

U/4 Lesson Plans & Practice Ideas

7 week plan
Week by Week

Build your season around the golden rule of: *"Let them play, let them touch the ball a lot, and teach one simple concept at a time."*

Before Week 1: Your Coaching Philosophy

At U/4, development happens through repetition and play.

If you have 8 players and one ball, you can easily end up with seven children standing around. If you have 8 players and 8 balls, suddenly everyone is learning. So our default setup will be:

1 player → 1 ball whenever possible.

We'll also keep activities short. Four-year-olds can be completely engaged in something for five minutes and then suddenly decide that a blade of grass is fascinating. That's normal. Don't fight it. Change the activity.

The "U/4 rule" - Try to avoid explaining an activity for more than 20-30 seconds.

Instead:

- Show them.
- Let them try.
- Stop briefly.
- Give one coaching point.
- Let them try again.

WEEK 1 — "Me and my ball"

Theme: *Ball familiarity + dribbling*

The big idea

Before we can teach passing, defending, positions, or tactics, we need the child to feel comfortable with the ball. This week is essentially: "This ball belongs to me. I can make it go where I want."

We're introducing: Dribbling, Stopping the ball, Starting again, Changing direction, Looking up, Using both feet, Keeping the ball close.

Don't worry about perfect technique.

At U/4, attempts are victories.

PRACTICE 1A — "My Ball, My Friend"

Equipment

For approximately 8-10 players:

1. 8-10 soccer balls
2. 10-15 cones
3. 2-4 small goals

4. Pinnies if available
5. A supply of extra balls
6. Field
7. Create approximately a 20 x 25 yard area.

You can make it smaller or larger depending on your group. Don't obsess over exact measurements.

0:00-0:05 — Arrival: "Get Your Ball"

Organization

Have every player grab a ball.

Tell them:

"Take your ball and show me what you can do!"

Let them freely dribble around. Don't immediately start correcting them. Walk around and encourage them.

Things you can say:

"Can you keep your ball close?"

"Can you go fast?"

"Can you go slow?"

"Can you stop it?"

"Can you turn?"

Why we're doing this

This is secretly one of the most important parts of practice.

Players are getting:

-Touches

-Confidence

-Movement

-Ball familiarity

And you're observing your team. You'll quickly see who is comfortable, who is nervous, who can dribble, and who struggles simply to keep the ball moving.

0:05-0:15 — Red Light, Green Light

This becomes one of your foundational U/4 games.

Setup

Every player has a ball. The coach stands at one end of the area. Players start at the opposite end.

-Green light: Players dribble toward you.

-Red light: They must stop their ball.

You can eventually add:

-Yellow light: Slow dribbling.

-Blue light: Turn around and go the other way.

Coaching points:

Keep it extremely simple: "Little touches!" "Keep the ball close!" "STOP!" "Can you stop it with your foot?"

Initially, don't worry about which foot they use.

Progression

Once they're comfortable:

Green → Red → Green

Then:

Green → Red → Turn → Green

Then add silly variations:

"Go like a turtle!"

"Go like a race car!"

"Go backwards!"

"Can you freeze like a statue?"

What you're actually teaching

This game introduces:

Start → stop → change direction → accelerate.

Those are fundamental soccer movements.

0:15-0:25 — "Cars"

Now turn the players into cars. Every player has a ball.

Tell them:

"Your ball is your car. Your feet are the engine!"

Commands: Drive! Dribble. Slow down! Small touches. Speed up! Bigger touches and faster movement. Crash! Stop the ball. U-turn! Turn around. Garage! Stop the ball and stand beside it.

Coaching point:

Introduce: "Big space = bigger touches. Small space = little touches."

Don't expect them to master this immediately. You're simply planting the idea.

0:25-0:35 — Treasure Hunt

Setup

Scatter 10-20 cones throughout the field.

Call them "treasures." Every player has a ball.

Game - Players dribble around collecting treasure.

For example: "Can you dribble to a treasure, stop your ball, touch the cone, and keep going?"

Then: "Can you find a blue treasure?"

Then: "Find a treasure and turn!"

Important

Don't have them physically collect the cones. They're just targets.

