



ALBERTA SOCCER ASSOCIATION  
*The Governing Body of Soccer in Alberta*

# GRASSROOTS

Parent Soccer Guide



## TECHNICAL DEPARTMENT CONTACTS

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### **Mission Statement:**

*The ASA Technical Department seeks to promote personal development and wellbeing through the provision of soccer participation opportunities for all within Alberta. The sport of soccer provides a lifetime of opportunities for players, parents, coaches, officials, and administrators: the ASA Technical Department seeks to provide guidance and support to all those wishing to embrace the sport that has become the World's Game.*

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## INTRODUCTION

Soccer has become the World Game and the Alberta Soccer Association holds responsibility for governing and managing the long-term development of the sport within the province. Linking with 23 urban and rural member districts, the technical department recognizes the need to support many new parents and players coming into the game and those already embracing it. This document seeks to provide a user-friendly guide for new and established parents and players within the game.

## FOR THE SOCCER PARENT

So your child has registered for soccer, a new sport for you or one you wish you knew more about? What do you need to know; and what are the benefits and attraction of soccer for your child?

## WHY IS SOCCER THE WORLD GAME?

- Kids love to play because it is FUN
- It is inexpensive and easy to organize
- There are few rules (especially within small sided soccer)
- It encourages physical literacy (ABC's of movement) from a young age
- It teaches many life skills for developing players
- It encourages social development through interactions with other players
- It presents a life-time of excitement, challenges and memories

## LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT

Sport Canada developed a model for athletic development within many of the leading sports in Canada. This has been adapted by the Canadian Soccer Association as the Long-Term Player Development Plan, which all ASA Programming aligns to.

Long-term Player Development is a plan to guide the soccer player through development, training, competition, and recovery aspects of performance based on biological age (i.e. Physical maturity) rather than chronological age. It is player centered, coach driven, administration, sport science, and sponsor supported.

