting or throwing the ball, rolling the ball, kicking the ball, dribbling the ball; and stopping.

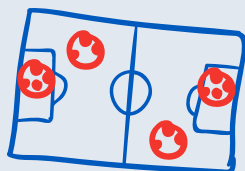


How to play



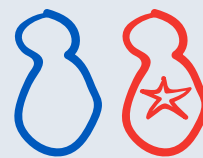
Aim of the game

Get all four balls on the other half of the pitch.



Set up

Create a pitch and divide it in two halves.
Place two balls per player on each half.



Format

1 v 1



Rules

- Each player stays in their half of the pitch.
- Each round can be played for 30 seconds, 45 seconds or one minute.
- Each round can be played with different equipment including ballons, tennis balls, footballs.
 - Progression One: Throw the ball into the other half.
 - Progression Two: Roll the ball into the other half.
 - Progression Three: Kick the ball into the other half.
 - Progression Four: Dribble into the other half and stop the ball.

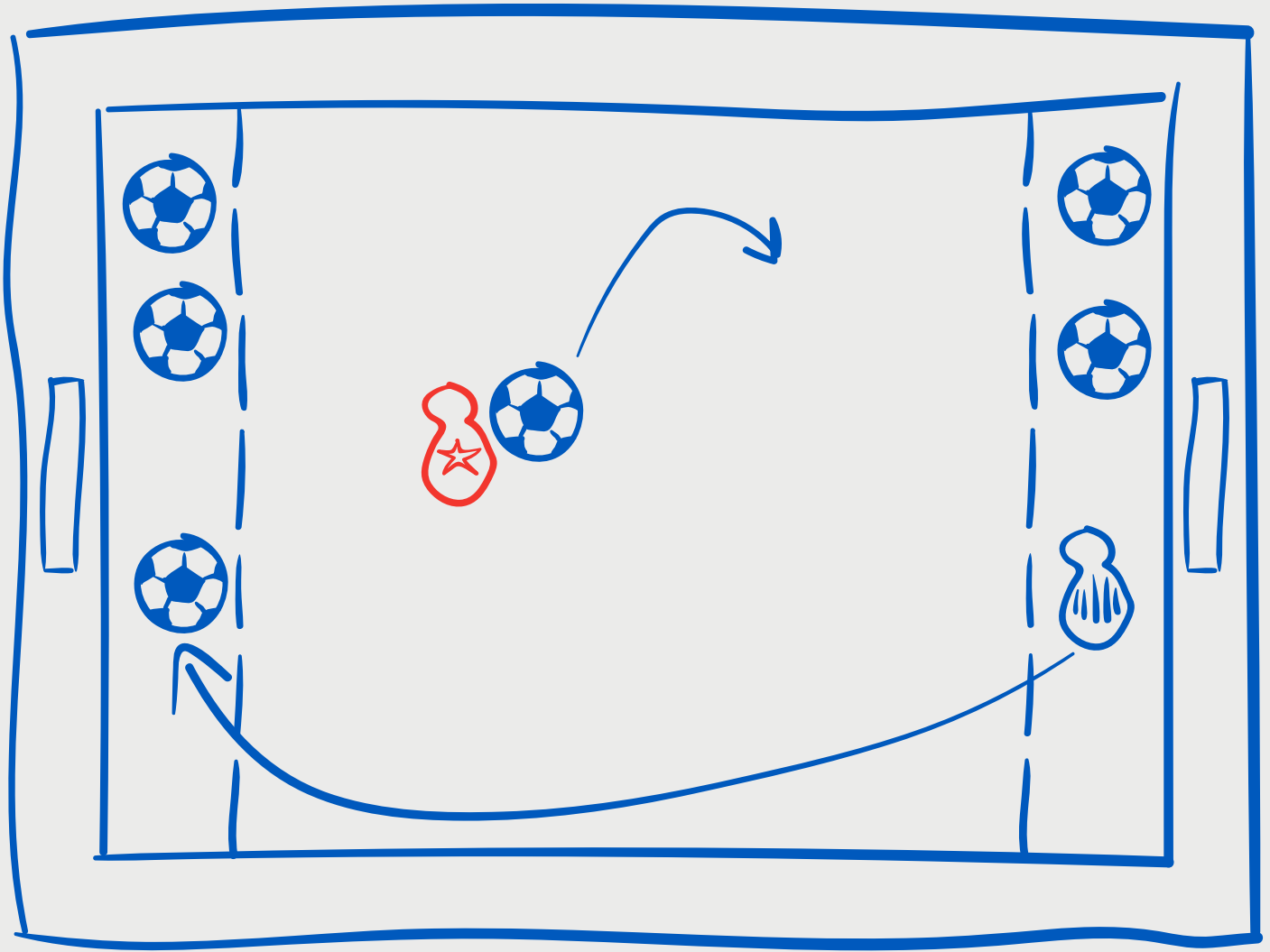
Top tips

- When introducing and teaching children how to play matches. Try keep the team colours the same each week, along with the direction they are attacking and defending.
- Consider the size of the pitch that you use. If it's too small, the balls will constantly be off the pitch. If it's too large, they will not be able to recognise the dimensions.
- Use red cones to help children recognise where to stop. Connect real world responses that the children will be familiar with. For example use red cones for stop, like a car stopping at a traffic light. Remember children who are **colour blind** might find certain colours challenging. For more information, check out the colour blindness guidance on the England Football Learning website.
- To help keep the balls in play, position parents at the end of each pitch and give them the responsibility to recycle the balls.



Step Two: Add a target

Step Two builds on the concept of direction by adding movement with an object towards a specific zone. By asking the children to travel over a specific distance with their own ball consolidates the idea of direction from Step One. The final step for the children to reach with this challenge is to kick their ball into a goal.

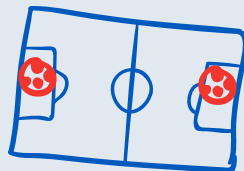


How to play



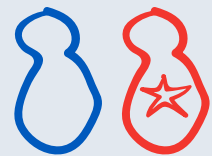
Aim of the game

Get as many balls as possible in the opponents end zone.



Set up

Create a pitch with two end zones.
Have goals ready to use.
Place three balls per player in each end zone.