Progression

Call out: Red treasure, Blue treasure, Yellow treasure, Big treasure, Little treasure

If your cones aren't different colors, simply use locations.

0:35-0:45 — Sharks!

Now we introduce opponents.

Setup

Every player has a ball.

- Choose one coach to be the shark.

- Players dribble inside the area.

- The shark tries to kick balls outside the area.

- If a ball leaves, the player retrieves it and comes back.

At U/4, don't eliminate players. That's important. We don't want: "You're out."

We want: "Go get your ball and come back!"

Coaching point:

Ask: "Can you keep your ball away from the shark?"

Now they're naturally learning:

- Awareness

- Direction changes

- Shielding

- Dribbling away from pressure

- Without giving a lecture on any of those concepts.

0:45-1:00 — 2v2/3v3 Game

Finish with soccer.

No lines. Create two small fields if possible.

For example:

Field 1: 3v3

Field 2: 2v2 or 3v3

Use small goals.

Rules: Keep it simple.

Ball goes out → kick it back in or dribble it in.

No goalkeepers.

Let them play.

Don't coach constantly.

Instead, celebrate: "Great dribble!" "Awesome try!" "You got the ball!" "Great job going toward the goal!"

Let them experience the game.

PRACTICE 1B — "Can I Control My Ball?"

Use this practice if you have your second weekly session. We're building on Practice A.

The focus is:

Dribble → stop → turn → go somewhere else.

0:00–0:10 — Free Dribble

Same concept as Practice A.

But introduce: Foot challenges

"Can you touch your ball with your right foot?" "Left foot?" "Can you touch it with both feet?"

Don't demand perfection.

0:10–0:20 — Follow the Coach

Every player has a ball. You're the leader. Dribble around the field. They copy you.

Do things like: Slow, Fast, Stop, Turn, Circle, Go toward a cone, Go away from a cone, then let a player become the leader.

This is fantastic for confidence.

0:20–0:30 — Gates

Setup

Make lots of little "gates" using two cones.

Example:

||
||
||

Each gate is approximately 2 yards wide. Scatter them around the field.

Challenge

Players dribble through as many gates as possible. Count their gates. "How many can you get?"

Progression

Now tell them: "You can't go through the same gate twice!"

This introduces scanning and decision-making.

0:30-0:40 — Turning Game

Players dribble. Coach calls: "TURN!" Players turn and go somewhere else. Introduce simple turns. Inside-foot turn. Dribble forward. Use the inside of the foot to push the ball back across the body. At this age, don't get obsessed with technical perfection. You're introducing the idea of turning.

0:40-0:50 — Monster in the Middle

Coach becomes the monster.
Players try to dribble from one side to the other.
Coach attempts to steal balls.
Again: Nobody is eliminated.
If the coach wins the ball: "Go get it!"

This creates repeated 1v1 experiences without making the activity too complicated.

0:50-1:00 — 3v3

Finish with a game. Your main observation. Don't worry about positions. Watch for: Are they chasing the ball? Are they willing to dribble? Are they trying to score? Are they enjoying themselves?

WEEK 1 COACHING CHECKLIST

By the end of Week 1, you are not expecting players to be great dribblers. You're looking for:

- ☐ Comfortable having a ball
- ☐ Can stop the ball
- ☐ Can start dribbling again
- ☐ Attempts to change direction
- ☐ Begins looking around
- ☐ Will chase the ball
- ☐ Understands the basic idea of a goal
- ☐ Enjoys practice

If you get those things, Week 1 was successful.

WEEK 2 — "TURN AND ESCAPE"

Theme

Dribbling + changing direction + protecting the ball

Now that players are comfortable moving with the ball, we want them to learn: "If someone is coming toward me, I don't have to run straight into them." That's the beginning of attacking awareness.

PRACTICE 2A — "GET AWAY!"

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery

Everyone has a ball.

Call out:

-Dribble

-Stop

-Turn

-Go

-Slow

-Fast

Then challenge:

"Can you use your other foot?"

0:10-0:20 — Escape the Coach

Coach walks toward players. Players must dribble away. Make it theatrical. "I'm coming!" Players turn and escape. This teaches the concept of pressure without using complicated terminology.

0:20-0:30 — Turning Stations

Set up four areas.