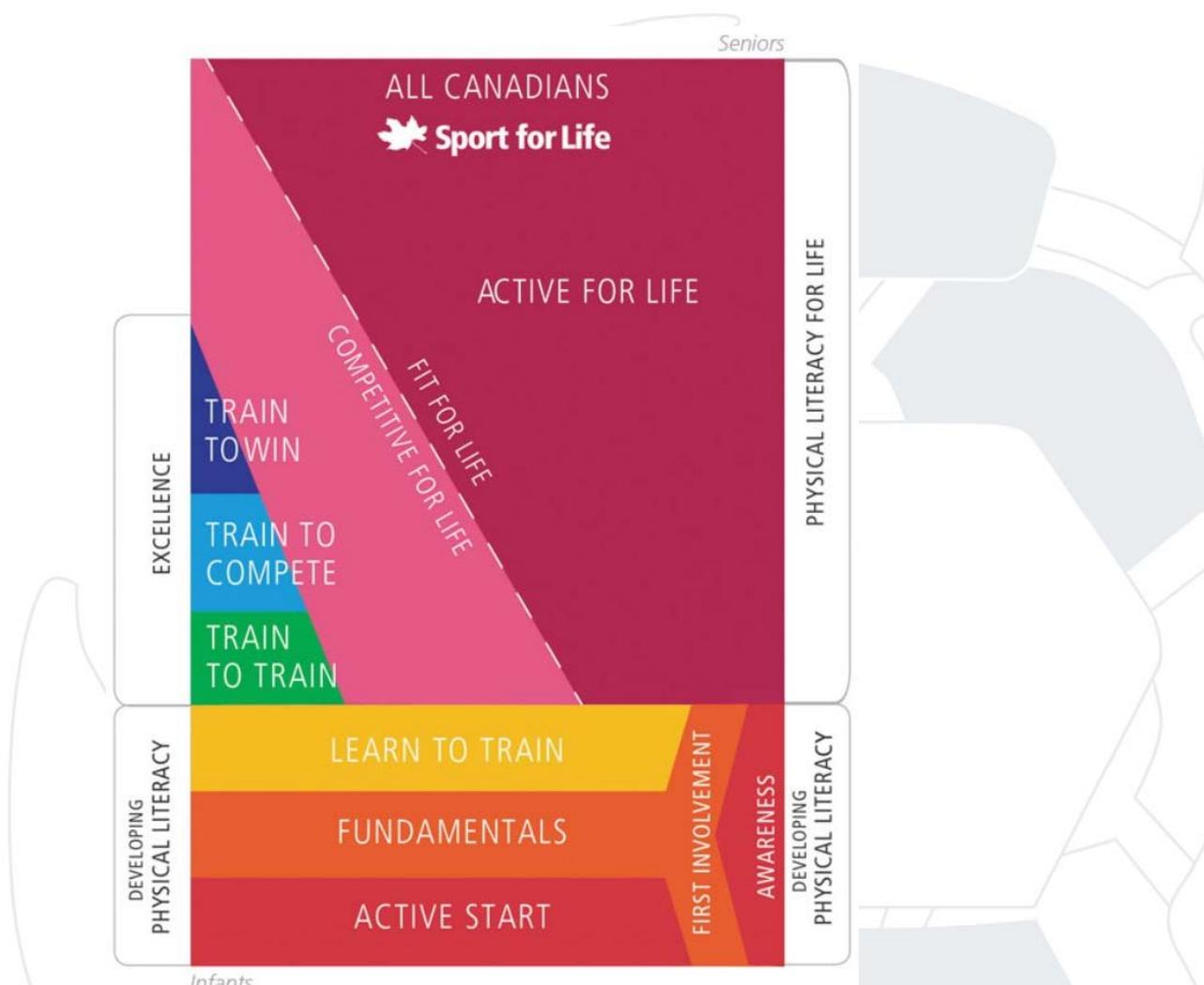
Long-Term Player Development ensures players, have the right coaching, at the right time. There is some controversy around competition, but LTPD does not abdicate competition, it seeks to ensure that competition is viewed in a reflective light of the player's stage of development. It has been researched and observed through experiential analysis that many children under the age of 12 years do not view competition the same as adults. It is important to recognize that one of the benefits of removing competition (scores and standings) at a young age, is that it encourages children to be more competitive, by allowing them to express themselves more freely. The goal of LTPD is to encourage a sporting



environment that reflects the needs of young players, in the hope that they will pursue an active life into adulthood.

LTPD advocates the development of physical literacy from a young age, where players are encouraged to explore and experiment during their early introduction to the sport. The focus is on developing Agility, Balance and Coordination; physical attributes that are the foundation of physical development and execution in later life and sporting endeavors. For further information on Long Term Player Development parents are encouraged to view the following external links

- [www.canadiansportforlife.ca](http://www.canadiansportforlife.ca)
- <https://www.canadasoccer.com/canada-soccer-pathway-ltpd--s16879>
- <http://activeforlife.com>
- <https://albertasoccer.com/player/resources/>



[http://sportforlife.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Sport-for-Life-Rectangle-EN\\_2015\\_web.jpg](http://sportforlife.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Sport-for-Life-Rectangle-EN_2015_web.jpg)  
**LONG TERM PLAYER DEVELOPMENT: STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT**



## PLAYER NEEDS

The first consideration for any player coming into sport is to recognize the attraction of their participation. This means the support and encouragement of significant others is critical for the child. A constant challenge in sport development is ensuring the right support is in place from a parents, coaches, teams/clubs, districts and provincial level.

## WHY PLAY?

An important consideration of why, is to ask your child why they want to play soccer. There are many reasons, and as a parent it is important that we recognize and support these. Some initial attractions could be to be with friends, or because they find it fun. Adults should support these motives by encouraging an emphasis upon performance and development over game outcomes. Sport experiences should reflect the child’s stage of development. Many younger children are focused upon developing an identity of self, not team or us. As the player develops their passion for soccer and begins to master the techniques, their focus will become developmental and later competitive within a team environment. The consideration for all parents is to mirror the child’s aspirations by supporting their involvement in the game.

