

SIDELINE SUPERSTARS: A Parent's Guide to Supporting Players



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why You Should Read This Guide	1
Why Do Kids Play Soccer?	1
Competition in Soccer—To Keep Score or Not?	2
Winning and Losing	2
Dealing with Losing	3
A Parent's Role in the Game	4
Sideline Behavior	5
Let Coaches, Coach	6
Breaking Down Long Term Player Development	7
Playing With Your Kids	9
Commit to Being A Sideline Superstar	12
Saskatchewan Soccer Association Information	14



The Value of This Guide

The Saskatchewan Soccer Association (SSA) Grassroots Soccer Parent Guide is a resource designed to enhance the understanding of the game for both new and experienced soccer parents. The Guide provides information on why children play soccer and what they enjoy most about the experience, as well as valuable tips on parent behaviour. By understanding and observing these key concepts, the enjoyment of the soccer experience will be greatly improved for both you and your child!

Kids & Soccer Children enjoy soccer for many reasons, some maybe unexpected!

FUN

Research shows that the primary reason that kids play sports is because it's fun. That said, how each child defines fun can be quite different. For example, one child might really enjoy the social aspects of being a part of a team, while another finds great satisfaction from developing his or her playing skills. Regardless of how a child defines fun, it is important to understand and support their enjoyment as, if they are not having fun, they are more likely to quit playing.

Developing Skills

Both on the soccer field and off, most children are eager learners. Learning new skills and improving, and perfecting existing soccer abilities is a major motivator for young players. It is both exciting and rewarding to translate what has been worked on in practice to successful execution in a game. That said, most youth athletes are just as excited to show off these skills at home. Don't forget to ask your young soccer player what they worked on in practice and if they can show you what they've learned!

Exercise and Well-being

Sports offer children an opportunity to improve both their physical and emotional health. Children that exercise regularly are more likely to continue to do so throughout their lives and are less likely to develop diabetes, cancer, and heart conditions. Regular exercise has also been shown to improve a child's abilities in the areas of reading and math. As a soccer parent, you should know that your child is getting exercise in a healthy social atmosphere each time they take the field!

Social Skills

The benefits of soccer participation go far beyond physical exercise; young players also develop valuable social skills that can lead to success later in life. Children can learn how to get along with others and be a part of a team as well as respect, fairness and responsibility. Soccer can be a very good character building experience for a child; however, it is the adults involved that define the environment. If it is properly defined, sport also provides valuable lessons about victory and defeat; however, coaches and parents must be careful to role-model appropriate conduct and provide the right context in order for these lessons to have a positive impact.

Competitions in Soccer - To Keep Score or Not?

One of the most polarizing discussions in youth soccer is the role of scores and standings. Competition itself is neither positive nor negative, it is how competition is used within the soccer community that can have either a positive or negative impact on the participants. With the commitment to the principles of the Long Term Player Development (LTPD) model, the Canadian Soccer Association indicates that game results and standings should not be tracked in the grassroots stages (Under 12 and below). Many equate game result with competition and; therefore, if there is no recorded result, there must be no competition. This same thinking leads us to believe that the important life lessons that are taught by winning and losing, such as sportsmanship, responding to defeat, and acting graciously in victory, are lost without recording scores and tracking results in the form of standings.

On the contrary, regardless of the publication of scores and standings, children will compete and understand that there is a winner and loser in every game. The need to reduce the emphasis on results at young ages in organized sport is actually to guide adult behaviour, not diminish the desire to compete, which is inherent to most children. Game results, standings and trophies for the winners place an undo emphasis on result, often at the expense of development and experience. Coaches adopt win-first strategies like limiting playing time for less developed or skilled players and punishing the mistakes that are necessary for young people to learn, which creates a highly pressurized environment that is not conducive to development. Parents can get wrapped up in the “importance” of the game result or playoff race and lose sight of what is really important to their child. The elimination of scores and standings at young ages is not about eliminating competition, it’s about enhancing the experience of the players, after all, isn’t that why you sign your child up for sport in the first place?