-Station 1 — Stop & Go

Dribble → stop → go.

-Station 2 — Inside Turn

Dribble → turn across body.

-Station 3 — Outside Turn

Dribble → use outside of foot to change direction.

-Station 4 — Free Turn

Players invent their own.

This last one is important. You want creativity. Ask: "Can you make up your own turn?"

0:30-0:40 — Protect the Treasure

Setup

Every player has a ball. Players dribble in a grid. Coach attempts to steal.

Teach one simple concept: "Put your body between the shark and your ball." Don't worry about the phrase "shielding." Physically demonstrate it. Ball on one side. Body between defender and ball. That's enough.

0:40-0:50 — 1v1 to Goals

Make several small fields. Two players. One ball. One goal at each end. Player with ball tries to score. Defender tries to win it. Keep rounds short. About 30-45 seconds. Then rotate. This gives everyone lots of opportunities.

0:50-1:00 — 3v3

Let them play. Your theme for the day: "Can you turn away when someone is in front of you?"

PRACTICE 2B — "BEAT THE DEFENDER"

Now we're introducing the very first form of attacking creativity.

0:00-0:10

Free dribbling.

0:10-0:20

Coach Says, Coach demonstrates:

"I'm the defender. Can you go this way?"

Then move one direction. Players go another. Make it silly. The goal isn't perfect technique.

The goal is:

Recognize space → move into space.

0:20-0:30 — Gates + Defender

Players dribble through gates. Coach tries to block gates. Players have to find another one. This is an excellent U/4 decision-making game.

0:30-0:40 — 1v1 Treasure

Put a cone/ball at the end of each channel. Attacker starts with ball. Defender starts behind. Attacker tries to dribble through the gate. The defender tries to stop them. Rotate frequently.

0:40-0:50 — Numbers Game

Create two teams.

Call: "ONE!" One player from each team enters.

Then: "TWO!" Two players enter.

Eventually: "THREE!" Three players enter.

They play until: Goal, Ball goes out, Coach stops game

This introduces players to attacking and defending without assigning positions.

0:50-1:00 — Free Game

3v3.

Let them play.

WEEK 3 — "SHARE THE BALL"

Theme

Passing and receiving. This is where we introduce a new concept: "Sometimes my teammate can help me." But don't make passing the only thing they do. At U/4, we don't want to take away their natural desire to dribble.

We want: Dribble when you can. Pass when it helps.

PRACTICE 3A — "PASS TO MY FRIEND"

0:00-0:10 — Dribble

Start exactly as usual. Consistency matters with young players.

0:10-0:20 — Partner Passing

Pair players. One ball per pair. Put them approximately 4-5 yards apart. Player A passes. Player B stops the ball. Then passes back.

Coaching points

Keep them very simple: "Look at your friend." "Kick the middle of the ball." "Gentle pass." "Stop it first." At this age, don't worry about beautiful passing techniques.

0:20-0:30 — Pass Through the Gate

Partners stand on opposite sides of a cone gate. They pass through the gate.

Challenge

How many successful passes can they make? Then move the gates farther apart.

0:30-0:40 — Moving Partners

Now both players move.

Player A dribbles. Player B runs beside them. Player A passes. Player B receives.

Then they switch.

This introduces:

Pass → move.

0:40-0:50 — 2v1 to Goal

Create small fields. Two attackers. One defender. Attackers try to score.

This creates natural opportunities to pass.

Don't yell: "PASS! PASS! PASS!" Instead ask: "Did you see your friend?"

0:50-1:00 — 3v3

Let them play.

Celebrate both: Great dribbles, Great passes

PRACTICE 3B — "PASS AND MOVE"

0:00–0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10–0:20

Partner passing.

0:20–0:30

Follow Your Pass

Player A passes to B.

A then runs around a cone.

B passes back.

Keep it moving.

0:30–0:40 — Passing Gates

Create multiple gates. Players score a point every time they pass through a gate. Then they must run through the gate. This keeps everyone moving.

0:40–0:50 — 2v2

Two attackers vs. two defenders. Small goals.

Now players begin learning:

"Where is my teammate?"

0:50–1:00

3v3.

WEEK 4 — "LET'S SCORE!"

