



BEHAVIOR CHARACTERISTICS:

STAGE 1-5: 3-18 YEAR OLD PLAYERS

EXCERPTS FROM THE UNITED
SOCCER COACHES PLAYER
DEVELOPMENT CURRICULUM





DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

STAGE 1 -EARLY CHILDHOOD (3-5 YEARS OLD)

The introduction to soccer stage coincides with the onset of independence from parents and increased self confidence in most children. Children also start to 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.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- Players should learn the fundamental movement skills of running (forwards, backwards and sideways), jumping, turning, twisting and bending (lowering center of gravity to form a solid base).
- The ball should be involved all the time.

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 1	
PHYSICALLY	1. Tires easily and recovers quickly. 2. Learns best by being physically active. 3. Needs to repeat activities that are well known and mastered. 4. Mainly uses large muscle movement, fine motor skills developing, but more difficult to master. 5. Basic motor skill developing, needs to combine skills in simple games. 6. Boys and girls have equal ability. 7. Center of gravity is higher, resulting in issues with balance.
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL	1. Likes to play/work on their own, egocentric. 2. Easily motivated. 3. Enjoys initiating activities. 4. Enjoys being praised for endeavors. Sensitive to criticism and does not enjoy failure. 5. Developmentally advanced players start to become more independent and attempt to exercise more control over own environment. 6. Limited attention span, 15-20 minutes. 7. Frustration can come quickly. 8. Has a strong desire for affection and attention from adults. 9. Seeks social approval. 10. Experimental, exploratory behavior is part of development.
COGNITIVE/ MENTAL	1. Increasingly able to use visual instructions (play them out of their mind), although observing demonstrations is more concrete. 2. Beginning to take into account ideas and emotions of others. 3. Inconsistent attention span. 4. Moving from being adventurous to be cautious. 5. Interests can be short and quick changing. 6. Imaginative, spontaneous and creative.





DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

STAGE 2 - MIDDLE CHILDHOOD (6-8 YEARS OLD)

A 6 year old is eager, active and likes to be on the go. Although keen to act independently, a 6 year old needs parental approval, understanding, praise and encouragement. Pushing too hard or expecting too much can result in the child becoming tense and nervous. An 8 year old is able to accept moderate responsibilities. Peer groups become important and the child will identify with other youngsters of the same sex and with similar interests and activities.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- Movement skills and technical development remain top of the agenda in Stage 2.
- Small sided games and teamwork activities are introduced.
- Speed training commences for Girls (6-8 years) & Boys (7-9 years)
- Optimal time for training suppleness occurs for both Girls and Boys in stages 2 and 3 (6-10 years)

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 2

PHYSICALLY	1. Coordination and body control improve rapidly as there is slower growth. 2. Boys and girls have equal ability. 3. Reaction time is slow, but improves as the child grows. 4. Lots of energy as endurance levels but there are fluctuations in energy. 5. High need for skill development. 6. Fine motor skills developing. 7. Visual and hand/eye coordination improving. 8. Height and weight increasing at a steady rate. 9. Balance improves with ear developments. 10. Learns best by being physically active. 11. Needs to repeat activities that are well known and mastered. 12. Eye development and ability to track objects in motion improving. 13. High center of gravity, so balance can be difficult.
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL	1. Interests often change rapidly. 2. Enjoys initiating activities. 3. Enjoys being praised for endeavors from adults. 4. Starts to become more independent and attempts to exercise more control over own environment. 5. Appreciates consistency in own environment. 6. Learns by repetition. 7. Experimental, exploratory behavior is part of development. 8. Still egocentric – each player wants a ball. 9. Peer group becomes increasingly important. 10. Players are concrete thinkers and find abstract concepts difficult. 11. Players start to develop powers of reasoning – if you do ‘X’ the result will be ‘Y’. 12. Easily motivated and eager to try new things. Willingness to seek risk and adventure. 13. Needs guidance and praise from adults to stay on task and to achieve the best performance. 14. Increasingly self-assured but can be childish and silly at times. 15. Stronger sense of right and wrong. 16. Growing desire to be liked and accepted by friends. 17. Enthusiastic and impatient.





DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 2 *(Continued)*

COGNITIVE/ MENTAL

1. Imaginative, spontaneous and creative.
2. Able to stay on task longer due to increased attention span.
3. Likes to be tested but often dislikes public failure.
4. Likes to try new activities.
5. Better able to understand and learn because of growing memory capacity.
6. Starting to visualize instructions—although demonstrations are much more concrete.
7. Inconsistent attention span.
8. Interests can be short and fast changing.
9. Highly verbal.
10. Asks fact-orientated questions (e.g., wants to know how, why and when).
11. Rapid development of mental skills.
12. Greater ability to describe experiences and talk about thoughts and feelings.
13. Less focus on one's self – seeks social comparison.

