



Special Olympics
Junior Athletes



Football



PHYSICAL EDUCATION STANDARDS ALIGNMENT

Each lesson in this unit connects to the SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards. These standards describe what athletes should know and be able to do to lead physically literate, active lives. Because every lesson is designed to promote inclusion, teamwork, and leadership, not every standard is directly taught or formally assessed in every session. However, many standards are reinforced implicitly through active participation, social interaction, and reflection. While SHAPE America standards were developed in the United States, they are grounded in research and informed by international practices in physical education. These standards provide a widely recognized framework for developing physical literacy and guiding high-quality, developmentally appropriate programming. Their focus on lifelong participation, skill development, and whole-child outcomes aligns with global principles for physical education, including those outlined by UNESCO.¹

CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION	HOW IT APPEARS IN LESSONS
Explicitly Taught & Assessed Standards	These are intentionally planned learning objectives. Athletes receive direct instruction and feedback, and their performance can be observed or measured.	Examples: Demonstrating control while dribbling, applying movement strategies, performing skill cues.
Implicitly Supported Standards	These standards are naturally reinforced through participation, teamwork, and classroom or team culture. They are not directly taught or graded but are embedded in the learning experience.	Examples: Demonstrating respect, encouraging peers, recognizing the value of physical activity, showing perseverance.

WHY THIS MATTERS

Physical education supports the whole child, physically, socially, and emotionally. Each lesson is designed to help athletes:

- Build foundational movement skills (Standards 1–2)
- Apply strategies and tactics in play (Standard 3)
- Develop respect, cooperation, and inclusion (Standard 4)
- Recognize the joy and value of physical activity (Standard 5)

By engaging in these experiences, athletes strengthen not only their motor skills but also their social and emotional competencies, including self-management, empathy, and collaboration.

WHY STANDARDS MATTER IN COMMUNITY COACHING

Using Physical Education standards helps coaches know what to teach and how to support each child's development. For coaches outside of school settings, these standards offer clear guidance to make sure activities are safe, age-appropriate, and meaningful for all athletes.

¹ SHAPE America National Physical Education Standards; international physical education guidance including UNESCO's International Charter of Physical Education, Physical Activity and Sport.

UNDERSTANDING “FOOTBALL” & “SOCCER” IN SPECIAL OLYMPICS

In Special Olympics, the sport commonly known as “soccer” in the United States is referred to as “football,” which is the term used in most countries around the world. This language reflects global usage, as the international governing body for the sport, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association), uses the term “football.” In the United States, the term “soccer” is used to distinguish it from American football. Within Special Olympics, both terms may be used depending on the region, but they refer to the same sport. Coaches should be aware of this difference and use the term that is most familiar and comfortable for their athletes and community.

WARM-UP, STRETCHING, & COOL-DOWN

Each lesson includes a warm-up and a cool-down with ball mastery moves and stretches to help prepare athletes for movement and support recovery. Ball mastery helps athletes build confidence, control, and coordination, giving them the foundation needed to successfully participate and enjoy the game. While the same warm-up and cool-down may appear throughout the lessons to provide consistency and familiarity, coaches are encouraged to adapt and vary these activities based on their knowledge, experience, and the needs of their athletes. Coaches may introduce additional or alternative stretches as appropriate, ensuring all movements are safe, age-appropriate, and support the overall goals of the session. For further information on warm-up and cool-downs reference [Special Olympics High 5 Cards](#).

EQUIPMENT

While having one ball per child is ideal for maximizing participation and skill development, coaches may not always have access to this amount of equipment. In these cases, activities can be adapted by having children work in pairs or small groups, take turns, or rotate through stations to ensure all participants remain engaged. Coaches are encouraged to be flexible and creative, focusing on inclusion and active participation rather than perfect conditions. The goal is to provide meaningful movement experiences for every child, regardless of available resources.

LEVELING UP

In Junior Athletes, “Leveling Up” means moving from learning in a playful manner to practicing a skill in the way it’s used in the real sport. As children build confidence and control, they progress from basic movements to playing and applying those skills in team-style activities. It’s how athletes grow, step by step, toward playing the sport with others.

THE STEP FRAMEWORK:

A foundational coaching tool for Special Olympics programs worldwide

Junior Athletes provides a space for children of all abilities to be successful. In some cases, due to a range of athlete abilities and challenges, activities may need to be adapted so that all athletes can participate.

STEP is a simple, powerful coaching tool—widely used in adapted physical education—that helps make any activity more accessible, more challenging, or more inclusive, without needing to create an entirely separate activity. By adjusting one or more of its four elements, a coach, teacher, or parent can meet every athlete where they are. You do not need to change every part of STEP for each activity—use your best judgment to make thoughtful adjustments that support success and inclusion for all athletes, while always presuming competence and recognizing that every child is capable of learning, growing, and participating in meaningful ways.

S	SPACE	Should I change the SPACE? Move targets closer or farther, open or shrink the playing area, add visual boundary markers, adjust the height of the activity.
T	TASK	Should I change the TASK? Simplify instructions, allow a different movement pattern, adjust the rules, use a visual schedule or picture card, break skills into smaller parts.
E	EQUIPMENT	Should I change the EQUIPMENT? Use a softer, larger, lighter, brighter, or noisier ball or tool; introduce a ramp, handle extension, communication board, or sensory support.
P	PEOPLE	Should I change the PEOPLE arrangement? Adjust team size, assign a supportive role, bring in a peer buddy, reposition yourself, add demonstration, physical guidance, or verbal encouragement.

HOW TO USE STEP

When observing an athlete, ask: Is modification needed? If yes, is it to provide support or to create a challenge? Start with the most important STEP element and add others as needed. Most athletes who need adaptations benefit from adjustments across multiple elements. Start with the minimum change, observe, and adjust from there.

STEP is also an analysis tool: work through each element to assess performance. You do not always need to modify—coaches should also recognize when an athlete can succeed without changes, and provide verbal encouragement and support first.

STEP is for every coach and athlete. Novice coaches may follow it step-by-step. Experienced coaches use it more fluidly and instinctively. Both should stay flexible, focus on athlete success, and build confidence in making adjustments.

INCLUSIVE ADAPTATIONS

The following pages organize the Junior Athletes Inclusive Adaptations for football by category. Athletes may have a primary need, such as requiring an assistive device to walk. You can find that category below to quickly see how to adapt activities across all football lessons.

However, categories are not mutually exclusive. Many children have multiple needs at the same time. Therefore, combining adaptations from more than one category may be necessary to ensure they can participate in all activities.



