



Soccer Curriculum (3-8 years old)

LVST Youth Programs (3-8 years old)

The introduction to soccer coincides with the onset of independence from parents and increased self-confidence in most children. Children also begin to play cooperatively with others. This does not mean; however, parents should fully pass the responsibility for learning to the club coach. The parent has a very important role in encouraging the child to play at home. Practice sessions should occur once or twice per week and players should be encouraged to play multiple sports and activities.

What you need to know about development

The first five years (3-8 years of age) of soccer participation provide the foundations for future performance. Failure to establish fundamental movement and **ball skills** can dramatically limit the player's performance and subsequent participation in soccer. LVST players focus on learning essential physical, psychosocial, and cognitive skills that form the building blocks for future participation in all sports. To this end, we must not underestimate the value of quality child-centered coaching with the youngest age groups.

Understanding some basic physical, psychological, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of children aged 3, 4, 5 and 6 will help the parents, coaches, and club in two ways. First, they will understand the logic behind selection of content and teaching methodologies. Second, they can anticipate the desired results of these choices. For example, knowing 3-6-year-olds are mostly self-centered (individualistic) will help adults to understand why 'their' ball is difficult to share with others and why *passing is unnatural and difficult to coach*.

Translation to Player Development

Child-centered coaching assumes a commitment on behalf of the coach to embrace a natural starting point in development for each player. The coach's role is *not* to create parity (all players the same), but to develop all players to the highest level of everyone's commitment, attitude, enthusiasm, and talent will allow. To ensure participation in soccer is enjoyable for players and adults, parents, and coaches of 3-6-year-old players need to embrace and work with the players' developmental characteristics, not against them.

Translated to player development this means:

- Teaching fundamental movement skills – running, jumping, skipping, throwing, etc.
- Focusing on ball familiarization and dribbling skills – one ball per child
- Planning sessions that are simple, fun, creative (superhero's cartoons animals etc), and have variety
- Selecting activities that do not place undue stress on the body
- Repeating activities regularly – young players need lots of reps to master skills
- Including activities that are brief (5-10 minutes), due to players' short attention spans
- Disguising technical information by using names, characters, and stories.
- Encouraging trial and error
- Making session's fun and challenging using hurdles, hoops, ladders, bean bags, etc.
- Including competitive games, **but emphasizing effort**
- Providing constant encouragement
- Keeping instruction to a minimum and **activity constant**
- Including 'games and matches' in every session
- Rotating all players through all positions

Tactical Focus

At this age, players should simply focus on learning how to return to their original positions when an action is finished. Most are not prepared to concentrate on staying "in position" *and* executing the basic movements and soccer-specific skills emphasized in training. Encourage protecting the ball and not just kicking it. Ask players "Can you keep it?" "Can you hide the ball?" "Can you dribble into space?"

Player Competencies and Assessment

The LVST Player Development Curriculum offers parents and coach comfort by ensuring there is a plan to guide a child’s soccer playing experience from the time they enter the program to the end of their youth playing experience. Part of this planning process is identifying the performance expectations/competencies for each stage of development. In addition, regular player assessment will enable coaches to know a player’s ability and take the necessary steps to provide appropriate instruction. Assessment also allows coaches to provide feedback to parents regarding a child’s progress and identifies how they can help in the player’s development.

With this in mind. The following table provides players, parents, coaches and administrators with a comprehensive list of soccer competencies (skills, techniques, knowledge, tactics) used by LVST. The matrix represents the recommended time for introducing a competency (+) and the time when the player should become competent (√). Note players are not expected to become competent in many competencies by the end of the end of the LVST program.

Key: (+) introduction of the skill (√) Expected time when the average player should become competent

Chronological Age	3	4	5	6	7	8
Fundamental Movement Skills						
Runs with stops and starts	+			√		
Run and change directions	+			√		
Gallop	+			√		
Skip	+			√		
Lateral movements – side-step	+			√		
Rolling, bending low, arching	+			√		
Balance – on a line	+			√		
Balance – on one foot	+			√		
Throwing – both hands	+				√	
Jump – make shapes in the air	+		√			
Jump – one foot to another	+		√			
Jump – stride and bound patterns	+					√
Jump – hurdles	+					√
Quick feet and crossovers	+				√	
Running technique		+				
Sprinting technique					+	
Soccer skills						
Turns – Pull back, chop, step over	+				√	
Dribbling – Toe taps, popcorn, tick-tock	+				√	
Ball manipulation		+				
Feints and dribble			+			
Attacking an opponent 1v1			+			
Receiving/Control - Basics			+			
Passing - Basics			+			
Shooting - Basics			+			
Physical Prep and Conditioning						
Dynamic warm-up			√			
Mental/Cognitive Conditioning						
Confidence		+				
Concentration		+				



Soccer Program Schedule

3–4-Year-Old Schedule – 50-minute sessions – FOCUS: Dribbling, Balance/Coordination		
Week	Theme	Description
1	Introduction	Fun games to introduce soccer, basic terminology, meet the coach, icebreakers etc.
2	Dribbling	familiarization with different parts of foot (<i>inside/outside/laces</i>).
3	Dribbling continued	Dribbling continued (higher focus on keeping the ball close when dribbling, but keep different parts of the foot in mind)
4	Dribbling continued	Dribbling and stopping the ball with different parts of foot (sole, outside, inside). Changing directions
5	Striking the ball (intro to passing/shooting)	Using different parts of the foot to strike the ball- inside and laces (emphasize “no big toe”) Planting a foot next to the ball with toe facing forward- then strike with other foot
6	Striking ball directionally	Using different parts of the foot to strike the ball- inside and laces, with the intention of hitting a target.
5–6-Year-Old Schedule – 50-minute sessions – FOCUS: Dribbling, Passing, Shooting Introduction to 4v4 competition		
Week	Theme	Description
1	Introduction/Dribbling	Fun games to meet the coach, icebreakers etc. Introduction to dribbling basics.
2	Dribbling continued	Dribbling with speed. Changing speeds/directions. Attacking 1v1
3	Passing	Learning the correct passing techniques. Intro to 4v4 competition.
4	Passing continued	Passing to a still and moving target
5	Shooting	Using different parts of the foot to strike the ball- inside and laces (emphasize “no big toe”) Planting a foot next to the ball with toe facing forward- then strike with other foot
6	Shooting continued	Using different parts of the foot to strike the ball- inside and laces, with the intention of hitting a target. Introduction
7–8-Year-Old Schedule – 60-minute sessions – FOCUS: Advanced techniques, competition		
Week	Theme	Description
1	Introduction/Dribbling	Fun games to meet the coach, icebreakers etc. Basics fundamentals reviewed. Introduction to 4v4.
2	Dribbling	Dribbling with speed. Changing speeds/directions. Attacking 1v1
3	Passing	Passing to a teammate. Passing in small groups.
4	Team shape/passing	Learning 4v4 spacing and passing in groups
5	Shooting/Team shooting	Using different parts of the foot to strike the ball- inside and laces. Learning to score as a team
6	Competition day	Using the skills to learn in the session to compete in mini-skills games and competition.