Format

1 v 1

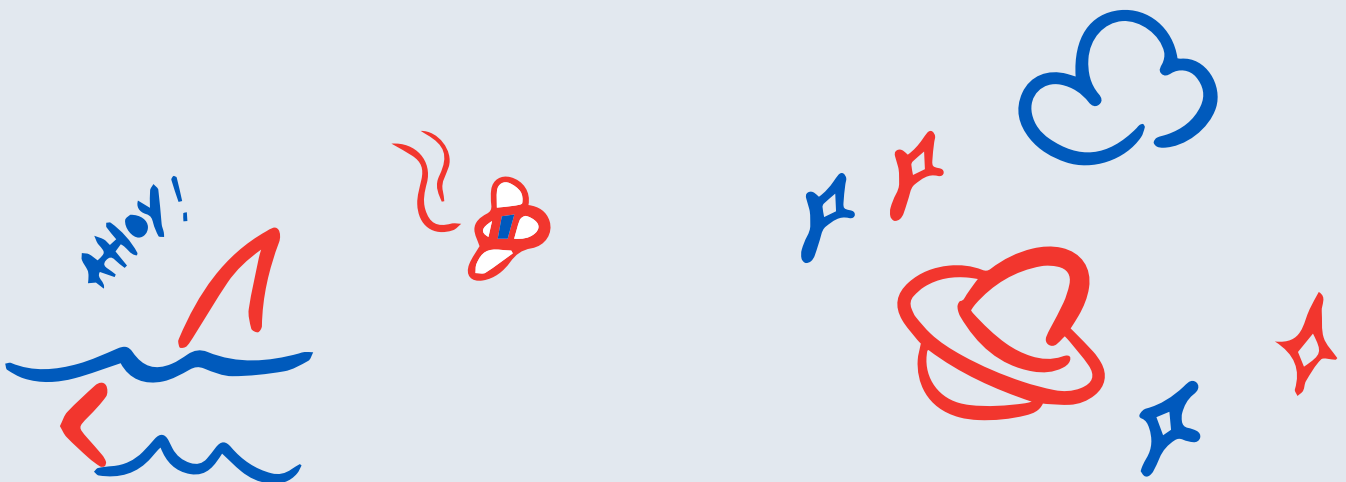


Rules

- Each player starts in their end zone.
- Each player selects a ball, travels to the oppositions end zone. Stops, leaves their ball, and returns to their end zone to collect a new ball.
- Each round can be played for 30 seconds, 45 seconds or 1 minute.
 - Progression one: Bounce the ball.
 - Progression two: Dribble and stop.
 - Progression three: Repeat round 1 and 2. Each time round is played remove a ball. Repeat until each player has one ball each.
 - Progression four: Dribble and strike. Give each player 3 balls each. Taking a ball at the time travel to the opposite zone and try to score. First player to score all three goals first wins.