Theme

Shooting

This is likely to be one of your players' favorite weeks.

The central message: "When you have a chance, go score!"

PRACTICE 4A

0:00–0:10

Dribble freely.

Then: "Can you dribble toward the goal?"

0:10–0:20 — Shooting Technique

Put players approximately 5–8 yards from goal. Ball stationary. Have them shoot.

Simple cue: "Toe down, kick the ball!"

You can demonstrate striking through the ball.

Don't spend five minutes explaining ankle position.

0:20-0:30 — Dribble & Shoot

Player starts with ball. Dribbles toward goal. Shoots. Retrieves ball. Repeats.
Now we're combining:

Dribbling → shooting.

0:30-0:40 — Beat the Coach, Shoot

Coach becomes defender. Player dribbles toward coach. Coach provides light pressure. Player tries to get around coach and shoot.

0:40-0:50 — Shooting Race

Two teams. Players dribble to a shooting line. Shoot. Retrieve. Next player. Make it fun.

0:50-1:00 — Game

3v3.

Encourage:

"Can we get the ball toward the goal?"

PRACTICE 4B

Build on it:

Receive → dribble → shoot

Then:

Pass → receive → shoot

Then:

1v1 → shoot

Then finish with 3v3.

WEEK 5 — "CAN YOU BEAT ME?"

Theme

1v1 attacking

This is a huge developmental week. We want players to become comfortable with:

- Taking players on
- Changing direction
- Accelerating
- Protecting the ball
- Making mistakes

The last one is crucial. Do not punish failed dribbles. A player who tries to beat a defender and loses the ball is learning. A player who never attempts it because they're afraid of losing it isn't.

PRACTICE 5A

0:00–0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10–0:20

1v1 warm-up games.

0:20–0:30

1v1 through gates.

0:30–0:40

1v1 to goal.

0:40–0:50

2v1.

0:50–1:00

3v3.

Main coaching phrase

"Can you go forward?"

PRACTICE 5B

Introduce the idea:

Defender close? Change direction.

Space available? Go!

Goal available? Shoot!

That's about as much tactical instruction as I'd want at U/4.

Use:

Go → Turn → Shoot

as your attacking framework.

WEEK 6 — "WIN IT BACK"

Theme

Defending

Now we flip the perspective.

The message: "When we don't have the ball, we can try to get it back."

PRACTICE 6A

0:00–0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10–0:20

Sharks.

0:20–0:30

1v1 defending.

Introduce:

"Get close."

Then:

"Slow down."

Then:

"Try to win it!"

Don't introduce complicated defensive terminology.

0:30–0:40 — Defender's Treasure

Attacker tries to dribble through a gate.

Defender tries to win the ball.

Rotate.

0:40–0:50 — 2v2

Players defend together naturally. Don't worry about teaching formal shape.

Instead:

"Can you help your friend?"

0:50–1:00

3v3.

PRACTICE 6B

Repeat the 1v1 theme but make the games more competitive.

Use:

1v1

2v1

2v2

3v3

Now you're beginning to connect:

Attack → lose ball → defend → win ball → attack again.

That's soccer.

WEEK 7 — "PUT IT ALL TOGETHER"

This is your celebration week. We're not introducing a bunch of new skills. We're giving players opportunities to use everything they've learned.

PRACTICE 7A — THE SOCCER ADVENTURE

Set up several stations.

-Station 1 — Dribbling

Dribble through gates.

-Station 2 — Turns

Dribble → turn → accelerate.

-Station 3 — Shooting

Dribble → shoot.

-Station 4 — Passing

Pass through gates.

-Station 5 — 1v1

Beat the defender.

-Station 6 — Game

3v3.

Spend approximately 7-8 minutes at each station.

PRACTICE 7B — CHAMPIONSHIP DAY 🏆

Don't make this about standings. Make it about celebration.

Start with:

10 minutes

Favorite ball games from the season.

Then:

10 minutes

Dribbling challenge.

10 minutes

Shooting challenge.

10 minutes

1v1.

20 minutes

Lots of small-sided games.

If your league permits it, finish with something memorable:

Team cheer, High fives, Coach awards, Stickers, Certificates, Parents watching

The message should be:

"You learned a lot, and soccer is fun."