Winning and Losing

While children vary in their reasons for participating, the overwhelming majority do not rank winning high on the list. This doesn’t mean they don’t want to win, it just means it’s not their only or most important reason for playing. Many kids would rather play on a team that’s losing than sit on the bench of a team that’s winning.

Parents and coaches play an important role in defining how children learn to deal with winning and losing. If a parent is overly focused on the result of the game, this sends a strong message to the child about what is important. It is innocent enough for the first question you ask after a game to be, “did you win today?” or “how did you do today?”; however, it sends the message to your child that the result is the most important thing to you.

If you are at a loss for what to ask your child after a particularly difficult game, saying something as simple as, “I really enjoyed watching you play today”, can have a massive impact on the psyche of a child.

THE GAMEPLAN: STRATEGY FOR AFTER THE GAME

“What was your favorite part of the game?”

“Did you have fun today?”

“Is there anything you want to practice together before the next game?”

Dealing with Losing

As a parent, you should view losing and mistakes as an opportunity. It's usually the time when a child learns the most and can often be when they require the most support. Despite children ranking winning low on their list of reasons for participating, this doesn't mean that losing does not affect them. First and foremost, ensure your child understands that they are far more important than any game and that they are loved and supported regardless of success on the soccer field. When that stress is removed, learning from mistakes is a lot easier.

Every child is different and will respond differently to losing. Sometimes it can help to focus on some of the positives of the game, other times it is better to simply be quiet and allow the child to work through their emotions. Despite best intentions, trying to cheer a child up with comments like "you'll get them next time" can sometimes have the opposite impact, particularly as children get older, making the child more frustrated. There will be other games and opportunities to learn, sometimes it is better to simply move on.



Some general guidelines that may help in supporting your child to deal with the disappointment of defeat include:

Do's

- Remind your child that everyone, even professionals, make mistakes and lose games.
- Talk about what your child enjoyed and what went well during the game.
- Reward effort.
- Teach your child that it's possible to learn from your mistakes. Encourage your child to talk to his or her coach about how he or she can improve.

Don'ts

- Blame a coach, referee or the other players for a loss. Remember, sportsmanship is one of the skills that children can learn through sport participation!
- Attribute a loss to luck or other external factors. This can teach a child that the outcome of a game is beyond their control.
 - Dwell on mistakes or losses.

A Parent's Role in the Game

Positive Parent Behaviour

Parents play a crucial role in the soccer community as organizers, coaches, chauffeurs, chefs and, most importantly, fans! In many ways, parents are as important to the success of soccer as the players. Always remember that the game is for your children, but that doesn't mean that you can't learn right along with your child. You have the chance to be as involved as you want to be and to make soccer an opportunity to spend quality time with your child!

Many parents go to games for years, yet never really understand soccer. That's okay, but your child's participation also provides you with a great chance to learn and have fun at the same time!

Play with your Child

It isn't as hard as you might think! You've never kicked a ball before? So what! Maybe this is a chance for your child to play coach and teach you a thing or two! Playing soccer together can be a great bonding experience for you and your child. For some simple ideas on games that are easy to organize and play together with your child, check out the Saskatchewan Soccer Association's Parent Guide to Playing with your Kids.

Watch and Learn

You don't have to be an expert at soccer enjoy it. Watching games on television or attending local games as a family is a great way to learn together! There are soccer resources everywhere, including books, magazines, websites, and videos. Spend some time exploring the online soccer community with your child. If you are more eager to learn, you may even consider taking a coaching or refereeing course. You may choose not to become actively involved, but this can provide you with additional knowledge and understanding of soccer, which can enhance your enjoyment of the game.



Sideline Behaviour

Children rely heavily on the external feedback they receive from adults. A child's perception of him or herself comes from the reactions of parents and coaches. Even just a few comments from the sidelines can determine if a child's experience is positive or negative. This is why it's important for parents and coaches to learn how to provide proper encouragement and feedback and model appropriate sideline behaviour.