Soccer presents a learning environment and challenge for players; it is when these challenges are successfully met that a player’s passion grows. However, to overcome a challenge (whether mastering a new move or technique), there will be mistakes and errors. These should not be viewed negatively, but as an opportunity to learn and embrace development. LTPD, as indicated earlier advocates seven stages of development to guide how we support our children:



1. Active Start
2. FUNdamentals
3. Learn to Train
4. Train to Train
5. Training to Compete
6. Training to Win
7. Active for Life



<b>STAGE</b>	<b>FOCUS</b>
<b>Active Start</b>	Development of physical literacy; running hopping, skipping, balancing etc. There will be mistakes and players falling and tripping as they 'find their feet'.
<b>FUNDamentals</b>	Ball mastery; building on physical literacy to support the development of mastering the ball. Within this stage, the player's focus is often upon themselves and the ball. Expect frustration and a very limited desire to share. Encourage self-exploration to allow the players to experiment with new moves and tricks.
<b>Learn to Train</b>	This is the stage where the game concept really takes hold. The player has mastered the individual techniques and is ready to put them into play, in a game. So now is the time for the focus to move towards team play and tactics. Again there will be mistakes and misplaced passes. The focus should therefore be on exploring options of play and not whether a play was the right or wrong one.
<b>Train to Train, Train to Compete, Train to Win</b>	These stages are recognized as high performance stages of development, not every player will progress through these on a sequential pathway. Some may enter and later return to more participatory stages of development before entering the final stage of Active for Life.
<b>Active for Life</b>	This is the final stage of development; some players may be returning to soccer or entering it for the first time. However the emphasis is upon participation and fun. So regardless of age, ability or level of competition there is always a game to be played. Active for Life also embraces the provision of further supporting options within coaching, officiating or administration support to the development of the game.

In observing the LTPD model there is recognition that some players will develop through various stages of development quicker if they receive positive support and encouragement. The game will also be more entertaining for the parents if they can see development as a positive outcome opposed to game results.

## HOW TO PLAY?

Soccer is a predominantly lower body game, in which players are allocated to two teams. The game takes place on either an indoor or outdoor field, with rectangular goal posts at each end. The teams must maneuver a ball away from their opponents and attempt to score by playing the ball into an opponent's goal. Whilst simple in its description it becomes complex in its execution, especially as players develop their technical ability to manipulate the ball. There are few rules (seventeen) but many decisions that need to be made, which is what provides the excitement, drama and sometimes controversy that is soccer. More importantly, everyone involved in the game develops an opinion and these are very rarely matched.

## EQUIPMENT NEEDS

Equipment needs for soccer will vary according to the game format and level of competition. There are many different formats; from regulation soccer, to futsal, indoor, and beach soccer. However, the most recognized form of soccer is played on a field with dimensions and rules to match the player's stage of development.

In terms of equipment, players should seek to attend all practice and game activities in appropriate clothing, which will be dependent upon not only the facility but also changing weather conditions. Even in summer, conditions may get cold with strong winds across Alberta. Always consult the weather networks when dressing for soccer as a parent/spectator or player.

It is mandatory for players to wear shin-guards, to protect the lower legs from impact injuries. These should be bought from a reputable retailer with due consideration to appropriate fit. Some shin-guards will come in a singular pad to cover the shin-bone area, while many more have built in ankle support and protection. It is recommended that players try these for comfort and practicality before purchasing.

Appropriate shoes are important, as there are indoors and outdoors options. Advice may be sought from the club coach or a retail outlet. Generally, 'flats' (flat soled shoes) are used for indoor soccer and rubber based **s t u d d e d** cleats for outdoor soccer. Wherever possible, soccer shoes should be bought, to offer comfort and support for the required actions when playing. Running or other 'sport' shoes will not give the same support.