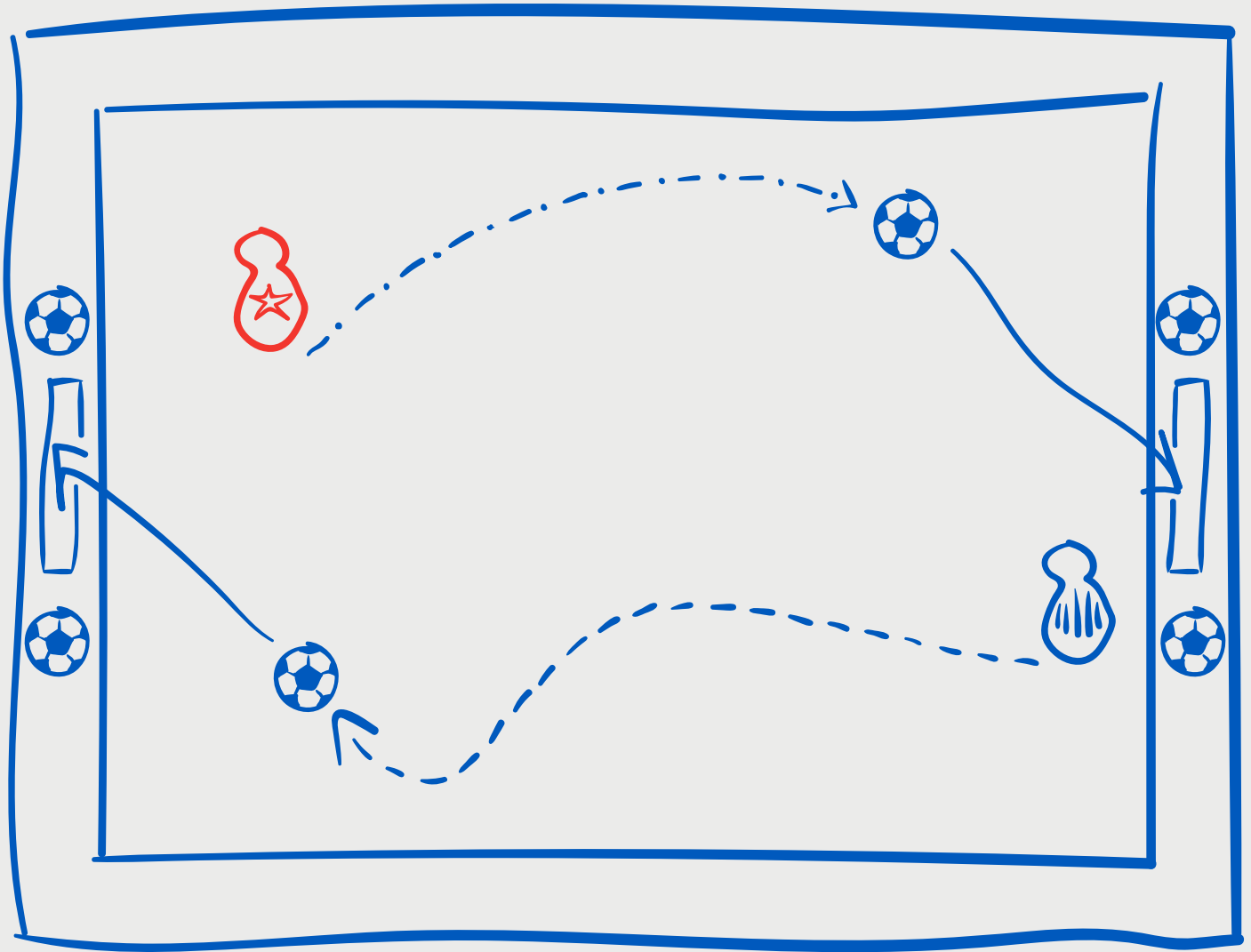
Top tips

- Consider changing the balls to beach balls, basketballs, futsals or different sized footballs to support movement and engagement in the activity.
- Do not rush through these stages, its ok to have different children completing a range of challenges.
- Do not worry if the children struggle to stay on the allocated pitch space. Moving with the ball under control towards a target is a difficult challenge to master.
- Some children will not recognise that scoring a goal is a good thing, especially if they have never played before. Your reactions to these small successes will build confidence and happiness as they learn to play the game.



Step Three: Play against others

The final challenge builds once again on the learning from Step One and Two. By continuing with direction, staying within the pitch, and celebrating goals are the key actions you are looking for from your children. As the balls are reduced a One v One will gradually be introduced.

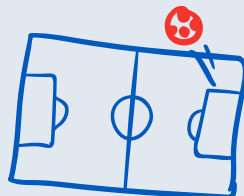


How to play



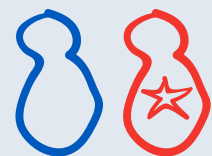
Aim of the game

Play a directional small-sided football game.



Set up

Create a pitch with goals for each pair.
Place three balls next to each goal.



Format

Start with 1 v 1



Rules

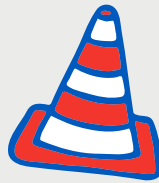
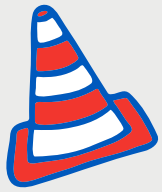
- Each player stands by their goal next to the three balls.
