

U/8 Lesson Plans & Practice Ideas

7 week plan
Week by Week

The U/8 Coaching Philosophy

At U/8, players are ready for more than simply learning how to control a ball. They can begin to understand why they are making a particular choice. Our goal isn't to turn 7-year-olds into miniature professional players.

Our goal is to help them become:

- Comfortable with the ball
- Confident taking players on
- Willing to pass
- Able to receive and control
- Comfortable attacking and defending
- Beginning to understand space
- Beginning to recognize teammates and opponents
- Excited to make decisions
- Comfortable making mistakes

The golden rule: *Teach the player, not the play.*

We want players thinking:

Can I go forward? Can I beat someone? Can I pass? Where is the space? Can I help my teammate? Can we win the ball back?

Rather than: "Stand here." "Run there." "Pass every time."

PRACTICE STRUCTURE

A consistent one-hour structure makes practices easier for coaches and players.

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery / Arrival Activity

Every player should have a ball whenever possible.

0:10-0:20 — Technical Skill

Introduce or reinforce the day's primary skill.

0:20-0:30 — Skill Game

Turn the technical skill into a competitive game.

0:30-0:40 — Small-Sided Game

Add teammates and opponents.

0:40-0:55 — Conditioned Game

Create a game that encourages the day's theme.

0:55-1:00 — Free Play / Finish

Let them play.

Important: These times are a guide, not handcuffs. If a game is working brilliantly, keep it going.

WEEK 1 — "I HAVE THE BALL"

Theme

Dribbling, ball mastery, changing direction and attacking space

U/8 players should already have some dribbling experience. This week isn't about starting over.

We're asking: Can you control the ball while moving?

Introduce:

- Inside/outside touches
- Change of speed
- Change of direction
- Turning
- Looking up
- Dribbling into space
- Protecting the ball

PRACTICE 1A — "FIND THE SPACE"

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery

Every player has a ball.

Coach calls: Right foot, Left foot, Inside, Outside, Stop, Turn, Fast, Slow

Then introduce: "Can you look up while you dribble?"

Don't have players stare at the ball the entire time.

Coaching Points: "Little touches when you're close to people." "Big touch when you have space." "Can you look up?"

0:10-0:20 — Traffic Lights

Create a 20x25-ish grid. Players dribble freely.

- Green: Go fast
- Yellow: Slow down
- Red: Stop
- Blue: Turn

-Purple: Change direction

Progression:

Call two commands together:

"Green → Red → Blue!"

Players must react quickly.

What We're Teaching: This isn't just a dribbling exercise.

Players are learning:

See → Decide → Execute

0:20-0:30 — Gates Challenge

Create 8-12 small gates around the area. Players dribble through gates.

Challenge: "How many gates can you get in 60 seconds?"

Then:

"You can't use the same gate twice."

Then:

"Can you get through a gate and immediately accelerate?"

0:30-0:40 — Sharks

Every player has a ball. 1-2 defenders attempt to steal balls. If a defender wins it, the player immediately becomes a defender. No sitting out.

Coaching Points: "Can you escape?" "Where is the open space?" "Can you turn away?"

0:40-0:55 — 3v3 / 4v4

Small fields. No positions initially. Encourage players to: Dribble forward, Find space, Attack goals. Don't stop play every 30 seconds.

0:55-1:00 — Free Play

Let them play.

Your primary observation: Who is willing to attack space?

PRACTICE 1B — "BEAT THE DEFENDER"

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery

Introduce simple moves:

-Inside-out

-Outside-in

-Scissors

-Stop-and-go

-Change of direction

Don't spend five minutes teaching a move.
Demonstrate → players try → play.

0:10-0:20 — Coach 1v1

Players dribble toward coach. Coach gives different amounts of pressure. Player attempts to get around coach.
Progress:

No pressure → passive pressure → realistic pressure

0:20-0:30 — 1v1 Gates

Create channels with a gate at the end. Attacker tries to dribble through. Defender tries to win the ball. Rotate quickly. Coaching Phrase: "Can you get past me?"

0:30-0:40 — Numbers Game

Two teams. Coach calls: "ONE!"
One player from each team enters.
Then: "TWO!" Now 2v2.
Eventually: "THREE!" 3v3.
This introduces players to recognizing when they have: A teammate, An opponent, Space, Pressure

0:40-0:55 — 3v3 / 4v4

Condition:
A goal after beating a defender = 2 points. This encourages players to actually attempt 1v1s.

0:55-1:00 — Free Game

WEEK 2 — "PASS AND MOVE"

Theme
Passing, receiving and supporting
At U/8, passing becomes more important. But we don't want:
Receive → immediately pass
We want players to understand: Sometimes dribbling is best. Sometimes passing is best.

PRACTICE 2A — "PASS TO MY FRIEND"

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery

Players dribble.
Coach introduces: Dribble → stop → pass

Then:

Dribble → turn → pass

0:10-0:20 — Partner Passing

Pairs 5-7 yards apart. Pass and receive.

Coaching points:

- Plant foot beside the ball
- Point plant foot toward target
- Strike middle of ball
- Use inside of foot
- Receive with soft foot

Keep the coaching simple.