Offer encouragement and praise effort. In order to give appropriate encouragement you need to separate effort and outcome. Outcome based feedback focuses on the success of the action, while focusing praise on the effort makes it possible to provide encouragement independently of the success of the action. While many external factors may impact the success of an action, effort is typically internal, thus something that children can learn to control.

While acknowledging a good play is valuable feedback to young players, be careful when providing outcome based praise that it is aligned to the coach's focus for that game (see Let the Coaches, Coach). It can be confusing to children to receive positive reinforcement from parents for something that the coach may not be teaching. For example, parents may feel inclined to cheer for a "big kick"; however, the coach may be working with players to maintain possession and discourage kicking the ball away.

When encouraging your child, remember that it isn't just what you say, it is how, and how much, you say it. It's easy to get excited, but you should also be aware of how much you are cheering from the sidelines. If you are constantly cheering, it can become distracting and lose effectiveness as a means of encouragement. Finally, when cheering, try not to use your child's name over and over again. Encourage each team member when they put forth a good effort or succeed.



Don't Be A Sideline Coach

Leave the coaching to the coach. Yelling out instructions from the sideline can be very confusing and frustrating for the players. This does not mean that the ideas you have are wrong, necessarily, but they may conflict with the information that the coach is providing or be too much feedback for a young player to process. If you would like more information from the coach about the team's focus, tactics or strategy, be sure to ask this away from the game so as not to distract the coach or players.

In addition, let the coach motivate the players, if external motivation is needed. Don't offer incentives or rewards to your child for playing well. This is known as "extrinsic motivation" and can take away from a child's ability to motivate themselves (known as "intrinsic motivation").

Model good sportsmanship and avoid being negative or critical

Parents play an important role in creating a positive environment for everyone. Players play, coaches coach, referees referee and parents cheer and encourage. To be the best role model possible:

Set a good example of sportsmanship – Sportsmanship is not only for the players and coaches; it's also for the parents. The referee and the parents on the other team are not your enemies.

Don't criticize the referee – Particularly in youth soccer, the referee is often learning alongside the players and, just like the players, will make mistakes. Being critical of the referee during a game is not likely to improve performance but could cause that referee to leave the sport.

Avoid conflicts with other parents – The other team's parents are there to watch and cheer for their children too. You are not part of the game and neither are the other team's parents. Don't get into a conflict with the other team's parents over things that happen in the game.



Breaking Down Long-Term Player Development (LTPD)



The Canada Soccer Pathway provides a roadmap for players of all ages and aspirations who want to play soccer at the recreational, competitive or high-performance EXCEL levels, with the aim of encouraging lifelong participation. The Pathway is built around the principles of Long-Term Player Development (LTPD).

THE FIRST STAGES OF LTPD

ACTIVE START

1

(U-4/ U-6 M/F)

Gives the youngest players the opportunity to develop basic skills like running, jumping, landing, kicking, throwing and catching in a fun setting built around informal play and positive reinforcement.

FUNDAMENTALS

2

(U-6/ U-8 F, U-6/ U-10 M)

Allows children to develop their movement ABCs—agility, balance, coordination, and speed—and learn the basics of the game while emphasizing fun, cooperation, and maximum time on the ball.

LEARNING TO TRAIN

3

(U-8/ U-11 F, U-9/ U-12 M)

This “golden age of learning”, when children become less self-centred and are more able to reflect on their actions and learn from mistakes, provides an optimal window for further development of skills. The focus is on learning by doing, building a larger repertoire of soccer movements and teaching the basic principles of play in a fun and challenging environment.

WHAT IS LTPD?

It is a model of athlete development that parallels what doctors and psychologists have long used to better understand human development: as a series of distinct stages, which take us from infancy to adulthood. Experts in sports science have identified seven stages of development—each with its own physical and psychological characteristics.

PROGRESSING INTO HIGH-PERFORMANCE

Based on the individual skill development and aspirations of the player, once outside of the first three stages of LTPD, players have choices in their next stage of development within the game.

