

# Lil' Kickers - Child Development Program

## Philosophy

Lil' Kickers is a non-competitive, introductory soccer and movement skills program for boys and girls ages 18 months - 9 years. In Lil' Kickers, we don't just teach soccer to kids, but also use soccer as a tool to teach kids about life. Enroll your child today, and find out why Lil' Kickers is the Highest Quality Child Development Program in the Northwest.

## Guiding Principles: The 3 C's

- Child-Centered
- Non-Competitive
- Child-Center

Lil' Kickers takes a **child-centered** approach to sports development. We look at the Lil' Kickers experience primarily from the perspective of children and their parents. We consider the child's developmental challenges and stages as the most crucial criteria for facilitating successful teaching and learning in Lil' Kickers. We also focus on the parent's role in the experience and educate parents about the psychology and dynamics of team sports and the coach-player relationship. Our approach helps children feel safe and supported so they will challenge themselves to grow and learn.

Most youth soccer and sports programs still define the relationship between player and coach in terms of what makes sense for the game of soccer, not the people involved. Most youth coaches in the 9 and under age range are volunteers with little to no coaching experience or training in child development. The typical coaching approach involves training players in specific technical skills and situational awareness which will help win soccer games. This approach is satisfying to those young players who have a natural aptitude for skills or are determined to excel. However, for the majority of young children, this type of coaching is not fulfilling. It fails to consider the importance of the parent's role and gives kids the impression that sports are always about winning. It also gives the misleading impression that the coach is the only member of the team that can help the team be a cohesive unit.

Lil' Kickers we change the coach-player relationship and that has been our recipe for success. Please read the table below for a more detailed explanation:

Typical Coaching			
Roles/Ideas	Player	Coach	Game of Soccer
1	Execute movements and skills according to direction of coach	Lead players to a higher degree of skill and understanding of the game	Most important to master the skills and concepts to facilitate victory in competition
2	Focus on those aspects of the game that involves only players and coaches	Lack of time for or understanding of parent's role in sports experience	Parents can make or break a child's sports experience in this age range
3	Winning is success, losing is failure	Confuse players with inconsistent standards and limits	Unclear standard of success for team and individuals
Lil' Kickers Instructing			
Roles/Ideas	Player	Coach	Game of Soccer
1	Enjoy the experience of playing and learning with others	Base coaching/instructing style and objectives on players and parents involved	The most important aspect of the game is the people involved
2	Execute movements and skills according to direction of instructor	Motivate children to be active and try skills because it is fun	When kids think learning skills is fun, they will progress to higher levels of understanding and ability
3	The important thing is to try, even if I do not always succeed	Set clear guidelines for success and behavior of players and parents	When guidelines are clear and players are motivated to try, winning will be a coincidence

## Non-Competitive

Lil' Kickers classes take the pressure of winning out of learning to play sports. Even in Micro Leagues we do not keep score or standings for our scrimmages. This is the second ingredient in the Lil' Kickers recipe for success. Obviously the whole world loves soccer and its emphasis on competition. In some countries, spectators trample each other to watch games and referees get murdered for making a bad call in big games.

**How does Arena Sports teach soccer without keeping score?** To answer this question, we must first admit that all sports are competitive and this aspect is inseparable from the learning process. Once a child has "learned" how to play a sports, the natural progression is to then to test his or her personal and team abilities in a competitive contest (game). However, young players should be learning skills because the learning process is fun and exciting - not because learning skills helps win games.

The real answer to our question is that Lil' Kickers instructors **reward efforts, not outcomes**. This is actually a complex process that takes hours of training and a significant amount of practice. The most easily understood example is a soccer goal. A child scores a goal (outcome) and everyone cheers (reward) . . . what about the hours of shooting practice that developed the scorers accuracy (effort)? In Lil' Kickers, people still cheer when goals are scored. We do not think rewarding outcomes is detrimental to players, but it does not create an environment where all players can feel successful. If we persist in only recognizing and rewarding outcomes, then those players who expend effort tirelessly with no obvious or outstanding outcome will lose interest in the sport. In Lil' Kickers, we believe all players who "give their all" have succeeded in the spirit of sports and competition.

Another important point is that if rewards or attention are focused on outcomes, then we are not encouraging learning, we are encouraging performance. Learning is a process by which a child can progress from basic levels of skill and understanding into more complex levels. If we focus on the outcome of the learning process, then we take for granted the sweat and tears the process involves. In Lil' Kickers we believe the process of learning is more important than the actual accomplishment. Consider this simple argument:

- All children can learn.
- Learning new skills requires effort.
- If a child's effort is rewarded and treated as an accomplishment, he/she will continue to make efforts.
- In making efforts the child will succeed and acquire a new skill.
- In succeeding the child will progress.

## Comprehensive

The 3rd and final ingredient to the Lil' Kickers recipe for success is that we do not narrow our focus on the sport of soccer. **In Lil' Kickers we don't just teach soccer to kids, we use soccer as a tool to teach kids about life.** In Lil' Kickers classes not only do children get exercise, skill development and fun, they are learning important concepts that will help them deal with life: cooperation, sportsmanship, teamwork, listening skills, and respect for others.

The global nature of the world today makes relating to others in all contexts (sports, relationships, business, education) a necessity. Lil' Kickers begins with children as young as age three teaching the concepts of cooperation and teamwork. Children learn about how a team works together because it is a better experience for everyone if all the members contribute. Our teaching also helps youngsters realize that in any group we must respect the needs of all members. Listening skills are also key in this formula - without the ability to understand directions and guidelines, any group activity would degenerate into chaos.

This all sounds great, you might think, but how do we actually do it in the context of soccer? Well, without going into all sorts of boring, technical discussions about curriculum and scientific background, we are very creative. Lil' Kickers instructors have a huge arsenal of fun activities, games and props to help children work through these important concepts. We have been able to combine sports, exercise, fun and behavioral and cognitive skill development into one Comprehensive child development program.