0:20-0:30 — Passing Gates

Partners pass through gates.

Challenge: How many successful passes in one minute?

Progress: Move farther apart.

Then:

Pass → follow your pass.

0:30-0:40 — Pass & Move

Player A passes to B. A immediately moves to a new cone. B passes to A. Continue.

Introduce: "Pass and don't stand!"

0:40-0:55 — 3v3

Condition: A team gets an extra point for completing three passes before scoring.

Don't force it. If players have an obvious chance to attack, let them attack.

PRACTICE 2B — "CAN YOU FIND YOUR FRIEND?"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20

Partner passing with movement.

0:20-0:30 — 2v1

Two attackers vs. one defender. Attackers attempt to score. Now players have a decision:

Dribble or pass?

Ask: "What did the defender give you?"

0:30-0:40 — Passing Numbers

Create two teams.

Coach calls:

1 → 1v1

2 → 2v2

3 → 3v3

Encourage passing when teammates are available.

0:40-0:55 — 4v4

Condition: Teams receive a bonus for a goal following a pass.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

WEEK 3 — "LET'S SCORE!"

Theme

Shooting and finishing

Players should begin recognizing: If I have a chance to shoot, shoot!

This week combines:

Dribble → shoot

Receive → shoot

Pass → receive → shoot

PRACTICE 3A — "SHOOT!"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

Finish each repetition with a shot.

0:10-0:20 — Shooting Technique

Players shoot from different distances.

Simple coaching points: "Plant beside the ball." "Eyes on the ball." "Laces for power." "Inside foot for placement."

0:20-0:30 — Dribble & Shoot

Player dribbles toward goal. Change direction around a cone. Shoot.

Progress: Add passive defender.

0:30-0:40 — Beat the Defender & Shoot

1v1 toward goal.

Attacker tries to: Beat defender → shoot

Defender attempts to win the ball.

0:40-0:55 — Shooting Game

Two teams.

Players score points by: Scoring, Hitting target area, Scoring after a dribble
Keep balls moving.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

PRACTICE 3B — "CREATE YOUR SHOT"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20

Receive → turn → shoot.

0:20-0:30

Pass → receive → shoot.

0:30-0:40

2v1 to goal.

0:40-0:55

4v4.

Condition: Get a shot within 10 seconds of winning the ball. This encourages players to attack quickly.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

WEEK 4 — "CAN YOU BEAT ME?"

Theme

1v1 attacking and creativity

This is one of the most important developmental weeks.

We want players comfortable:

- Attacking defenders
- Changing speed
- Changing direction
- Using moves

-Protecting the ball

-Recovering after losing it

Most importantly: Trying and failing is better than being afraid to try.

PRACTICE 4A

0:00-0:10 — Ball Mastery

Free dribbling.

Coach calls:

Move → accelerate

0:10-0:20 — 1v1 Gates

Attacker scores by dribbling through a gate. Defender scores by winning the ball and dribbling out.

0:20-0:30 — 1v1 to Goal

Two goals. Attacker attempts to score. Defender attempts to win and counter.

0:30-0:40 — 1v1 Tournament

Short rounds. Winner stays / rotate opponents. Keep it fun rather than overly focused on winners.

0:40-0:55 — 2v2

Now introduce: Beat defender OR pass to teammate. Players choose.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

PRACTICE 4B — "SPACE OR DEFENDER?"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20 — Coach Says

Coach demonstrates:

Defender close - Change direction

Defender far - Attack space.

0:20-0:30 — Gates + Defenders

Players find open gates. Defenders attempt to close them down.

0:30-0:40 — 2v1

Attacker must decide: Dribble or pass?

0:40-0:55 — 3v3 / 4v4

Encourage: "Can you recognize the space?"

0:55-1:00

Free game.

WEEK 5 — "WIN IT BACK"

Theme

Defending + transition

Now we introduce an important soccer idea: When we lose the ball, we don't quit. We try to win it back. Defending should be active and fun.

PRACTICE 5A — "GET CLOSE!"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20 — Sharks

Players dribble. Defenders attempt to win balls.

0:20-0:30 — Defensive 1v1

Attacker attempts to score.

Defender learns:

Get close → slow down → stay in front → try to win it.

0:30-0:40 — Defender's Treasure

Attacker attempts to dribble through a gate. Defender prevents it. Rotate constantly.

0:40-0:55 — 2v2

Now players begin helping one another.

Coaching phrase: "Can you help your teammate?"

0:55-1:00

Free play.

PRACTICE 5B — "WIN IT AND GO!"

0:00-0:10

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20 — 1v1**0:20-0:30 — 2v1**

Defender wins ball → immediately attacks the opposite goal.

This introduces:

Defend → win → attack

0:30-0:40 — Transition Game

3v3.

When a team wins the ball, they have 5 seconds to attack.

0:40-0:55 — 4v4

Free game with emphasis on immediate reaction after losing the ball.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

WEEK 6 — "CAN WE PLAY TOGETHER?"

Theme

Support, spacing and combination play. This is where U/8 starts looking more like organized soccer.