STAGE 3 - ADOLESCENCE/EARLY PUBERTY (9-11 YEARS OLD)

This is the beginning of pre-adolescence. Children begin to 'spread out' as their rate of development accelerates. Girls in particular start to physically mature quicker than boys and this growth surge can lead to awkward performance, particularly on tasks requiring fine motor movements. As friendships are developing and players are becoming more reliant on their peers it is important for team selection to be handled sensitively. The reason why so many athletes plateau during the later stages of their careers is primarily because of an overemphasis on competition instead of training during this important period in their development.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- This is a crucial time for developing advanced competency in basic techniques and this platform allows for the introduction of more advanced skills.
- Some basic tactical appreciation can also be introduced.
- Commence aerobic capacity training at stage 3, prior to the adolescent growth spurt, also known as Peak Height Velocity
- Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.
- It is also important that children are encouraged to take part in unstructured play and other sport participation is encouraged.

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 3

COGNITIVE/ MENTAL

1. Attention span continues to increase.
2. Players still prefer to learn by doing— players can become impatient quickly.
3. Players learn by repetition.
4. A predominant learning style begins to surface – most children learn by doing.
5. Language is not fully developed so players find it hard to articulate fully.



DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 3 *(Continued)*

PHYSICAL	1. Heart size is increasing in relation to body size. 2. The players ability to perform anaerobically (high intensity and short duration movements) is limited due to slow development of anaerobic energy system. 3. The players aerobic system (activities lasting for durations of 30 seconds plus) is not as efficient as older players. 4. Large muscle groups are more defined than small muscle groups. 5. Extreme heat and cold affects players rapidly. 6. Players develop balance due to changes in the functionality of the inner ear. 7. Developments in the nervous system facilitate the development of strength. 8. Onset of puberty in females results in breast and hip width development impeding performance and fall behind late developers. 9. Early developing males are bigger and stronger than late developers and often experience success.
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL	1. Individual need for attention and 'showmanship' is common. 2. Self confidence and self awareness is developing through peer group experiences. 3. Structured environments provide comfort. 4. Players generally like consistency in approach and application of rules etc.

STAGE 4 - ADOLESCENCE/LATE PUBERTY (12-14 YEARS OLD)

Dramatic physical changes are the hallmark of adolescence. Late stage 3 and early stage 4, there will be noticeable differences occurring in the growth of girls in comparison to boys. Girls (12 years) generally experience peak growth approximately two years ahead of boys (14 years). Since many young adolescents are unaware that the onset and rate of puberty vary greatly, they need reassurance that their own growth and development are normal, and they will benefit from learning about the progression of physiological changes. Most 12-year olds focus on social life, friends and school and they continue friendships with members of the same sex. Coaches must be sensitive to close friendships when selecting teams and generally working with children in stage 4 – emotional changes can enhance sensitivity and lead to conflicts between players and between players and adults.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- On average, girls reach Peak Height Velocity (PHV) in Stage 4. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.
- Continue to consolidate the performance of fundamental and advanced individual skills.
- Players should receive more in depth tactical instructions, particularly in understanding playing positions. Players should continue to experience different positions on the field.
- Optimum time for the introduction of Strength training for girls (immediately following PHV)
- A second speed training window opens for girls (11-13 years)
- The second speed training window opens for boys (13-16 years)
- Players should play other sports, but soccer should become the primary sport during the soccer season for the serious and committed players.





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KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 4