Uniforms are usually distributed by individual clubs and comprise of soccer socks, shorts and jerseys. When playing a game, these should be matching colors for a team. Again, consideration should be made to reflect the changing climatic conditions.

Ball size is an important factor for game play and practice. General retail soccer ball sizes range from size 3-5 and should be used according to the age appropriate guidelines:

- Size 3 – U4-U8 age groups
- Size 4 – U8-U11 age groups
- Size 5 – ages U12 and above

## NUTRITION AND HYDRATION

It is important to consider the provision and content of refreshments for soccer. Most games and practices take place between 60-90 minutes and the weather will need to be a consideration. Dependent upon the age of the player and



intensity of the exercise, it is recommended that all players should use fluid replacement. Ideally water alone will suffice, especially for lower intensity practices. However, in hotter conditions and higher intensity some electrolyte replacement fluids are recommended.

It is further recommended that players eat proficiently before a game or practice and then following the activity. The type of nutrition before the game will be dependent upon individual dietary needs and level of competition, but it is also recommended that sufficient time is allowed for digestion. Following a game, players should eat a meal high in carbohydrates and protein, as the body's energy stores will be depleted. Protein also aids muscle repair and development.

It is advised that soccer players avoid sugary based foods around playing times, as these give a sharp release of immediate energy that is followed by an energy slump. Also avoid soda and sugary carbonated drinks as these lead to dehydration.

## BEING A SUPPORTIVE SOCCER PARENT

The roles of a soccer parent are many and varied, from taxi driver, to uniform cleaner, cheerleader, scheduler etc. There are also many roles that parents may be required to volunteer in support of their child's passion. These may include team coach, manager, medical support, etc. However, the first consideration is what this opportunity may give you as a parent, an opportunity to bond and share your child's passion, not control it.

To be a supportive parent, it is important to recognize some of the spoil sport behaviors that drive children away from soccer and sport;



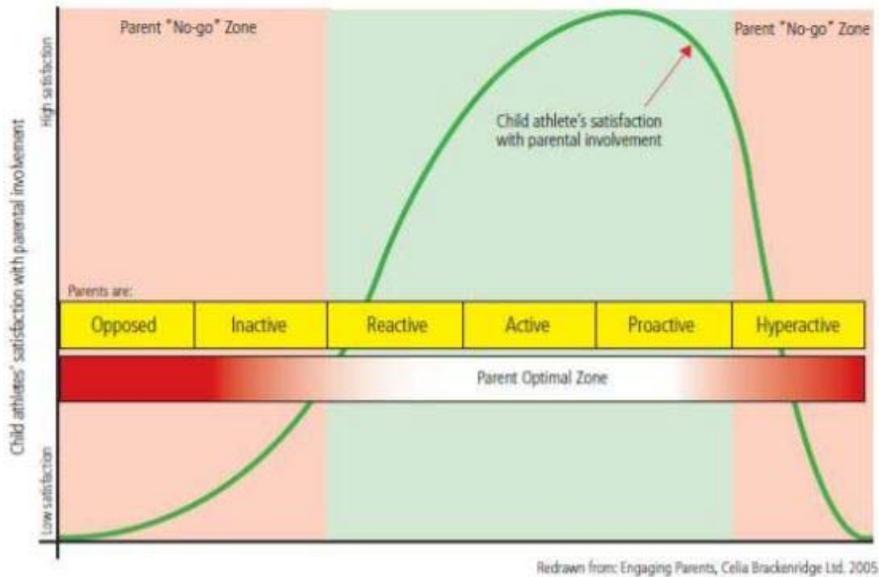
- Adult criticism and yelling
- Too much emphasis on the game outcome (result)
- Players not receiving sufficient playing time
- Fear of failure (making mistakes)
- Boring practice sessions

Many of these actions are be driven by adults.

