

THE ABC'S OF COACHING

"The better the coach, the more the ABC's are used."

We like to think of you as we do ourselves: first and foremost as an educator of children, and secondly as a soccer coach. To this end, we feel the value of this material lies in the fact that it applies to any situation in which children are being instructed, including life away from the sports field. That is why we recommend you study this section before moving on to the Lesson Plans. Then, use it in conjunction with the Lesson Plans.

The ABC's of Coaching is a collection of the most useful teaching techniques we have incorporated into our everyday teaching and coaching. By learning these principles and using them every time you are on the field with children, you will create effective and enjoyable practice sessions.

Each letter of the alphabet includes one or more teaching concept. No single concept is more or less important than any other, but together they make a formidable whole. By constantly revisiting each concept, the wise and enthusiastic coach will gain valuable knowledge of child psychology, group dynamics, creative teaching, and a deeper understanding of how children learn.

The best way to use the ABC's is to first read and digest them as thoroughly as possible. Once you begin to put the tips into practice, focus on areas in which you feel your coaching needs improvement (making notes on your lesson plans will help you in identifying areas that may need work). Then go back to the ABC's: there's a good chance that something in them will help you. When we at Sports Domain Academy coach, all of these tips are taken into consideration all of the time, something that takes skill and practice. Gradually, you will include more of the tips into your repertoire, until they become second nature.

Note that some ABC's are inapplicable to the KinderKicker age group, but are useful teaching tools anyway. They can be incorporated into your teaching as your child develops in to a pro of the future!

HAVE FUN

Finally, remember the reason for the KinderKicker session – to have fun! You're not a drill sergeant! Inject enthusiasm and personality into your sessions, and you will find your attitude is contagious. If you are a confident, happy coach and you have fun, the children will too.

Good luck, and please feel free to call our staff at any time to ask questions or discuss your progress.



And Stop! ⇒ Be Firm, Fair and Happy! ⇒ Coach What Players
do Correctly ⇒ Demonstration ⇒ Energy ⇒ Fun & Flexibility ⇒
Games ⇒ Have Control ⇒ Eyes on the Group ⇒ Join In ⇒
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The A, B, C's of Coaching & Teaching

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A Guide for Coaching Sports & Teaching Children

By



The A, B, C's of Coaching

a And Stop!

This is the only stop command that we use at Ashley's Soccer Camp. Every player we work with knows it. It is most applicable when the dynamics of a group require a verbal command, rather than a gesture. So, have one consistent stop command. Be LOUD and forceful: "**And STOP!**"

b Be Firm, Fair and Happy!

Make the children do what you want them to, but always do it smiling! No group is beyond being able to be controlled, and if your standards at practice and on the field are high, but attainable, and you are consistent and fair, the children will respect you. So be **firm**, be **fair**, and **enjoy yourself**.

c Coach What Players do Correctly

Always coach what is right and do not worry about and highlight what is wrong. Never, ever use exercise as a form of punishment (like running extra laps, or doing push-ups). **Humiliation** does not create happiness or proficiency. Emphasize the positive, for example, "That was a good pass because you made it quickly." Or, "I liked how you sprinted after that loose ball!" **Positive reinforcement** works better than negative humiliation. Simply praising behaviors that you want repeated will enhance success.

d Demonstration

One demonstration speaks louder than a thousand words. If you cannot do it, have one of the members of the group do it. Insist on a good demonstration, and show the correct way to do something. Never show the way not to do it!

e Energy

Always be energetic and show plenty of enthusiasm. After a few weeks of training and games this may become a challenge, but dig deep into your reserves. Children will respond well to activities if they know you are putting in as much energy as you can.

f Fun & Flexibility

Have Fun!! Always try to inject an element of fun into your activities. Constantly ask yourself, "Would I have fun doing this?" "Are they having fun doing this?" "Would anybody have fun doing this?" If not, be **flexible** and try something new.

g Games

ASC uses a "Games Based Approach" to teaching. Children learn better and have more fun through playing games, not by repeating exercises. Many skills are involved in games; the coach has to know how to use them in order to focus on teaching a particular skill. We do not believe in using **drills** (which are for making holes!) and the word implies a military approach. A package of activities is essential, and when that package is delivered through games, the result is fun!

h Have Control

Without control, teaching cannot take place. Children need boundaries. Clearly communicate your rules and expectations early in the season. A good coach then constantly enforces them. But beware; in most cases, a lack of control is traceable to inappropriate activities. This leads to bored and frustrated children. If this occurs, look to yourself before you blame your players.

i Eyes on the Group

Constantly walk the perimeter and scan the group. **Scanning** requires constant attention to all your players by frequently looking over the group from different places around the perimeter. This requires enormous discipline, but it really helps in identifying potential problems. Players quickly realize, and respond well, when they are under constant observation.

j Join In

Every activity must be structured to achieve **maximum participation**. Children want to kick the ball and be involved. Activities must include everyone, with everybody doing something!! An abundance of activity is not always a bad thing. Organized chaos can actually be useful. Please remember that children are easily bored and do not enjoy standing on line. (When was the last time you were happy stuck in a traffic jam?) **No lines. Join in. Maximum participation.**

k Keep Records and Maintain High Standards

Records enable problems and ideas to be effectively logged and dealt with. Maintain high standards for yourself and the children. Accept nothing less than you ask for. If you allow standards to slip, your control of the group slips. Always remember to smile, though!

l Learn Names

Everyone appreciates being called by his or her first name. Children love to be known by their coach. Make a point of learning names as quickly as possible. Use games and a variety of other activities to enliven this process. Stating: "My name is Billy!" is not as exciting as playing tag and shrieking your name when you are caught. We find the use of last names impersonal. The bottom line is: call children what they want to be called, not what you want to call them.

m Movement

This is a fundamental teaching tip for all sessions. You must have activities that entail movement to mentally and physically awaken and engage the players. By warming up prior to stretching, your sessions have a solid beginning. You should end every session with a cool down and stretching.

n No Talking While I am Talking!