SIX CATEGORIES

	Limited Mobility (LM): Athletes with limited or uncoordinated movement of their arms or legs; an athlete may use a wheelchair or stander for positioning and mobility.
	Assistive Device (AD): Athletes who are ambulatory with an assistive device (walker, crutches, cane, gait trainer) or wear a brace.
	Hard of Hearing (HOH): Athletes with difficulty hearing.
	Visual Impairment (VI): Athletes with difficulty seeing.
	Non-Verbal (NV): Athletes who have difficulty with oral communication; they may use sign language or a communication device.
	Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD): Some athletes may be overly sensitive to minor environmental stimuli (touch, sounds, etc.), while others may seek sensory stimulation, including movement.

Focus on what athletes CAN do and celebrate all participation!



KEY ADAPTATIONS: LIMITED MOBILITY (LM)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Use a balloon or lightweight ball; allow dribbling with any body part (hand, elbow, or foot)
- Allow seated dribbling or wheelchair propulsion while moving the ball across the space
- Shorten the distance across the field; allow a peer partner to assist with ball retrieval
- Permit rest stops at any point; allow athlete to pause and restart at their own pace

Look & Dribble

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights; allow dribbling any body part (hand, elbow, or foot)
- Allow seated dribbling or wheelchair propulsion while moving the ball across the space
- Shorten the distance across the field; allow a peer partner to assist with ball retrieval
- Simplify to one technique focus at a time, don't require athletes to look up

Coach Says

- Allow seated dribbling or wheelchair propulsion for all movement commands
- Reduce the number of active commands in play at one time
- Pair with a peer partner who can model each command; allow extra time to respond

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Allow passing with hands, rolling the ball, or nudging with a wheelchair footrest
- Reduce the size of the circle so distances are shorter
- Allow extra time to receive and redirect the ball
- Pair with a peer partner who can assist with ball control

Driver's Test

- Allow nudging the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Widen home base floor markers to accommodate wheelchairs or assistive devices
- Make the different dribbling challenges optional
- Pair with a peer partner who can assist with ball control

Dribbling in Space

- Allow nudging the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Reduce the playing area so distances are manageable
- Pair with a peer partner who can assist with ball control

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Shorten the kicking distance; increase the size of the target
- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Provide a peer partner for ball retrieval after each kick

Gate Pass

- Widen gates to accommodate wheelchair clearance
- Allow hand passes or rolling passes instead of kicks
- Reduce the distance between partners and gates
- Allow a peer partner to reposition the ball as needed

Pass to Score

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Reduce the required number of passes before shooting
- Shorten distances between players and to the goal
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval and support; enlarge the goal



KEY ADAPTATIONS: LIMITED MOBILITY (LM)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Allow the Treasure Keeper to use a wheelchair to shield the ball
- Allow the Sneaky Pirate to tap the ball rather than steal it in one motion
- Provide a peer partner to assist with ball repositioning between rounds

Defense Practice

- Allow the attacker to use hand dribbling or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Allow the defender to attach a pool noodle to a wheelchair to represent defending

Sharks & Minnows

- Allow Minnows to use hand dribbling or wheelchair propulsion to cross the field
- Allow Sharks to attach pool noodles to their wheelchair to tag Minnows
- Shorten the crossing distance
- Provide a peer partner to assist with navigation

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Allow athletes to perform adapted versions of all commands (hand dribble, wheelchair propulsion, seated stop)
- Skip or modify commands that are physically
- Allow extra time to respond to each command; do not require speed
- Pair with a peer partner who can model each command

Mini Matches

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Position cone goals at accessible distances
- Assign a peer partner to assist with ball retrieval and navigation

Shooting Showdown

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Shorten the shooting distance individually; increase the target size
- Allow extra turns or a personal scoring goal distinct from the group challenge
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval after each attempt

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Allow nudging the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Reduce the playing area so distances are manageable
- Pair with a peer partner who can assist with ball control

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Shorten the kicking distance; increase the size of the target
- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Provide a peer partner for ball retrieval after each kick

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Allow the Treasure Keeper to use a wheelchair to shield the ball
- Allow the Sneaky Pirate to tap the ball rather than steal it in one motion
- Provide a peer partner to assist with ball repositioning between rounds

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Allow seated kicking, hand kicks, or pushing the ball with a wheelchair footrest
- Shorten the shooting distance individually; increase the target size
- Allow extra turns or a personal scoring goal distinct from the group challenge
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval after each attempt



KEY ADAPTATIONS: ASSISTIVE DEVICES (AD)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Shorten the distance across the field; allow extra time to cross the space
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Pair with a peer partner for support and retrieval; allow rest stops as needed

Look & Dribble

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Shorten the distance between lines; allow extra time to cross the space
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Pair with a peer partner for support and ball retrieval; allow rest stops as needed

Coach Says

- Adapt movement commands to match device use
- Allow extra time to respond to each command
- Pair with a peer partner who can model adaptations for each command

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Change the circle size to allow for safe device navigation
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Allow extra time to receive, stabilize, and redirect the ball

Driver's Test

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Ensure clear pathways between floor markers; allow extra time for navigation
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Skip or modify challenges that require rapid direction changes
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval

Dribbling in Space

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Reduce the playing area; ensure wide clear pathways
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval and safety

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Shorten the kicking distance; increase the target size
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval

Gate Pass

- Widen the gates to allow for safe navigation
- Reduce the required number of passes before moving to the next gate

Pass to Score

- Allow use of device to move the ball
- Reduce the required number of passes before shooting
- Shorten distances between players and to the goal; enlarge the goal



KEY ADAPTATIONS: ASSISTIVE DEVICES (AD)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Allow the Treasure Keeper to use the assistive device to shield the ball
- Allow the Sneaky Pirate to tap the ball rather than take it in one motion
- Reduce role duration to allow more frequent, shorter turns
- Ensure safe spacing for the assistive device

Defense Practice

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Allow the attacker to use the assistive device to shield the ball
- Reduce the time to match the athlete's balance capacity

Sharks & Minnows

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide or steal the ball
- Ensure the crossing path is wide and obstacle-free

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Allow extra time between commands; skip commands that are unsafe when using a device
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval

Mini Matches

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Shorten the distance; increase the target size

Shooting Showdown

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Shorten the distance; increase the target size
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Offer different ball sizes, textures, and weights
- Allow the use of the assistive device to guide the ball
- Reduce the playing area; ensure wide clear pathways
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval and safety

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Shorten the kicking distance; increase the target size
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Allow the Treasure Keeper to use the assistive device to shield the ball
- Allow the Sneaky Pirate to tap the ball rather than take it in one motion
- Reduce role duration to allow more frequent, shorter turns
- Ensure safe spacing for the assistive device

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Offer different ball sizes and weights
- Shorten the distance; increase the target size
- Pair with a peer partner for support as needed and ball retrieval



KEY ADAPTATIONS: HARD OF HEARING (HOH)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Demonstrate the activity visually before starting; face the athlete when giving directions
- Check for understanding before proceeding