As indicated, an important role for any parent is to share your child's passion, not control it. Ask them questions about their interest and performances. Avoid giving all the answers or critical feedback. Players respond to positive feedback, so offer praise and support to their performance. When providing feedback, it is important to offer it from a supportive performance perspective. A player may control their performance in accordance to the degree of effort they exert, but rarely does one player control the result. Everyone enjoys the thrill of challenging their ability and no more so than in a closely contested game, when the result could go for either team; rather than a one-sided game that challenges neither team. Encourage your children to embrace the thrill of challenge, in the knowledge that mistakes will be made and lessons learnt. At times, when it feels that nothing may be going right, remind them that 'one game doesn't make a season.'

If you are a committed parent who enjoys the game then you could consider taking up a volunteer role to help the club or program. Evidence shows that children whose parents have an active interest in their child’s sport have greater satisfaction than those children whose parents have too much or too little involvement. In essence, children want to share the game with their parents, but not be pressured by the relationship (see table below).

Figure 2 LTAD and Parent Involvement



## BECOME INVOLVED

Many coaches get involved in soccer because their children choose to play. The challenge is encouraging adults to share the many roles that are required to support a program. Some parents shy away because they don’t wish to impinge on another volunteer, but the best team is a team where everyone works in support of each other and to their strengths. Consider your personal skills and experiences, then how they may support the team. An accountant would make a great financial fund-raiser; a fitness trainer could offer physical development opportunities. Express your interests and skills to the club and join a team, to help your child’s enjoyment. Below are a sample of roles required to support a team, but the degree of responsibility will be determined by the age and level of competition the team participates within.

### Required roles

Coach/assistant coach

### Desired qualities

This role is suited to someone who has played and a passion for soccer. They should have personable qualities and enjoy supporting and communicating with children and the element of play. They will also need to be punctual, reliable, organize and have fun.

Manager

This role requires an organized and efficient person who has effective communication skills. There is a responsibility to communicate with all parents and representatives in relation to arranging team games etc.

Social Engagements

There will be team events and activities above and beyond scheduled



commitments. This would suit a sociable and engaging person with many links into a community.

#### Fund Raiser

Some teams may require an administrator to help assist with the collection and accounting of tournament fees or social engagements.

These are a few team commitments; some individuals may feel they have the time and expertise to support the club at a 'board of directors' level. Whatever level of support an individual can offer would be appreciated, especially in an ever-increasingly busy society.

## BECOMING AN EDUCATED PARENT

As many things today, the easiest way to learn new ideas is through your children... so consider the following activities together

- Watch professional games on television
- Discuss what your child enjoys in soccer
- Discuss the rules and culture of the game
- Ask, what your child wishes to hear from you (parent); before, during and after the game
- Seek what you (parent) can do to help your child prepare and enjoy their soccer
- Listen and hear what the coaches are seeking from the players in a game
- Tell your child you are proud of them
- Promote the spirit of fair game in your club

Alberta Soccer's Grassroots Department offers a "Parents Play" Clinic for parents who are seeking new ideas and support on how to engage with your child in soccer and how to be a good soccer parent.

Please visit <https://albertasoccer.com/player/grassroots/> for further information and resources on this program and other Grassroots resources.

## THE GAME TECHNIQUES AND SKILLS

As indicated the LTPD plan promotes a developmental framework for players, related to age appropriate activities. The FUNdamentals stage encourages the exploration of many of the games techniques that evolve into game related skills within the Learning to Train stage. Here is a list of the prominent skills that parents should observe and encourage for all young players to master.

**DRIBBLING:** Dribbling is the one skill beyond scoring that excites and attracts spectators to soccer. Being able to manipulate the ball between and around opponents, whilst maintaining possession with your feet is challenging. A key aspect for an effective dribbler is a relaxed and positive perspective. Therefore, wherever possible encourage your child to try tricks and moves and never reprimand them when they are unsuccessful. Even the most skilled players lose possession at times; the key is that they have the courage to keep playing and developing new moves.