ACTIVE FOR LIFE

WHY LTPD?- When activities and expectations don't match with a child's developmental stage, this can set them up for failure. When young children are thrust into a soccer environment that over-emphasizes winning at the expense of developing skills and having fun. The negative consequences can last a lifetime: Some kids develop bad habits and poor skills and can become discouraged. Many don't achieve their performance potential. Others end up leaving the sport altogether because they don't enjoy the game.

PROGRESSING INTO HIGH-PERFORMANCE

As children move into adolescence, official league standings are introduced and the game becomes more competitive, with more emphasis on strategy and tactics. With a steady increase in training time over the next three LTPD stages (4-6), a move to larger-sided games and year-round play, the most advanced players are given the opportunities for further development with the Canada Soccer Pathway's EXCEL program. Others may decide to continue playing recreationally, moving straight to LTPD stage 7.

4

(U-11/U-15 F,
U-12/U-15 M)

TRAINING TO TRAIN

The onset of the adolescent growth spurt for most kids during this stage is an ideal time for endurance training. Players are introduced to concepts like mental preparation, goal setting, and coping with winning and losing while learning more advanced soccer skills, introducing position-specific techniques.

5

(U-15/U-19 F, U-16/U-20 M)

TRAINING TO COMPETE

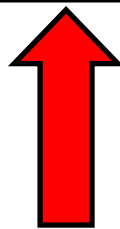
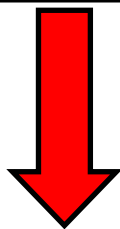
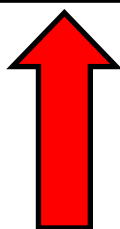
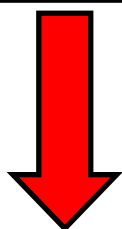
Players are now working to hone their skills under a variety of competitive conditions in an 11 v 11 game format that mirrors adult play. Along with the continued refinement of advanced techniques, players work to develop their tactical awareness, discipline and mental toughness.

6

(U-18+ F, U-19+ M)

TRAINING TO WIN

With most of their soccer skills now fully established, the focus for EXCEL players at the National Team, semi-professional and professional levels shifts to performing at their best. They work on adapting strategies quickly to suit changing demands, establishing a pre-training and pre-match routine, and maintaining optimal physical and psychological fitness.



ACTIVE FOR LIFE

7

(U-13+ F, U-13+ M)

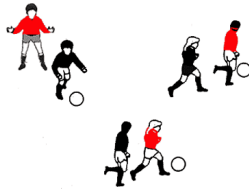
This stage encompasses boys and girls, men and women of all ages and abilities who want to play soccer for fun and fitness. They may be youth players who don't pursue high-performance play through the EXCEL program, former competitive players who don't intend to play internationally, or professionally or, they may be brand new to soccer. In all cases, the game structure is adapted to suit the level of play, the number of players and the available space.

PLAYING WITH YOUR KIDS

Me and My Shadow

Take turns dribbling the ball. The “Shadow” must stay as close as possible. Later the “Dribbler” can try to lose the “Shadow” by moving off quickly left or right.

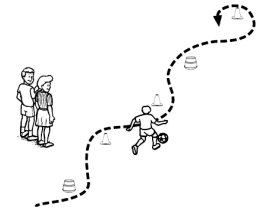
Try quick turns and fakes. Don't forget to change every once in a while so that Mom or Dad has the chance of running with the ball and the child must try to “Shadow”



Don't Be A Conehead

Dribbling in and out of the cones or water bottles (or anything that is safe) is great soccer fun.

Don't be a Conehead and avoid knocking over any obstacles.

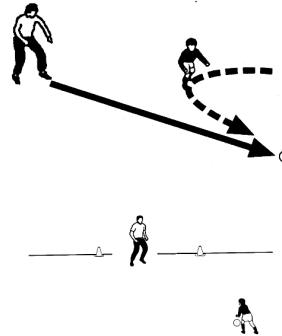


Ball Juggling



Kids really enjoy beating their personal best! The objective is to keep the ball in their air without letting it touch the ground. Kids can use their feet, thighs, head, and chest. If the kid is improving in this skill, Mom or Dad can setup different patterns with the ball.