- On go, each player selects a ball, travels to the oppositions end of the pitch and strikes the ball into the goal.
- Once the ball enters the goal, the player returns to their goal to select a new ball.
- The cycle repeats until the timer stops. Points are scored for each ball that is in the goals at the time.
- Each round can be played for 30 seconds, 45 seconds or 1 minute.
 - Progression one: 3 balls.
 - Progression two: 2 balls.
 - Progression three: 1 ball.
 - Progression four: increase format size (1 v 2, 2 v 2).

Top tips

- You can reduce the physical load by reducing the length and width of the pitch.
- When the children start to play 1 v 1 for the first time, the ball will not stay on the pitch. Playing against someone else is really hard. To help, you can remove the pitch boundaries completely and use parents and carers as a physical barrier.
- Be patient and if needed, go back a stage to consolidate direction and targets.

Step Four: What's next

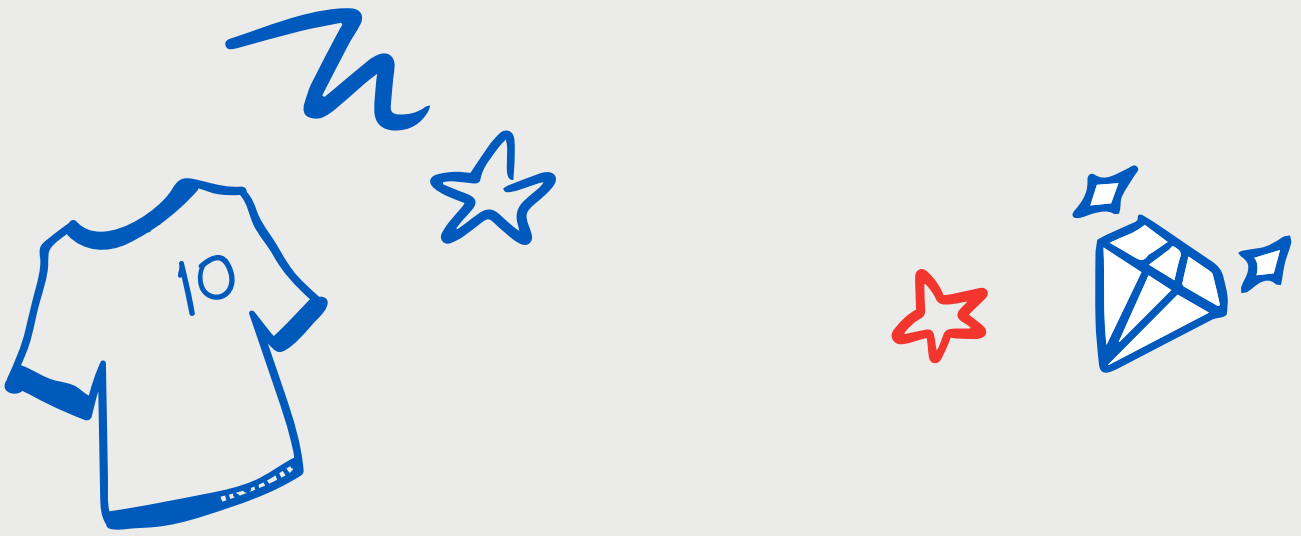
Introducing children to matches will take time. Steps one to three could take an entire season. When children have mastered 1 v 1 you can start to consider moving onto 2 v 2. Don't forget that when a new child starts, they will need to start from Step 1. Therefore, you will have lots of different activities being played across your pitches. Ask your parents and carers to help facilitate the different games.