PHYSICALLY	1. Boys – Stage 4 is the most likely time when boys start going through puberty. 2. Girls – late developers start puberty at this stage but for many girls the later stage of Stage 4 is the conclusion of puberty. 3. Significant proportional changes occur in bone, muscle and fat. 4. Extremities grow quicker than the trunk resulting in a gangly appearance. 5. Decreases in flexibility occur. 6. Oxygen transportation is greatly improved due to increased production of red blood cells – aiding aerobic energy production. 7. The nervous system is almost fully developed. 8. Displays rapid but uneven physical growth, leading at times to awkwardness, uncoordinated movement, tiredness, lack of confidence and poor posture. 9. Increase in female and male hormone levels. 10. Increase in height, weight and musculature. 11. Males develop deeper voices, characteristic patterns of facial/body hair become stronger. 12. Females become wider at hips; breast development continues for several years. 13. Girls may reach close to physical maturity.
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL	1. Emotional development may not correlate to physical development–physical changes may occur earlier and develop more rapidly. 2. Continued development of independence, yet wants and needs adult help. 3. Players may start to question coaches and parents more readily and become less accepting - Less affection may be shown toward adults and players may sometimes seem rude or shorttempered. 4. Hormones become more active & can lead to mood swings & behavioral fluctuations. 5. Players are more interested in and influenced by peer group - Increasingly concerned about acceptance by friends. 6. Peer group becomes increasingly important in fostering independence and interaction with members of the opposite sex. 7. Players become more concerned about body image, looks, and clothes. 8. Focus on self, going back & forth between high expectations and lack of confidence. 9. Eating problems sometimes start at this stage – resulting in reduced energy and poor performance. 10. Shows tolerance of needs and abilities of others.
COGNITIVE/ MENTAL	1. Players are able to think abstractly, and are able to contribute to critical thinking 2. Player can become more egotistical– resulting in increased awareness of personal performance successes and failures. 3. A heightened sense of personal achievement and striving for perfection/success. 4. Players have more capabilities for complex thought. 5. Better able to express feelings through talking. 6. A stronger sense of right and wrong. 7. Ready for in-depth, longer learning experiences. 8. Has a continuing need for reinforcement and development of self-esteem, especially in relation to body perception and sport. 9. Increasingly capable of making informed decisions and accepting a leadership role, although often may choose not to do so. 10. Requires opportunities to be creative and may need consistent encouragement. 11. Can concentrate and participate in activities for longer periods of time.



DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

STAGE 5 - ADOLESCENCE/LATE PUBERTY (15-18 YEARS OLD)

During middle adolescence, puberty is well underway, and is complete in many teenagers. There is a decreased preoccupation with the body and an increased involvement with peers. Parental conflicts develop over independence, since the peer group often serves as the adolescent's reference for their standards of behavior. By the age of 16, most girls have completed the changes associated with puberty and most boys are well on their way to finishing pubertal development, having gained muscle mass and strength. If players in stage five have received appropriate coaching in stages 1-4, they will be ready to perform competently in game situations.

DEVELOPMENT FOCUS:

- Team tactics should form a significant part of practice sessions and teams should be coached in team 'units' – defense, midfield and attack.
- Position training is important, and players should be prepared for a primary position.
- Physical conditioning is also important for all players and training should be tailored to the physical demands of their position on the field.
- On average, boys reach PHV in Stage 5. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates.
- Optimum time for the introduction of strength training for boys (1-1 ½ years following PHV)
- The second speed training window opens for boys (13-16 years)
- Participation in other sports can enhance physical preparation and transferability to soccer. However, soccer should be the primary sport for serious and committed players.

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 5

PHYSICALLY	1. Start of speed and strength training for male and female players. 2. Aerobic conditioning following peak height velocity. 3. Girls reach full maturity at the beginning of Stage 5 and boys peak around 16 years old. 4. Shows improved posture and coordination in coping with physical changes. 5. Needs to continue fitness activities, especially those that develop flexibility, aerobic and anaerobic efficiency, muscular strength and endurance. 6. Can achieve advanced levels of complex skill and movement efficiency. 7. Decreases in flexibility.
PSYCHOLOGICAL/ SOCIAL	1. Increased interest in the opposite sex. 2. Decreased conflict with parents. 3. Deeper capacity for caring and sharing, and the development of more intimate relationships. 4. Decrease time spent with parents and more time spent with peers. 5. Strong social needs and desires. 6. Wants and needs own voice in planning. 7. Desires leadership roles. 8. Team and group allegiance important. 9. Developing into an independent person who is increasingly able to make choices, solve problems and accept responsibility for own actions. 10. Developing more stable and emotional responses.





DEVELOPMENT CHARACTERISTICS

KEY DEVELOPMENT POINTS FOR CHILDREN IN STAGE 5 *(Continued)*

COGNITIVE/ MENTAL

1. More defined work habits.
2. More concern about future educational and vocational plans.
3. Greater ability to sense right and wrong.
4. Sadness or depression, which can lead to poor grades at school, alcohol or drug abuse, unsafe sex, thoughts of suicide, and other problems (Note: Problems at school, alcohol and drug abuse, and other disorders can also lead to feelings of sadness or hopelessness.)
5. Able to learn new skills in a short time.
6. Thinking becomes more practical and adaptive to take into account logical reasoning.
7. Changes are multi-directional and depend on education and understanding of the world.

