



How Children Learn To Move

There are a number of patterns of skill development that are very important to children's coaches.

The development of movement skills follows a path from basic and generic to increasingly specific and specialised. For example, from being able to kick a ball, to kicking aiming at someone and putting the right weight into it.

What this means for you

UP TO THE AGE OF 7

Up to the age of seven, children should be developing generic movement skills like:

Stability

Bending, stretching, twisting, turning and stopping

Object Control

Holding, throwing, kicking, catching and rolling.

Locomotion

Running, walking, leaping, jumping, skipping.

All the skills above are underpinned by the **Fundamentals of Movement**: Balance, Coordination and Agility.

Highly technical and specific instruction is usually inappropriate during this rapid growth period as children should be developing generic skills that will in turn provide a solid foundation for the specific ones later in life.

BEYOND THE AGE OF 7

Between the age of seven and the onset of puberty, children are ready to develop more specialised skills for more specific situations.

They do this by combining and refining the generic skills they learnt at a younger age in new and challenging situations.

Children are now ready for more structured activities with progressively more complex rules and a greater variety of roles and interactions.

In these 'skill hungry' years, motivation rarely is an issue as children are very eager to extend their range of skill.

What follows is some more, quite detailed, physical development information. This may not interest everyone but we have tried to link each one to your role as a Foundation Phase coach to help you make sense of what each one might mean to you and your players.

We are not trying to turn you into paediatricians merely offering an opportunity to learn more.



Perceptual Difference 1: Field Independence/ Dependence

The ability to distinguish detail from the other information around it. This develops progressively with age. Our under 8's tend to be very field dependant as they may not have developed the ability to separate out important information from all that they see.

Coaching implication: use bright coloured balls, bibs and markers to help very young children.

Perceptual Difference 2: Pattern Recognition

This is related to experience. Judging space, speed and direction takes time to master so be patient and understanding with the young players.

Coaching implication: help them begin to recognise what is relevant and important. Draw their attention to these things so that the players get to know where the most important information lies. Tag and chase games are great for children. They must scan, begin to judge speeds, notice "danger" and when doing this they are having fun. Getting Them Moving.

Perceptual Difference 3: Visual Acuity

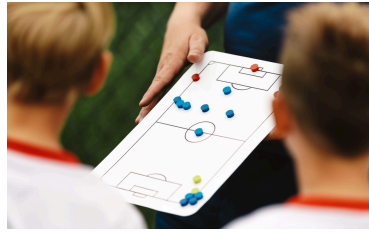
The sharpness with which moving objects can be perceived. Develops progressively with age. Crucial for judging speed of the ball and other players.

Coaching implication: control the speed of movements with very young players to give them a little more time to process things.

Perceptual Difference 4: Perceptual Integration

The ability to integrate information from different senses. Also develops progressively with age. Crucial for hearing instructions and seeing the ball.

Coaching implication: do not overload the young player with information.



Attentional Difference 1: Cue selection linked to field dependence/independence

This develops progressively from 6-12yrs. Very young players will not know what cues to select and what to ignore.

Coaching implication: give very specific pointers to young players about where to get their information from. (Be careful not to make every decision for them). Encourage them to begin to scan for information at a very basic level.

Attentional Difference 2: Attention Span

This develops progressively and increases to a maximum of around 20mins as an adult.

Coaching implications: the younger the players the shorter the tasks must be whilst helping the young players develop the ability to concentrate for slightly longer periods.

Attentional Difference 3: Attentional Demands

The cognitive “energy” needed to pay attention and to carry out a specific task decreases as the young child repeats and repeats similar actions. The more automatic a task the less attention it will demand. This means that the focus of attention can change or be given to other things.

Coaching implication: ensure that foundation skills are well automated before putting more attentional demands on the player-e.g playing 8 a side with u8's or shouting for them to pass the ball when they may be very unsure where it is in relation to their feet. All or most of their attention is on this aspect NOT on looking for who to pass to. The DNA advocates that coaches get the players supremely comfortable in possession and then they will be ready and able to perform the next part.



Decision Making Difference: Speed of Decision Making

Children are significantly slower at making decisions than adults. The more options available the slower the decision making might become.

Coaching implication: limit the options for young players. It is a good idea to start with the game and then work on skill developments that emerge from the game situation. This enables players to link more effectively the correct responses needed in the game.

The England DNA in the Foundation Phase adopts a games based approach rather than denying the young players the very thing they come to do.