We introduce:

-Width

-Support

-Passing options

-Moving after passing

-Finding space

-Playing away from pressure

But we still avoid over-coaching positions.

PRACTICE 6A — "HELP MY FRIEND"**0:00-0:10**

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20 — Pass & Move

Partner passing.

Every pass must be followed by movement.

0:20-0:30 — 2v1

Ask: "Where can you go to help the player with the ball?"

Introduce: Don't stand behind the defender. Move somewhere the ball carrier can see you.

0:30-0:40 — 3v2

Three attackers. Two defenders.

Encourage: Width, Movement, Passing, Dribbling

0:40-0:55 — 4v4

Condition: A team gets a bonus point for a goal following a pass and movement.

0:55-1:00

Free play.

PRACTICE 6B — "FIND THE SPACE"**0:00-0:10**

Ball mastery.

0:10-0:20 — Gates

Players move through gates without the ball.

Coach calls: "Find space!"

Then introduce the ball.

0:20-0:30 — Keep Away

3v1 or 4v1. Keep the ball moving. Don't expect perfect possession.

The objective is learning:

Pass → move → support

0:30-0:40 — 3v2 to Goal

Attackers try to create a scoring opportunity.

0:40-0:55 — 4v4

Coach observes rather than constantly stopping play.

Look for:

- Players spreading out
- Players supporting
- Players moving after passing
- Players recognizing open space

0:55-1:00

Free play.

WEEK 7 — "PUT IT ALL TOGETHER"

Theme

Decision-making + confidence + FUN

No major new skills. This week is about letting players show what they've learned.

PRACTICE 7A — THE SOCCER ADVENTURE

Set up stations.

-Station 1 — Ball Mastery

Dribble through a cone course.

-Station 2 — Turning

Dribble → turn → accelerate.

-Station 3 — 1v1

Beat the defender.

-Station 4 — Passing

Pass through gates.

-Station 5 — Shooting

Dribble → shoot.

-Station 6 — 2v2 / 3v3

-Small-sided game.

Spend approximately 7–8 minutes per station, depending on the number of players.

PRACTICE 7B — CHAMPIONSHIP DAY 🏆

This isn't really about a championship. It's about celebrating the players.

0:00–0:10 — Favorite Game

Let players vote on their favorite game from the season.

0:10–0:20 — Dribbling Challenge

Gates challenge. Can they beat their previous score?

0:20–0:30 — Shooting Challenge

Different targets. Different distances. Lots of shots.

0:30–0:40 — 1v1

Players get plenty of chances to attack and defend.

0:40–1:00 — BIG GAME

4v4 or 5v5 small-sided games.

Minimal coaching. Let them play.

Celebrate: Great pass! Great idea! Great effort! Great defending! Awesome finish! I love that you tried!

U/8 COACHING CHECKLIST

By the end of seven weeks, we're not expecting every player to master every skill. We're looking for progress.

Ball Skills

- ☐ Can dribble with control
- ☐ Can change direction
- ☐ Can change speed
- ☐ Can use both feet
- ☐ Can stop and restart
- ☐ Can protect the ball

Attacking

- ☐ Willing to take on a defender
- ☐ Recognizes open space
- ☐ Can shoot toward goal
- ☐ Understands when a teammate may be helpful
- ☐ Begins looking up before making decisions

Passing & Receiving

- ☐ Can make a basic inside-foot pass
- ☐ Can receive and control a pass
- ☐ Begins moving after passing
- ☐ Begins looking for teammates

Defending

- ☐ Understands that everyone defends
- ☐ Tries to win the ball
- ☐ Can get close to an attacker
- ☐ Attempts to stay between attacker and goal
- ☐ Reacts after losing the ball

Game Understanding

- ☐ Understands direction of attack
- ☐ Understands where the goals are
- ☐ Begins recognizing space
- ☐ Begins understanding teammates
- ☐ Can transition from attacking to defending

Most Important

- ☐ Has fun
- ☐ Wants the ball
- ☐ Isn't afraid to make mistakes

☐ Wants to come back next practice

COACHING LANGUAGE: At U/8, what we say matters almost as much as what we teach.

Instead of:

❌ "PASS!"

Try:

"Can you find your teammate?"

Instead of:

❌ "Don't dribble!"

Try:

"Is there space to go forward?"

Instead of:

❌ "You're out of position!"

Try:

"Where could you go to help?"

Instead of:

❌ "Why didn't you pass?"

Try:

"What did you see?"

Instead of:

❌ "You lost the ball."

Try:

"Can we win it back?"

THE U/8 PROGRESSION

The entire seven-week season can essentially be remembered as:

WEEK 1

Me + Ball

↓

WEEK 2

Me + Teammate

↓

WEEK 3

Me + Ball + Goal

↓

WEEK 4

Me vs. Defender



WEEK 5

Me vs. Defender + Win It Back



WEEK 6

Me + Teammates + Space



WEEK 7

Put It All Together

The ultimate goal is not perfect soccer. It's players who want the ball, want to attack, aren't afraid to make mistakes, recognize teammates, compete to win the ball, and genuinely enjoy playing soccer. That is a successful U/8 season.