Look & Dribble

- Demonstrate each dribbling technique before starting
- Use large picture cards rather than verbal calls for the 'look up' cue

Coach Says

- Use large visual command cards alongside each verbal instruction
- Demonstrate each command physically before athletes attempt it
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Demonstrate the activity and animal gestures, not just animal sounds, before starting
- Use visual cards or gestures alongside animal noises for role prompts
- Ensure athletes can see the coach and all peers; position them in a clear sightline

Driver's Test

- Demonstrate each dribbling command before starting the activity
- Use large visual command cards alongside verbal calls
- Use a visual or light signal in addition to a whistle for freeze and go prompts
- Use a visual 'Drive Home' sign card rather than a verbal-only call
- Use gestural cues (hand signals, thumbs up) to indicate direction changes

Dribbling in Space

- Use Go and Stop signs or light signals for speed changes
- Demonstrate each speed level before play begins
- Use a visual card system with walk, jog, and run icons posted prominently
- Check that the athlete has seen and understood each signal before play continues

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Demonstrate the kick technique and target aim before starting
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use large, brightly colored, or lighted targets

Gate Pass

- Demonstrate the passing activity and all coaching cues visually before starting
- Use visual 'switch gate' cards or signals to indicate when to move to the next gate
- Ensure athletes have a clear sightline to the gates and the coach

Pass to Score

- Demonstrate the game sequence visually before starting; use numbered visual steps
- Use a picture-based visual chart to show the sequence: pass, pass, pass, shoot
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops



KEY ADAPTATIONS: HARD OF HEARING (HOH)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Demonstrate the Treasure Keeper and Sneaky Pirate roles visually before starting
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switches
- Use gesture-based coaching cues alongside verbal prompts

Defense Practice

- Demonstrate attacker and defender roles visually before starting
- Use a visual timer, Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops

Sharks & Minnows

- Demonstrate Shark and Minnow roles clearly before starting
- Use a visual timer, Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use brightly colored pinnies or hats to distinguish Sharks from Minnows
- Use a raised card to signal when eliminated Minnows join the Sharks

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Use large visual command cards alongside each verbal instruction and to signal discussion pauses
- Demonstrate each command physically
- Provide a written or picture-card version of the discussion questions

Mini Matches

- Demonstrate out-of-bounds and hands rules before play begins
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use visual cards to display guiding questions during coaching pauses
- Use brightly colored pinnies or vests to distinguish teams

Shooting Showdown

- Use a visual 'Go' sign or light signal to indicate each athlete's turn
- Demonstrate the "weaker foot" round visually before starting
- Use a team challenge sign with a visible tally

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Use Go and Stop signs or light signals for speed changes
- Demonstrate each speed level before play begins
- Use a visual card system with walk, jog, and run icons posted prominently
- Check that the athlete has seen and understood each signal before play continues

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Demonstrate the kick technique and target aim before starting
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use large, brightly colored, or lighted targets

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Demonstrate both the Treasure Keeper and Sneaky Pirate roles visually before starting
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Use gesture-based coaching cues alongside verbal prompts
- Signal role switches with a light flash or raised card

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Use a visual 'Go' sign or light signal to indicate each athlete's turn
- Demonstrate the "weaker foot" round visually before starting
- Use a team challenge sign with a visible tally



KEY ADAPTATIONS: VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (VI)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles to guide the direction of movement
- Give clear verbal cues before direction changes; allow extra time to orient
- Pair with a peer partner for navigation and ball retrieval support

Look & Dribble

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles or use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape to guide the direction of movement
- Replace the visual 'hold up fingers' cue with a verbal call-out challenge
- Pair with a peer partner for navigation and ball retrieval support

Coach Says

- Use clear verbal commands for all movement instructions
- Use a whistle, bell or horn to signal command changes
- Allow extra response time for each new command
- Pair with a peer partner who narrates the activity and helps with orientation

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Give clear verbal cue before each pass
- Reduce the circle size so distances are shorter and easier to track by sound
- Pair with a peer partner for navigation and ball retrieval support

Driver's Test

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls;
- Use textured or squeaky floor markers for home base
- Use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape to indicate the roadway
- Pair with a peer partner for navigation support

Dribbling in Space

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Use a whistle, bell or horn to signal command changes
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles or use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape to guide the direction of movement
- Pair with a peer partner for navigation support

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and sound-making cones or beeper at the target
- Give clear verbal cues before each kick
- Shorten the kicking distance; allow the athlete to touch the target before kicking
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval

Gate Pass

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and sound-making cones to mark the gate
- Allow athletes to touch each gate before and during play
- Give clear verbal cues for gate location before each pass
- Shorten distances as needed

Pass to Score

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and sound-making cones to mark the goal
- Shorten the distances or number of passes; give verbal cues for teammate location before each pass
- Allow the athlete to approach and touch the goal before shooting



KEY ADAPTATIONS: VISUAL IMPAIRMENT (VI)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Sneaky Pirates need to steal the ball with a pool noodle and give a verbal warning when approaching
- Reduce the role duration to shorter intervals for easier tracking
- Pair with a peer partner who provides verbal guidance

Defense Practice

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Give verbal cues for attacker direction before each round
- Use tactile guidance to help the athlete understand defensive body position
- Pair with a peer partner who provides verbal guidance

Sharks & Minnows

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles or use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape to guide the direction of movement
- Use verbal cues for Shark proximity; allow the athlete to stop and orient if needed

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls
- Use clear verbal commands for all instructions
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles or use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape to guide the direction of movement
- Pair with a peer partner who provides verbal guidance and orientation

Mini Matches

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and sound-making cones or beepers at the goal
- Use brightly colored pinnies or vests to distinguish teams
- Create tactile pathways with ropes or pool noodles or use high-contrast or tactile line markers or tape

Shooting Showdown

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and sound-making cones or beepers at the target
- Allow athletes to touch the target before shooting
- Shorten the shooting distance as needed
- Pair with a peer partner for retrieval and verbal feedback

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; use auditory signals for speed changes
- Create tactile boundaries at the station; pair with a peer partner for navigation

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Use sound-making targets; allow athlete to touch target before kicking
- Shorten distance; pair with a peer partner for retrieval

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Use a sound-making ball; give verbal cues for role changes
- Allow tactile awareness of ball and partner position

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Use beeper or sound-making cone targets; allow touch before shooting
- Shorten distance; pair with a peer partner for retrieval and verbal feedback
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval support



KEY ADAPTATIONS: NON-VERBAL (NV)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Demonstrate the activity visually before starting; face the athlete when giving directions
- Check for understanding before proceeding
- Do not require verbal participation; celebrate all forms of communication (gestures, eye gaze, vocalizations)
- Provide extra time for responses

