

Don't Take Risks - Play Safe

Soccer should be (and usually is) a fun and safe pastime for our children.

Soccer coaching should be fun too.

But that doesn't mean you can take your players' health and safety lightly. You must take care of your players while they are in your care. If you don't, the consequences could be serious, both for your players and for you.

The following guidelines won't remove all the risks associated with youth soccer but following them will help you demonstrate your professionalism where health and safety is concerned.

1. Know your players - when players join your club their parents should be asked to provide the following information relating to their son or daughter: birth date, address, parents' mobile telephone number, any existing medication or allergies. If a child is asthmatic you should be given their inhaler and know what to do if the child needs it while they are in your care.
2. Explain the risks - parents or guardians need to give their written, informed consent to their child taking part in training sessions and matches and for the consent to be informed the risks MUST be explained. A simple line such as: 'soccer is a contact sport and injuries will sometimes occur' is sufficient although you might want to reassure by saying '...but we will do everything we can to keep the risks to a minimum'.
3. Supervise closely - never, ever leave your players on their own. You must be with them at all times and never leave the practice or game until all the players have been safely picked up.
4. Don't try to do it on your own - always have a second adult present, preferably one of the same gender as the children you are coaching. If you don't, how will you manage if a player is seriously injured? You can't leave the other players on their own while you arrange first aid.
5. Get qualified - you should have a coaching qualification and there should be a first aider in attendance at matches and training. This person should make sure that the first aid kit is fully stocked.
6. Plan your coaching sessions - bear in mind the physical and emotional maturity of your players when choosing activities. Match your players in terms of physique when choosing teams; don't allow six foot teenagers to play against seven year olds. Amazingly enough, it does happen.
7. Check your equipment - keep written records of portable goal inspections, make sure nets and posts are in good condition and that goals are secured properly (don't allow children to put them up). Balls shouldn't have any rough edges.
8. Check your players equipment - parents should be made aware that their children won't be allowed to play if they're not wearing shinpads and clothing/footwear that is appropriate to the ground conditions and weather. Jewelry should not be worn (by boys or girls!). And correct equipment includes bringing fluids; tell them to bring a drink.

This might seem like a daunting list but it's really just common sense.

Have fun but always play safe. Don't take risks.