It reinforces basic good behavior to keep children quiet while you are demonstrating or explaining. This should be a rule of every coach. Some coaches get carried away and drone on. Children key on your voice. Droning on causes them to phase out. Children also know that while you are talking, they can daydream. Breaking your speech with inflections is crucial. Silence is also an essential teaching tool. Silence, and a look in the right direction, are powerful tools for keeping control.

o Organization

A successful team needs to be well prepared. Ensure your paperwork is always up to date and accurate. To help your team be in the right place at the right time, a phone chain is a great idea. Frequent contact with parents is also recommended to build strong team spirit. This may be in the form of a fun, weekly or bimonthly newsletter. Another idea is to organize a refreshments rotation for game-days. You cannot be too well prepared!

p Planning

A written lesson plan for every training session is essential. Take into account the age and skill level of your players in order to create an appropriate plan. After your practice session make notes on your lesson plan and keep it in a file. Revisit your plans often so as to evaluate your performance as a coach and identify problem areas. Insufficient or poor planning leads to **Band-Aid Coaching**. This means that a coach does not have a set plan, but rather makes do by fixing the noisiest problem. Organize your session to include a warm-up (always with a ball), stretching, conditioning, individual skills work, group games and activities, and scrimmage time.

q Questions

Questions should be asked to stimulate the children. When you ask your players questions, employ a tactic called **wait time**. This means always waiting at least **five seconds** before calling on someone to answer. Children process information at different rates, and by responding to the first child to raise his or her hand to answer, you exclude a large portion of the group. More children will participate if this teaching skill is employed. By waiting, you will see an increase in the participation of the quieter, less impulsive children.

r Regressive Pull

As the season progresses, you may find yourself being constantly tempted to engage in the players' habit of arguing about everything. We call it going back and forth, or regressive pull. One has to be vigilant in guarding against this. Be cool, be adult and be in charge!

s Safety, Safety, Safety!

This is the most important aspect at any time. The emotional and physical safety of the players is of paramount importance. Evaluate every situation with its safety in mind. Consider the safety implications of the following: field, equipment, game organization, and the emotional aspect of the coach/player interaction.

t Time on Task

A coach must evaluate how much time is spent practicing an assigned skill. "Time on Task" is the ratio of a player's time engaged in the activity, versus inactivity (i.e. listening to the coach, taking a break, in transition between activities). Have someone with a stop watch monitor your coaching to help you work out this ratio. We aim for 80% of Time on Task, but don't be surprised to find your figures much lower early on! Remember, the children are there to learn by playing, not by listening to your voice.

u Understanding

Coaches must constantly check for understanding. Ask the children what they have learned from the skills, games and activities. What can they tell you about what has occurred? This means taking a break between activities and asking questions. This should be done at least at the conclusion of a session and at the beginning of the next session.

v Versatility

Be it snow, heat, behavior problems, or the arrival of a moose on the playing area, a coach must be able to handle a changing environment with ease and confidence. The most important aspect of this is modifying an activity from its original form to improve it. Whether this means changing a game or enlarging your field after a few minutes of cramped play, a coach needs to be thinking all the time. You should be willing to admit that an activity is unsuitable, and if it does not work, then move on. It is okay to admit this to the children as well.

w When I Say Go!

This is the opposite command to **"AND STOP!"** and it is equally important. We use "When I say go..." as a way of starting an activity. A coach needs to be consistent with this instruction. Strong emphasis should be placed on the word **"GO!"** and children should learn to react only to this word, and not before it is said.

x Explain Activities Clearly

Be **simple, clear and concise** when asking players to carry out a command. An 8 year old will not understand an MLS tactical game plan. Instead, make all requests appropriate to the age and ability to understand them. Do not spend more than 20 seconds talking; otherwise, players tend to lose concentration.

y Why is the Coach Always on the Winning Team?

Coaches are there to teach and not to dominate the game. A coach's focus can shift from the children to himself or herself. Too often we see a coach showing off while children become bored or unhappy. Do not be tempted to demonstrate to the children that you can dominate in the scrimmage, or do the most juggles. If this happens, a coach is not doing a good job.

z Zzzzzzzzzz

Zzzzzzzzzz, the children are drifting off. Why? As mentioned under "H" (Have Control), a lack of control can be attributed to inappropriate activities. Look at yourself, your planning, and the activity before you blame the children for being bored. If they lose interest, the game could be too difficult, too easy, or just not fun. All activities can be structured to challenge all players. Suggest to the group, "If you feel comfortable you can try this more difficult skill, but if you're not sure, continue to work at the level on which you're most comfortable". If the majority of children are not interested in an activity, the chances are that it is unsuitable.