Look & Dribble

- Demonstrate each dribbling technique before starting
- Use large picture cards with verbal calls to “look up”

Coach Says

- Use large visual command cards alongside each verbal instruction
- Demonstrate each command physically before athletes attempt it
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Demonstrate the activity and animal gestures, not just animal sounds, before starting
- Allow athlete to make any vocalization or gesture instead of an animal noise
- Use picture cards showing different sounds and animals that athletes can point to as their choice

Driver's Test

- Demonstrate each dribbling command before starting the activity
- Use large visual command cards alongside verbal calls
- Use a visual “Drive Home” sign card rather than a verbal-only call

Dribbling in Space

- Use Go and Stop signs or light signals for speed changes
- Allow the athlete to communicate readiness to change speed with a gesture or nod
- Use a visual card system with walk, jog, and run icons posted prominently

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Demonstrate the kick technique and target aim before starting
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Allow any gesture to communicate readiness for their next turn

Gate Pass

- Demonstrate the passing activity and all coaching cues visually before starting
- Use visual ‘switch gate’ cards or signals to indicate when to move to the next gate
- Celebrate any form of communication throughout

Pass to Score

- Demonstrate the game sequence visually before starting; use numbered visual steps
- Use a picture-based visual chart to show the sequence: pass, pass, pass, shoot
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Allow any form of communication to indicate readiness to shoot



KEY ADAPTATIONS: NON-VERBAL (NV)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Demonstrate the Treasure Keeper and Sneaky Pirate roles visually before starting
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Use gesture-based coaching cues alongside verbal prompts
- Signal role switches with a light flash or raised card

Defense Practice

- Demonstrate both roles fully before starting; use picture cards for attacker and defender
- Allow athlete to signal readiness to switch roles with a gesture or nod
- Use a visual timer for the 10-second shielding period
- Offer participation choices using pictures or objects

Sharks & Minnows

- Demonstrate Shark and Minnow roles clearly before starting
- Use a visual timer, Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use brightly colored pinnies or hats to distinguish Sharks from Minnows
- Use a raised card to signal when eliminated Minnows join the Sharks

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Use large visual command cards alongside each verbal instruction and to signal discussion pauses
- Demonstrate each command physically
- Provide a written or picture-card version of the discussion questions
- Celebrate all forms of communication

Mini Matches

- Demonstrate out-of-bounds and hands rules before play begins
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags, or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Use visual cards to display guiding questions during coaching pauses
- Use brightly colored pinnies or vests to distinguish teams

Shooting Showdown

- Use a visual 'Go' sign or light signal to indicate each athlete's turn
- Demonstrate the "weaker foot" round visually before starting
- Use a team challenge sign with a visible tally

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Use Go and Stop signs or light signals for speed changes
- Allow the athlete to communicate readiness to change speed with a gesture or nod
- Use a visual card system with walk, jog, and run icons posted prominently

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Demonstrate the kick technique and target aim before starting
- Use Go and Stop signs, flags or light signals to indicate starts and stops
- Allow any gesture to communicate readiness for their next turn

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Demonstrate the Treasure Keeper and Sneaky Pirate roles visually before starting
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Use gesture-based coaching cues alongside verbal prompts
- Signal role switches with a light flash or raised card

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Use a visual 'Go' sign or light signal to indicate each athlete's turn
- Demonstrate the "weaker foot" round visually before starting
- Use a team challenge sign with a visible tally



KEY ADAPTATIONS: SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)

LESSON 1: BASICS

Keep It Moving

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Provide verbal and visual countdowns for starting and ending
- Shorten the distance across the field
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Look & Dribble

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Limit the number of technique cues introduced at once; simplify to one focus at a time

Coach Says

- Use visual command cards to reduce auditory overload
- Simplify to fewer command options; allow extra response time for new commands
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Circle Share

- Use a textured or familiar ball; observe whether noise-based elements (animal sounds) are engaging or overwhelming, and adjust
- Reduce circle size as needed
- Give advance notice before it is the athlete's turn
- Allow fidget toys between turns if needed

Driver's Test

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use brightly colored or textured floor markers to designate personal space and home base
- Reduce the number of active dribbling challenges
- Use visual cards and timers to indicate activity and duration

Dribbling in Space

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use a visual countdown before each change
- Limit the number of balls in play to reduce visual and auditory stimulation
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

LESSON 3: PASSING

Power Kicks

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and targets; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Allow the athlete to set their own pace for retrieval and reset
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Gate Pass

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and gates; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use visual "switch gate" cards or signals to indicate when to move to the next gate
- Reduce the number of technique coaching cues given at one time
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Pass to Score

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and goals; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Reduce the distances or number of passes
- Limit the number of players involved; use smaller groups to reduce unpredictability
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed



KEY ADAPTATIONS: SENSORY PROCESSING DISORDER (SPD)

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Ball Defenders

- Use a familiar ball; observe whether the close physical proximity of the Sneaky Pirate is comfortable and adjust spacing
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Defense Practice

- Use a familiar ball; observe whether the physical proximity during defense is comfortable; adjust spacing
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Sharks & Minnows

- Observe whether the physical proximity of others is comfortable, adjust accordingly
- Use brightly colored pinnies to distinguish Sharks from Minnows; limit the number of Sharks in play
- Use a visual "Go" card with advance countdown before each crossing round
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Coach Says

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use visual command cards; reduce the pace of command changes
- Provide a written or picture-card version of the discussion questions
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys between commands

Mini Matches

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use brightly colored pinnies to distinguish teams; limit the number of players in each mini game
- Use a visual countdown timer for each round
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Shooting Showdown

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and targets; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Reduce the number of cones in play at once if multiple targets are overwhelming
- Use a visual turn-taking card and a countdown timer
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE

Station 1: Dribbling in Space

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Use a visual countdown before each change
- Limit the number of balls in play to reduce visual and auditory stimulation
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Station 2: Power Kicks

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and targets; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Allow the athlete to set their own pace for retrieval and reset
- Pair with a peer partner for ball retrieval
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Station 3: Ball Defenders

- Use a familiar ball; observe whether the close physical proximity of the Sneaky Pirate is comfortable and adjust spacing
- Use a visual timer, card, or light signal for role switch
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

Station 4: Shooting Showdown

- Use bright, glowing, or sound-making balls and targets; adjust stimulation level to the athlete's sensitivity
- Reduce the number of cones in play at once if multiple targets are overwhelming
- Use a visual turn-taking card and a countdown timer
- Designate a rest zone; allow fidget toys when needed

ABOUT FOOTBALL

Football is an invasion game. It is a team sport played with a round ball. Each team has 11 athletes, and they use their feet to kick and move the ball around the field. The goal of the game is to kick the ball into the other team's goal to score points. The team with the most goals at the end wins.