**PASSING:** Soccer is a team game and a key objective is to move the ball quicker than the opposition may pursue it. The most effective manner of achieving this is through passing, encourage players to recognize how and when to pass the ball effectively and discourage calls of 'kick it!' Indifferently when a player is pressured into kicking the ball, it often falls to the opposition. Interestingly observe the number of passes a team may make in a forward opposed to backward



direction. Successful professional teams often pass the ball in a backward direction (and maintain possession), more than they go forward, in order to create space.

**RECEIVING:** Before the ball can be passed, the ball must be received. Also known as “first touch”, receiving is an essential skill that must be developed to improve efficiency in maintaining possession of the ball. Any part of the body other than the hands and arms may be used to control the ball. Players with a sublime first touch play with great artistry. Lionel Messi is a pleasure to watch as he controls the ball with ease before either passing or gliding past defenders.

**HEADING:** Striking the ball with the head becomes a key technique as the players mature; however, it is a good idea to encourage this technique as early as possible, so players may master it later in their development. To begin with, players may start with a balloon or light ball and serving it to themselves. Don’t throw the ball at a child’s head; this may arouse a deeper fear for later in their development.

**GOALKEEPING:** This is a specialized position that allows the use of hands. Although it is beneficial for everyone to have a go at playing in goal, it is certainly not everyone’s desire to have a ball hit at them and to get in the way of it. You may identify your potential goalkeepers by encouraging hand-eye co-ordination drills with a ball early in their development.

**SHOOTING:** If you don’t shoot, you don’t score. One of the most challenging aspects for a coach is to get players beyond the fear of missing. So always praise a player who demonstrates the desire to shoot. Shots do not always have to be struck hard, indeed the best pass within the game is the one that ends in the opponents’ net.

**RUNNING OFF THE BALL:** This is a skill that is not so obvious to all, but many successful plays in soccer may be the result of a player’s unselfish runs away from the action, a run that distracts the focus of the opposition. Always encourage players who have the knack of making such moves and resultant plays possible.

**TACTICS:** There have been many formations utilized in soccer, for each different format of the game. In the 11 a side game most teams will align with a defense, midfield and attack. How many players they play in each line will be dependent upon the coaches’ discretion and often determined by the players at their disposal or the strength of the opposition. Common formations are

11 a side (outdoor)	:	4-4-2	4-3-3	3-5-3
6 a side (indoor)	:	2-2-1	2-1-2	

A key consideration and tactical objective is when your team has possession, players should seek to create space. When the opposition have possession, the team should condense space and apply pressure to regain possession of the ball as quickly as possible.

## PRACTICE SESSIONS – PREFERRED TRAINING MODEL

The Preferred Training Model is a supportive organizational model as advocated by FIFA and Canada Soccer. It is recognized by a station rotation approach of delivery, whereby players are placed into small groups and rotate through a series of activity stations led by different coaches. Therefore, the players are constantly engaged with new activities throughout the session and coaches develop their attributes and support to the players within their station. The focus of this approach is that the players are constantly engaged and challenged within the stations where the outcome is upon development and engagement as opposed to team play and achieving a desired game outcome. This model may be supported across all age groups and is also an effective tool in coach development and retention.

## PRACTICE SESSIONS -TEAM

Team practice sessions usually commence with a warm-up to loosen the body and prepare the players mentally for the session. This segment should also set the tone for a fun and active session. Warm-ups should be ball driven, to encourage as many individual touches of the ball as possible – this will encourage the development of technical skills.

Activities must be age-appropriate, and dictated by the requirements of the group not the 'big' (adult) game. These could come in the form of individual, small group, large group or whole team activities. Typically, the session should present a series of short fun games that reflect a child's thirst for activity and matches their attention span. Coaches should focus on high activity and avoid any activity line-ups or long lectures. There should also be an element of game related practice and time, so the players are afforded an opportunity to display their development with a realistic game based situation.