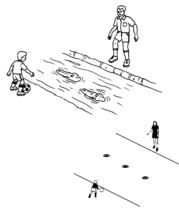
Go Fetch!



Mom or Dad can send their kid on a little walk. They have to bring the ball back as quickly as possible. Ask them to try bringing it back in three different ways.

Crocs and Swamps

Crocodiles have a liking for soccer balls. They don't kick them. They eat them. Set up cones or plastic water bottles in a line. Mom or Dad stands on opposite sides of the “crocodiles” from their kid. Pass the ball back and forth and avoid hitting the cones or water bottles. As the kid gets better at passing, spacing can be increased between Mom or Dad and the kid.

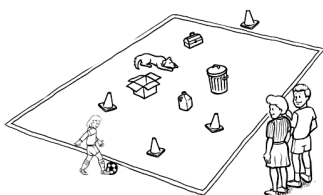


Free Style Soccer Show

Encourage your kid to put on a show. A free-style soccer show is a series of moves and tricks. You can find many examples of these shows on YouTube.



Back Yard Jungle Soccer

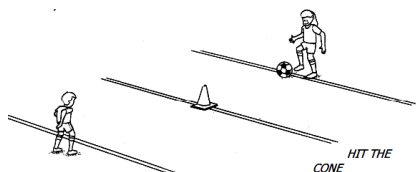


Let's setup your own “jungle” in the back yard to practice dribbling. Use any safe objects, such as cones and/or plastic water bottles for “trees”. Dad or Mom can be the tiger or the elephant and follow your kid through the obstacles.

PLAYING WITH YOUR KIDS

Let's Play # 1

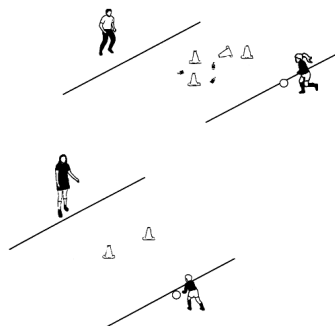
Make sure to stay behind the lines. Both Mom or Dad and your kid try to hit the cone/milk jug. It's great practice for both shooting and passing. Start with three cones/milk jugs, if your kid is finding it difficult. As your kid gets better, use a smaller target like a water bottle.



Knock 'Em Down

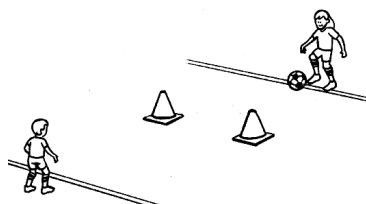
See how many cones or water bottles you and your kid can hit.

Then put two cones/water bottles spaced apart and try to score through them.



Let's Play # 2

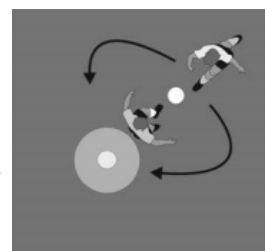
Working as a team both Mom or Dad and your kid score goals between the two cones. How quickly can you score 10 goals? What is the most goals scored together?



To make it harder, goals don't count if the shot touches the cone on the way through.

Kick the Can

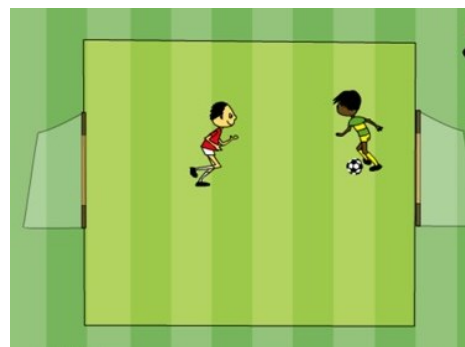
Kick the can is a great one-on-one game. All you need is a can, garbage can, or milk jug. Mom or Dad defends against your kid, trying to stay two steps away from the can. This is great for practicing individual ball control skills. Next, it is your kid's turn to defend and Mom or Dad try to hit the can.