BUILDING FOOTBALL SKILLS

Learning to kick, pass, and dribble helps athletes control the ball and work together as a team. These skills are the foundation of playing football and make every game more fun. As athletes practice, they build confidence, coordination, and teamwork on the field.

BASIC RULES

As you progress in teaching kicking, passing, and dribbling, begin to incorporate the basic rules of football as skills begin to advance:

- You can kick, pass, or dribble the ball with your feet.
- The ball must stay within the pitch boundaries to be in play.
- When the opposing team has possession of the ball, try to win the ball back.
- You must always listen to the referee and follow their directions.
- Be a good teammate and show good sportsmanship.



CONNECTING TO SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES

The sport skills align with the categories of walking & running, balance & jumping, trapping & catching, throwing, striking, and kicking. Coaches who are familiar with the Young Athletes program will notice that the core gross motor skills taught there are continued and further developed in the Junior Athletes program. If you have athletes who need a little extra practice, reference the skill in Young Athletes for more skills, games, and activities. [Click here](#) or scan the code to access the Young Athletes Activity Guide.



LESSON 1: BASICS

Learning how to dribble, or kicking the ball with control to move around the field, is an important skill in football. When you or your team has possession of the ball, you can score. When you do not, you cannot score.



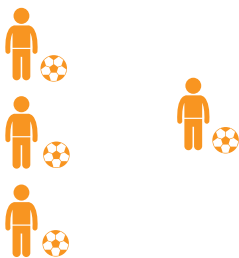
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE “KICK” LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the “leader” and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

The warm-ups and cool-downs will be the same for each lesson in football.

SKILL: KEEP IT MOVING

Equipment

- Balloon or lightweight ball for each athlete

Setup

Athletes stand with a balloon or lightweight ball.



Instructions:

- Athletes all start on one side of the space.
- Athletes kick the ball until it reaches the other side.
- Focus on staying in control of the ball.
- Repeat going in the other direction.

Coaching Tip:

- Practice using soft feet like in the warm-up.
- Encourage athletes to keep the ball close to their feet at all times while dribbling.
- To increase engagement of athletes, switch up instructions by adding cones, making the activity a relay race, or change the direction the athletes are moving.

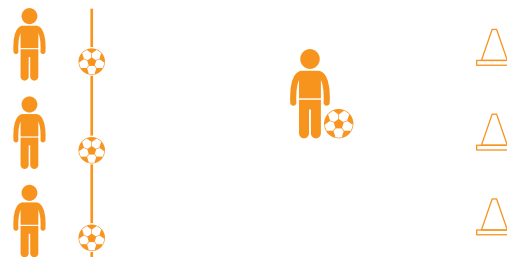
LEVEL UP: LOOK & DRIBBLE

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes stand with a ball on the line watching the coach.



Instructions:

- Each athlete starts with a ball on a line.
- They practice dribbling the ball from one line to the other.
- Each time they cross the field remind them to focus on a different technique to focus on:
 - » Use the inside and outside of the foot to control the ball.
 - » Keep the ball close to the feet while moving.
 - » Keep eyes up to be aware of surroundings.
- After practicing each technique, start to hold up fingers on the opposite side of the field to remind them to keep looking up (have athletes call out what number they see).
- Make it even more fun by printing off silly pictures of animals or characters and holding them up as motivation to look up!
- For an extra challenge encourage athletes to dribble around cones.

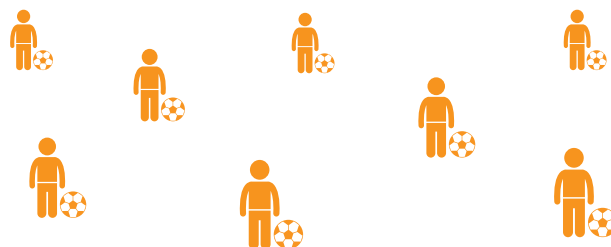
GAME: COACH SAYS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Athletes each stand with a ball, spread out around the field.



Instructions:

- Athletes start by dribbling around the field, while staying in control of the ball.
- Every 30 seconds, call out a different movement that they need to do:
 - » Fast
 - » Stop (foot on the ball)
 - » Slow
 - » With hands straight out from your body
 - » While singing a song out loud (or in your head)
 - » Personal bubble (do not get within 5 feet of anyone)
 - » Zigzag
 - » Switch balls with someone

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:
Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:
Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:
Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have athletes think about this question and encourage a few to share or demonstrate—
“What are some important things to remember when dribbling the ball?”

LESSON 2: DRIBBLING

Dribbling builds confidence, allows athletes to move into space, keep control under pressure, and opens opportunities to pass or score.



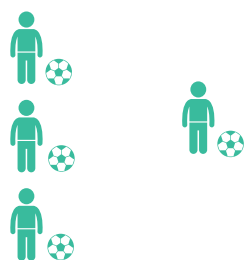
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE “KICK” LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the “leader” and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Pick a skill or game to review from the previous lesson to help remind athletes what they have been working on!

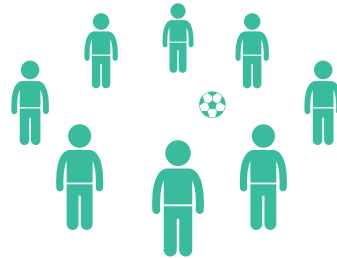
SKILL: CIRCLE SHARE

Equipment

- Ball for each group

Setup

Athletes stand together in a circle, with one ball



Instructions:

- Athletes stand in a circle with one athlete starting with the ball.
- Athletes move the ball by dribbling to the center, then passing the ball to another athlete while making a silly noise such as an animal noise.
- The athlete who received the ball repeats the animal noise and makes up their own before passing to someone else.
- Remind athletes to kick with the inside of their foot.

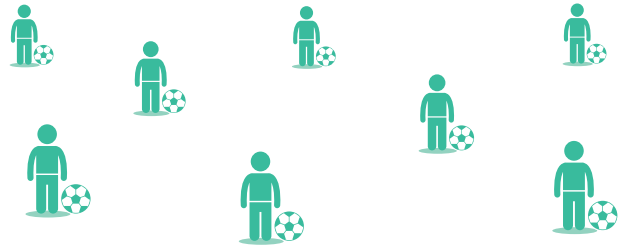
LEVEL UP: DRIVER'S TEST

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Floor markers
- Whistle (or similar)

Setup

Spread floor markers out throughout the space. Athletes stand on a floor marker with a ball.