Delivery tips

- If you want to involve the children, they can help with marking out the area. There is a real benefit to doing this but allow more time.
- The size and shape of the area will depend on how many children or how many groups you have playing. Don't be afraid to change the area size if it doesn't feel right.
- If you let the children pick teams or opponents, you may get some mis-matches so keep an eye on this. You may want to have different ideas on how to change teams again.
- Think carefully about how you explain the rules. Make them simple and easy to grasp knowing that other elements can be added once the group have played the game a few times.
- Remember, you and the other Captains of Play can walk through how the game works to show the children before they have a go.
- When the game starts, look closely to see if you need to make any adjustments and whether any child, group or team is disadvantaged.
- Build up the excitement with your voice, your comments, and your encouragement.
- REMEMBER - it is meant to be FUN.





Chapter Three

Engaging families



Parent engagement ideas



Support from families:

While running your sessions, you'll interact with a lot of your children's family members and support networks. Parents, carers, siblings – whoever they are, it's vital that they are supportive of the sessions and their children.

It's a good idea to give families an idea of what to expect before your session. This will help to get their support and manage their expectations.

It's really helpful to let families know how they can get involved in the sessions, as well as what sort of support is helpful for their child and you as the Captain of Play.

Families can play a huge part in developing skilful players. Below is some useful information you may want to share with parents and carers.



Parent explainer card



Do you want your child to have a great start in their love of the game? Have lots of fun and make new friends? Gain confidence and develop their physical skills?

Then our Play Phase approach is perfect for you.

For your child, Play Phase means:

-  improved communication and language
-  personal, social and emotional growth
-  healthy physical development



A start that lasts a lifetime

Childhood is a magical time full of infinite possibilities, hope and potential.

We believe that children deserve the best possible start to ensure a bright and healthy future. The fun of taking part in games while keeping active can make a huge and positive difference that lasts a lifetime.

Although this is an England Football approach, the focus is not on the game of football itself. Instead, the focus is on fun, enjoyment, creativity, imagination, confidence, and creating engaging activities for all children aged four to six who want to take part.

So, with Play Phase your child:

- plays in a safe, supportive environment.
- enjoys memorable experiences of being active, and makes memories to be shared with parents, other children, and adults.
- sees their individuality and potential celebrated.
- takes part in fun activities that encourage creativity and experimentation.
- is given a voice, is listened to, and is valued by playing an active role in learning.



Top tips



Explain your approach

Periodically, explain how you want the group to develop and how you plan to get them there using the Play Phase approach.

Be consistent, confident, and clear

This helps parents and carers to understand how you plan to develop your players. Once they 'get it', they can support your approach and reinforce it with their children.

Remind them this is a learning environment

Like in school, your sessions are a learning environment. The children need encouragement and time to work things out – parents and carers have a big part to play in this.

Get them involved

The more you can engage and involve parents and carers, the stronger you make the team! When children see their role models displaying certain behaviours, they're more likely to act in the same way.

Remember, you can signpost families to the [coaching community podcast](#) for parents, to help them understand the sessions and Play Phase philosophy.