Shooting and Stopping

Mom or Dad makes a goal with cones or water bottles. Your kid shoots a static ball at Mom or Dad and as they get better, the ball can be rolled slowly from the goal to encourage a one-time shot.

Your kid also takes a turn in the net and Mom or Dad shoots on the net. The objective is not to score on your kid, rather to encourage your kid to be moving to the corners of the net to stop shots.



One-on-One

Set up two nets on either ends of the back yard. The ball is placed in between the two nets. Mom or Dad stands beside one net and your kid beside the other. Mom or Dad yells, "Go" and everyone runs to get the ball. Whoever gets to the ball first has to try to score, while the other has to defend their net. Mom and Dad should ensure equal opportunity for your kid to score and defend.

COMMIT TO BEING A SIDELINE SUPERSTAR

1. I WILL NOT FORCE MY CHILD TO PARTICIPATE IN SPORTS.
2. I WILL REMEMBER THAT MY CHILD PLAYS SPORTS FOR HIS OR HER ENJOYMENT, NOT FOR MINE.
3. I WILL ENCOURAGE MY CHILD TO PLAY BY THE RULES AND TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS WITHOUT RESORTING TO HOSTILITY OR VIOLENCE.
4. I WILL TEACH MY CHILD THAT DOING ONE'S BEST IS AS IMPORTANT AS WINNING, SO THAT MY CHILD WILL NEVER FEEL DEFEATED BY THE OUTCOME OF A GAME./EVENT.
5. I WILL MAKE MY CHILD FEEL LIKE A WINNER EVERY TIME BY OFFERING PRAISE FOR COMPETING FAIRLY AND TRYING HARD.
6. I WILL NEVER RIDICULE OR YELL AT MY CHILD FOR MAKING A MISTAKE OR LOSING A COMPETITION.
7. I WILL REMEMBER THAT CHILDREN LEARN BEST BY EXAMPLE. I WILL APPLAUD GOOD PLAYS/ PERFORMANCES BY BOTH MY TEAM AND THEIR OPPONENTS.
8. I WILL NEVER QUESTION THE OFFICIALS' JUDGEMENT OR HONESTY IN PUBLIC.
9. I WILL SUPPORT ALL EFFORTS TO REMOVE VERBAL AND PHYSICAL ABUSE FROM CHILDREN'S SPORTING ACTIVITIES.
10. I WILL RESPECT AND SHOW APPRECIATION FOR THE VOLUNTEER COACHES WHO GIVE THEIR TIME TO PROVIDE SPORT ACTIVITIES FOR MY CHILD.
11. I WILL RESPECT THE OPPOSITIONS PLAYERS, COACHES, AND PARENTS.
12. I WILL NOT COACH MY CHILD FROM THE SIDELINES, JUST SUPPORT THEM POSITIVELY FROM THE SIDELINES.
13. I WILL NOT DISCRIMINATE ON GROUNDS OF RACE, GENDER, OR SEXUALITY.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Information regarding LTPD taken from the Canada Soccer Long-Term Athlete Development: Community Guide.

For more information, visit www.canadasoccer.com/pathway

Playing With Your Kids drills taken from Byte Size coaching materials.

For more information contact the SSA Offices for more details.



FIND OUT MORE TODAY!

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The Saskatchewan Soccer Association (SSA) is the designated Provincial Sport Governing Body (PSGB) for the sport of soccer in Saskatchewan and is a full member of the Canadian Soccer Association (CSA). As such, SSA is entrusted by the statutes of FIFA and the constitutions of CSA and SSA with the mandate of fostering, developing and promoting soccer in Saskatchewan. The Saskatchewan Soccer Association is comprised of Regular and Associate Members, made up of clubs, zones, community associations and individual players, coaches, managers and referees. Registered members of the Saskatchewan Soccer Association are entitled to participate in sanctioned soccer activities within the province. In addition to training and competition in local leagues and tournaments, registered players and teams are also able to host or travel outside the province and country to compete against affiliated teams from other provinces, states or countries through exhibition matches and tournaments.



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