Instructions:

- Give each athlete a ball and a "home base" floor marker.
- On "Go," athletes dribble their ball using the inside of the foot while moving around the space.
- Athletes keep their heads up and watch for other athletes as they move.
- When the whistle blows, athletes freeze with their ball and listen. Coach calls out how to continue dribbling (fast, slow, robot, etc.)
- When the coach says "Drive home," athletes dribble back to their home base as fast as they can.
- Additional Challenges:
 - » Move in different pathways: zig-zag, loop, straight.
 - » Change speed: slow, medium, fast.
 - » Change direction on the signal: left, right, backwards.
 - » Circle as many floor markers as you can in 1 minute.

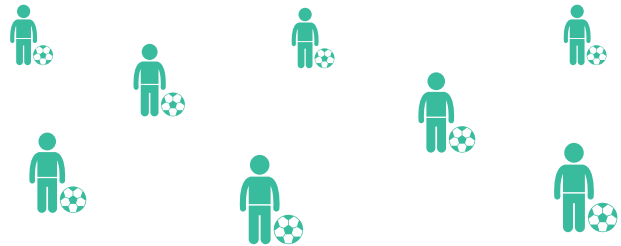
GAME: DRIBBLING IN SPACE

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Boundaries (lines or cones)

Setup

Athletes each stand with a ball, spread out around the field.



Instructions:

- Each athlete starts with a ball
- When the whistle is blown or hand is clapped or some signal is done, athletes walk and dribble the ball.
- When the signal is done again, athletes start to jog while dribbling.
- When the signal is done again, they run and dribble the ball.
- Repeat as many times as you would like.
- Additional game:
 - » Freeze Dribble: Athletes dribble the ball and when the coach yells freeze, athletes must stop the ball and put their foot on top of it

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:
Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:
Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:
Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have the athletes answer the question: "Why is it important to know where your teammates are on the field?"

LESSON 3: PASSING

Passing is one of the most important skills in football because it helps athletes work together as a team. When athletes pass the ball, they move it faster than they could by dribbling alone, helping them keep control, find open space, and create chances to score.



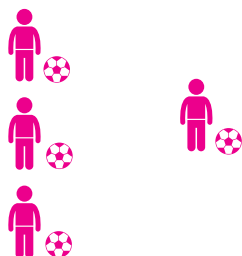
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE “KICK” LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the “leader” and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Pick a skill or game to review from the previous lesson to help remind athletes what they have been working on!

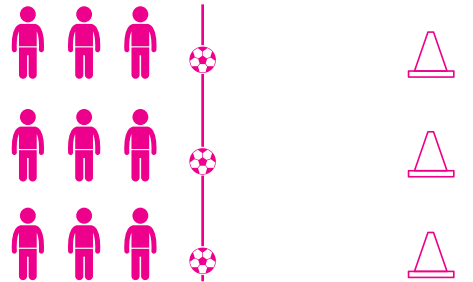
SKILL: POWER KICKS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Target (cone, net, etc.)

Setup

Each athlete has a ball and stands on a line. A target is placed 10-15 feet in front of each athlete.



Instructions:

- Athletes take a big step, swing their leg, and give the ball a strong, smooth kick.
- Watch where it goes and aim for a target, like a cone or net.
- After each kick, athletes run to their ball, bring it back, and try again!
- Once everyone has gone once or twice, give point values to different cones, athletes can practice their math skills and add up their points!

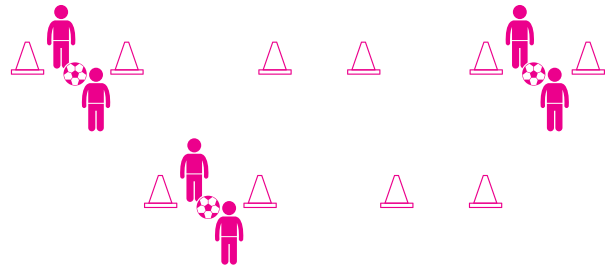
LEVEL UP: GATE PASS

Equipment

- Ball for each pair of athletes
- Cones (to make "gates")

Setup

Set up "gates" around the space with two cones placed 3 feet apart for each gate. Each pair of athletes share a ball and a gate.



Instructions:

- Athletes pass the ball back and forth through the gate.
- After 3 good passes, athletes move to a new gate and try again.
- Remind athletes to:
 - » Use the inside of their foot to pass.
 - » Aim for the middle of the gate.
 - » Stop the ball first if needed, then pass.
 - » Look up to find the next gate.

Coaching Tips:

- Make it more fun by calling out:
 - » "Find a new game!" (switch every time)
 - » "Back up 2 steps!" (harder)
 - » "Try your other foot." (challenging)

GAME: PASS TO SCORE

Equipment

- Ball for each group
- Goals (nets or cones)

Setup

Set up a goal with cones or net, and divide athletes into groups of three with one ball per group.



Instructions:

- Athletes can't run with the ball—they must pass to their teammates.
- Everyone must touch the ball before shooting.
- When a team makes 3 passes, they've "unlocked the castle" and can now shoot at the goal.
- After Each Turn:
 - » Whether a team scores or misses, athletes cheer together.
 - » Then, let the next team take their turn.

Coaching Tip:

- If space allows, set up 2–3 castles so everyone keeps playing.

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have the athletes answer the question: "When you passed today, what helped your partner the most: passing softly, aiming for their feet, or talking to them—and why?"

LESSON 4: DEFENSE

Defense helps a team protect their goal and stop the other team from scoring. Good defenders use quick thinking, teamwork, and strong positioning to keep the ball away from danger.



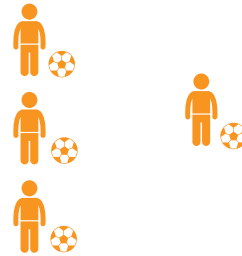
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE “KICK” LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the “leader” and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Pick a skill or game to review from the previous lesson to help remind athletes what they have been working on!

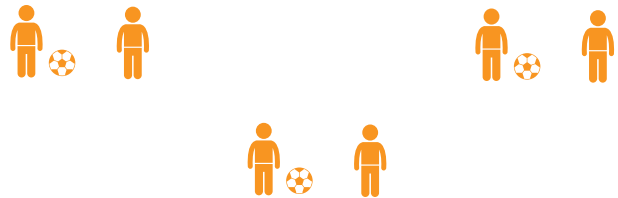
SKILL: BALL DEFENDERS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Each pair of athletes shares one ball. One athlete is the Treasure Keeper (with the ball), the other is the Sneaky Pirate (trying to steal).



Instructions:

- The Treasure Keeper tries to protect their treasure (the ball) by keeping it close and using their body as a shield.
- The Sneaky Pirates try to gently steal the ball away from anyone who is a treasure keeper.
- Switch roles after 10–15 seconds so everyone gets a turn.

Coaching Tips:

- Use the following coaching cues:
 - » "Keep your treasure close."
 - » "Use your body like a wall."
 - » "Eyes up—look for pirates!"
 - » Celebrate effort: "Great guarding!" "Awesome pirate sneaks!"
 - » Sportsmanship Reminder: "Pirates must be gentle, no pushing."
 - » Celebrate both roles equally—"Guarding and Sneaking are both part of the fun!"