A key consideration for all parents is to respect the coaches' rules and direction within the sessions – these should be in place only to support the player's safety and learning.

## GAME DAY ROUTINES

As a parent avoid placing your expectations upon your child or their teammates. The game is an opportunity for players to test their development, not a battle to be fought and won. As indicated earlier, soccer is a game to be played and mastered. Consider the difference in terminology between these word-pairs: war – game; fought – played; won – mastered.

Allow your child time (space) to relax and prepare before a game. Remember 'why' they wish to compete.

Ensure they are prepared, uniform (appropriate shoes and shin guards), protective clothing (inclement weather) and have adequate refreshments. Children often rely on parents, so show you care without being over bearing.

Allow the coach to meet and greet the players, and then prepare them for the game (physically and mentally).

The coach should offer direction to the game, allow them to do this and avoid giving your interpretation (commentary) on the game, as this may confuse the players.

The coaching staff should hold responsibility for dealing with injuries, so allow them time to assist with this, even in the case of your child being injured.

Applaud positive play, whether this is from your team or the opposition. Applaud and encourage good sportsmanship.

Avoid voicing any criticism to the game officials, they rarely change their decision.

Relax and enjoy the game, remembering that it is but a 'snapshot' of your child's development as an individual and soccer player.

Remember the players will often reflect the behaviors of the significant adults around them, that is you the parents, so be positive role models.

## AFTER THE GAME

Don't reward what you perceive as good, ask your child what they thought was good.

Don't punish what you perceive as failure, development comes from mistakes and the learning that occurs as a consequence.

Remember why your child plays, for the challenge and to have fun – please support these virtues.

## DEALING WITH A COACH

Firstly, please recognize that most coaches are volunteer parents – they are not always experts.

Let the coach do the coaching and recognize that the game, first and foremost, is about opinions.

Ask the coach, if possible at the outset (start of the season), what their philosophy, team rules and goals are. If you have concerns, then arrange an appropriate time to discuss these with the coach.

Offer support to the coach if you feel you could (have a skill set and experience) contribute something to the team, but do not feel offended if this offer is declined.

Never make assumptions regarding a coach's decisions or actions. If you are in doubt, seek their opinion. If this is not possible then there may be a requirement to communicate with a member of the club's board of directors to act as a mediator.

## GAME OFFICIALS

Soccer is no different to any other sport, it is based upon opinions, individual opinions and the official is no different. Game officials observe the game as officials, and parents as parents. In recognizing this it is also important to understand that there will be differences of opinions. The objective of the official is to ensure each game is played within the rules and spirit of the game and it is done so in a safe manner. Regardless of age or experience, the official is given authority over the game and their decision is ALWAYS final.

Officiating is not an easy task and mistakes will be made by the game referee as well as the coaches, players and parents. The key is to respect their calls and ensure that the children strive to continue playing within the spirit of the game. As with coaches, let the officials officiate, without obstruction or judgment. Constant criticism only encourages attrition of game officials, and without officials we have no game. Remember, as parents and adults, we are the role models from whom players learn to accept mistakes and positive sportsmanship.

## FINAL WORDS

Welcome to soccer and a world of fun and opportunities.

## EXTERNAL RESOURCES

There are many external resources for supporting the development of soccer. On a local level, these should include club contacts, i.e. coaches, technical director or board members.

Outside the club, the internet has brought a wide and varied number of potential support networks. Prominent links for soccer are:

Canadian Soccer Association [www.canadasoccer.com](http://www.canadasoccer.com)

Alberta Soccer Association [www.albertasoccer.com](http://www.albertasoccer.com)

## COACHING

[www.coachingsoccer101.com](http://www.coachingsoccer101.com)

[www.bettersoccercoaching.com](http://www.bettersoccercoaching.com)

[www.bytesizecoaching.com](http://www.bytesizecoaching.com)





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