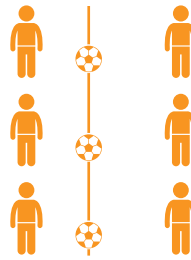
LEVEL UP: DEFENSE PRACTICE

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Athletes stand facing a partner with one ball; one athlete is the attacker (dribbler) and the other is the defender.



Instructions:

- Athletes pair up, one as an attacker (dribbler) and one as a defender.
- The attacker tries to shield the ball for 10 seconds without losing control.
- Rotate roles after each round

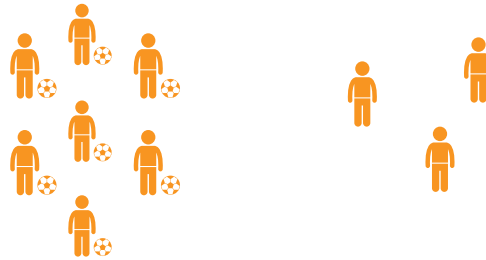
GAME: SHARKS & MINNOWS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Most athletes are the "minnows" and start with a ball on one side of the field. 2–3 athletes are the "sharks" and start in the middle without a ball.



Instructions:

- Coach calls out: "Minnows, swim across!"
- Minnows dribble their ball (keeping it close) to the other side.
- Sharks try to steal or tap the balls away.
- If a Minnow loses their ball, they join the Sharks in the middle for the next round.
- Keep going until only 1 Minnow remains, the winning Minnow!

Coaching Tips:

- Give Minnows silly movements to try (tiny kicks, giant kicks, hopping on one foot).
- Sharks celebrate every steal with a big "chomp!" motion.

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have the athletes answer the question: "What do you think is more important: offense (passing and shooting) or defense (blocking or stopping the ball)? Why?"

LESSON 5: RULES & STRATEGY

Teaching rules and strategy helps athletes understand how the game works and how to play safely and fairly. When athletes know the rules, they can focus on having fun while respecting their teammates and opponents.



Learning simple strategies—like where to move, when to pass, or how to defend—helps athletes think ahead, make smart choices, and work together as a team. In Junior Athletes, this builds confidence and sets the foundation for playing real games later on.

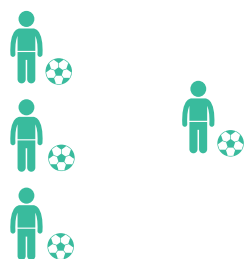
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE “KICK” LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the “leader” and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

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Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Pick a skill or game to review from the previous lesson to help remind athletes what they have been working on!

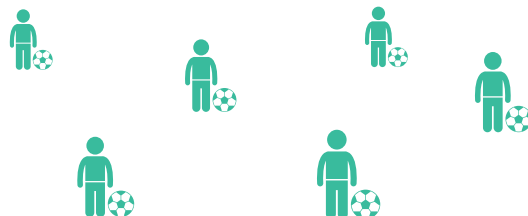
SKILL: COACH SAYS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Athletes spread out with a football, watching the coach



Instructions:

- Each athlete needs a football and clear boundaries.
- The coach calls out different cues and the athletes complete the directions.
- Some of the instructions will be against the rules of the game.
- The coach stops and quickly discusses after each.
- Coaching cues:
 - » Dribble the ball for 10 seconds.
 - » Stop the ball (put your foot on top of it).
 - » Pick up the ball with your hands.
(For discussion: Can you do that? Only goal keepers can touch it with their hands.)
 - » Dribble the ball while looking down at the ball.
(For discussion: Is this a good technique? No!)
 - » Dribble the ball while looking up.
 - » Dribble the ball and stand next to a partner.
 - » Take a few steps back and pass the balls to each other.
 - » Dribble the ball out of bounds.
(For discussion: What happens when the ball goes out of bounds?)
 - » Practice throwing the ball in bounds. Then dribble quickly and in control.
(This is a time that an athletes can use their hands and hold the ball over their head with both feet on the ground and throw it in.)
 - » Dribble and shoot at the goal (if you have nets or goals set up).

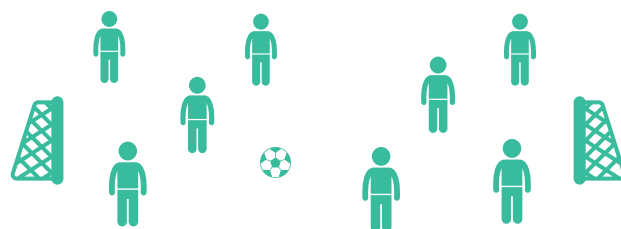
LEVEL UP: MINI MATCHES

Equipment

- Ball for each game
- Goals (nets or cones)

Setup

Set up two goals (nets or cones) on either side of the field; if space allows, set up two to three additional fields so athletes get more playing time



Instructions:

- Begin with 2v2 or 3v3 games in a small area.
- No goal keepers at first—just dribble and kick to score in goals.
- Keep rounds short (2–3 minutes) so kids stay engaged.

Coaching Tips:

- Encourage teamwork and fair play.
- Pause play briefly to ask guiding questions:
 - » What is the goal of the game?
 - » Where can you use your hands and where can you not?
 - » What happens when the ball goes out of bounds?

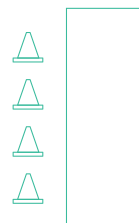
GAME: SHOOTING SHOWDOWN

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Goals (nets or cones)
- Targets (cones or plastic bottles)

Setup

Line up 4–6 cones (or plastic bottles) as “targets.” Place them inside or in front of a goal. Each athlete has a ball.



Instructions:

- Athletes take turns kicking their ball, trying to knock over the cones.
- After shooting, they retrieve their ball and go to the back of the line.
- Keep cheering each try—celebrate every cone that falls!
- Add a “super kick” round where everyone tries with their weaker foot.
- Team challenge: “Can we knock them all down together in 10 kicks?”

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have the athletes answer these questions: "What are the basic rules of football? How would you describe it to someone who has never played?"

LESSON 6: SKILLS SHOWCASE



An end-of-session Junior Athletes Skills Showcase is a joyful celebration of growth, effort, and teamwork. It gives participants a chance to show what they've learned—from dribbling and passing to confidence and sportsmanship—in a fun, supportive setting. For families, it's a moment to see their child shine, cheer them on, and celebrate their progress together. The showcase builds pride, connection, and excitement for continuing in sports, turning learning into a shared, memorable experience for everyone.

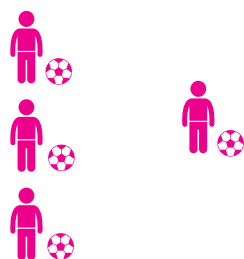
WARM-UP 1: FOLLOW THE "KICK" LEADER

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Optional: cones

Setup

Athletes each have a ball. One is the leader.



Instructions:

- One athlete is the "leader" and dribbles the ball in silly ways (tiny taps, sideways). The rest copy.
- One athlete is the leader at a time.
- Switch leaders until everyone has a turn.

Coaching Tip:

- Athletes should be dribbling into an open side of the field or gym where there are no other participants.

WARM-UP 2

Ball Mastery Moves



Roll and Reach:

Athletes sit or stand and gently roll the ball forward with their hands. Then roll it back.



Toe Touch Taps:

Athletes tap the top of the ball gently with one foot, then the other, and keep switching.



Side Roll:

Athletes stand with the ball at their feet. They roll it side to side using the inside of their feet.

Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Pick a skill or game to review from the previous lesson to help remind athletes what they have been working on!

Note:

- The showcase is designed to have 4 stations going simultaneously. Set up all 4 stations and divide athletes into 4 groups to rotate through all stations in the time allotted.

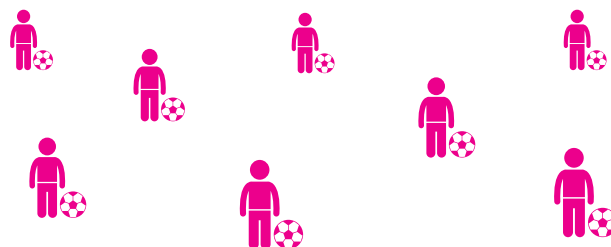
SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 1: DRIBBLING IN SPACE

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Boundaries (lines or cones)

Setup

Athletes each stand with a ball, spread out around the field.



Instructions:

- Each athlete starts with a ball
- When the whistle is blown or hand is clapped or some signal is done, athletes walk and dribble the ball.
- When the signal is done again, athletes start to jog while dribbling.
- When the signal is done again, they run and dribble the ball.
- Repeat as many times as you would like.
- Additional game:
 - » Freeze Dribble: Athletes dribble the ball and when the coach yells freeze, athletes must stop the ball and put their foot on top of it

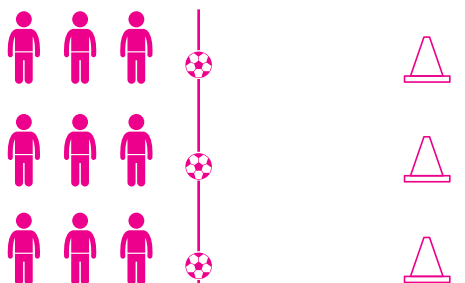
SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 2: POWER KICKS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Target (cone, net, etc.)

Setup

Each athlete has a ball and stands on a line. A target is placed 10-15 feet in front of each athlete.



Instructions:

- Athletes take a big step, swing their leg, and give the ball a strong, smooth kick.
- Watch where it goes and aim for a target, like a cone or net.
- After each kick, athletes run to their ball, bring it back, and try again!
- Once everyone has gone once or twice, give point values to different cones, athletes can practice their math skills and add up their points!

SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 3: BALL DEFENDERS

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete

Setup

Each pair of athletes shares one ball. One athlete is the Treasure Keeper (with the ball), the other is the Sneaky Pirate (trying to steal).



Instructions:

- The Treasure Keeper tries to protect their treasure (the ball) by keeping it close and using their body as a shield.
- The Sneaky Pirates try to gently steal the ball away from anyone who is a treasure keeper.
- Switch roles after 10–15 seconds so everyone gets a turn.

Coaching Tips:

- Use the following coaching cues:
 - » "Keep your treasure close."
 - » "Use your body like a wall."
 - » "Eyes up—look for pirates!"
 - » Celebrate effort: "Great guarding!" "Awesome pirate sneaks!"
 - » Sportsmanship Reminder: "Pirates must be gentle, no pushing."
 - » Celebrate both roles equally—"Guarding and Sneaking are both part of the fun!"

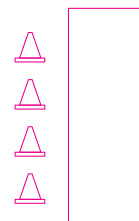
SKILLS SHOWCASE STATION 4: SHOOTING SHOWDOWN

Equipment

- Ball for each athlete
- Goals (nets or cones)
- Targets (cones or plastic bottles)

Setup

Line up 4–6 cones (or plastic bottles) as “targets.” Place them inside or in front of a goal. Each athlete has a ball.



Instructions:

- Athletes take turns kicking their ball, trying to knock over the cones.
- After shooting, they retrieve their ball and go to the back of the line.
- Keep cheering each try—celebrate every cone that falls!
- Add a “super kick” round where everyone tries with their weaker foot.
- Team challenge: “Can we knock them all down together in 10 kicks?”

COOL-DOWN SUGGESTIONS

Ball Mastery Moves



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Side Roll:

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Coaching Tip:

- Remind athletes to use soft feet, use easy taps with the foot, and keep their bodies under control

Stretches



Lunge Stretch



Triceps Stretch



Seated Hamstring Stretch



Butterfly Stretch

Reflection:

Have the athletes answer the questions: "What was something you are proud of from this football unit? What is something you are excited to keep practicing?"

WRAPPING UP THE SKILLS SHOWCASE

Thank you for your dedication to the Junior Athletes program.

As you close out the Skills Showcase, be sure to highlight the next steps in your participants' Special Olympics journey. Junior Athletes is a multi-sport experience designed to introduce children to a variety of activities—not just one sport. Use this moment to inspire families and help them see what comes next. Here are some ideas to help you plan:

- **Promote What's Next:**

What sport will your Junior Athletes learn about next? Create a simple way for parents to sign up or learn more—whether it's a flyer, a sign-up sheet, or a QR code linked to more info. Don't forget to collect emails if you don't already have them!

- **Celebrate Every Athlete:**

Hand out certificates to recognize each child's achievement. Take photos to send to families as a fun and meaningful wrap-up.

- **Recognize All Pathways:**

Congratulate every athlete and share that while some may continue with Junior Athletes, others might be ready for competitive play—and no matter what, there's a place for everyone in Special Olympics.

- **Invite a Local Program Staff Member:**

Having someone available to answer questions about area teams, how to start competing, or how to get involved can make a big difference for families.

- **Include a Guest Athlete Speaker:**

Invite a Special Olympics athlete to speak about their own journey. Hearing firsthand experiences can help parents understand the possibilities for their child's future in the program.



Special Olympics
Junior Athletes

CERTIFICATE OF ACHIEVEMENT

PRESENTED TO:

FOR:

CONGRATULATIONS ON A FANTASTIC SEASON!

COACH'S SIGNATURE

COACH'S SIGNATURE



Special Olympics
Health
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