



Gozzie's Soccer Handbook

A Players' & Parents' Guide

Beta Version 1.0 - Under-8 Soccer Program

And Ward Pty Ltd

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Welcome from

Hi! I'm Gozzie.



Welcome to your soccer handbook.

This book is for **you**.

Use it when you want to know what the coach is saying. Use it when you want to remember what to do at training. Use it when something happens in a game and you want to figure out what just happened.

Every page tells you about one thing. Look it up when you need it. Or read the whole book if you want.

I'll be here helping you out. So will the coach.

Let's play.

Welcome — For Parents

Gozzie's Soccer Handbook · Beta v1.0

This handbook is the team's shared playbook. It explains how we play — in language your child can read — with notes for you on every spread so you can support them at home and on the sideline.

Every concept spread has two facing pages: a page for your child (left) and a page for you (right). Same concept, two audiences.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND INSIDE

Kid pages (left)

What the concept is, what it looks like, what to do.

Parent pages (right)

Why it matters, how to spot it, how to reinforce it, what to say.

THE GOAL

Shared language. When the coach says something during a game, you'll know what it means. When your child does something at training, you'll know how to recognise it. This handbook turns the team into a community speaking the same words.

HOW TO USE IT

There's no curriculum here — just reference. Dip in when you need it. Read it together. Look up the concept that came up at the last game. The most useful pages for you are the **Coach Cues Dictionary** and **Parent Quick Tips** at the back. Start there if you want a fast overview.

ONE ASK

Trust the coach. Your job at games is to recognise good moments *after* they happen — not to coach from the sideline. This handbook gives you the language to do that well.

Thanks for being part of the team.

Use this handbook like any reference book — dip in when you need it.

There's no right way. Use it however helps you.



GOZZIE SAYS:

"Look it up when you need it. Or read the whole thing. Up to you."

● WHEN SOMETHING HAPPENS AT TRAINING OR IN A GAME

Look it up. Find the page that fits the moment:

- Coach yelled something you didn't understand? → **Coach Cues** at the back
- Something went wrong with the ball? → **Control the Ball / Hold**
- Team lost the ball or won it back? → **The Moments** pages
- Teammate did something cool? → **Make It Yours / Teach**

● WHEN TO READ

- At home, after training, before bed
- Before a game (a quick look)
- In the car on the way to soccer
- Whenever you want!

● HOW EACH PAGE WORKS

- **What it is** — the simple idea
- **What it looks like** — what to look for
- **When to do it** — the right moment
- **Your move** — what to do, step by step

The pages marked *"For Parents"* are for the grown-ups. You can read them too if you want!

THE STRUCTURE

Front matter: welcome, how to use, meet the team, how we play, what we practise

Concept spreads: 12 concepts, each on a facing spread — kid left + parent right

Back matter: Coach Cues Dictionary, Quick Reference Card, Words to Know, Parent Quick Tips

WHEN TO USE WHICH SECTION

- Heard a coach call you didn't recognise? → **Coach Cues Dictionary**
- Need the team's whole approach at a glance? → **Quick Reference Card**
- Forgot what a soccer term means? → **Words to Know**
- Want to be a better sideline parent today? → **Parent Quick Tips**

A QUICK WAY IN

1. **Welcome** (you've read this) — why the book exists
2. **How we play** (next spread) — the philosophy in two pages
3. **Parent Quick Tips** (back of book) — the practical summary
4. Then explore concept spreads as they come up at training or games

A reading suggestion: Read a concept spread out loud with your child. Take the left page; let them comment. Then read the right page silently to yourself. End with: *"What do you think about this one?"*

Meet the Team

The players you'll see throughout this book.



Gozzie

Your guide. Always ready to learn something new.



Sam

Steady. Good at the basics. The teammate you want next to you.



Pip

Fast. Loves running into space. When Pip moves, the team moves.



Liv

Clever. Sees gaps and runs other players don't. Watch her off the ball.

The team wears blue. You'll spot them in every spread — watch for what they do!

Meet the Team

And the coach, and the other team.



Tess

Brave. Runs at the ball and gets stuck in. Goes first when needed.



Will

New to the team. Learning every week. That's how we all get stronger.



The Coach

Calls out cues from the sideline. Their words are in the back of this book.



Other Team

They play in red. Not the enemy — just the other side, doing the same things we do.

Good soccer means respecting the other team.

Here's our team in a nutshell.



GOZZIE SAYS:

"This is everything. One page. Our whole way of playing."

1 We control the ball.

Not just by kicking it. By controlling our bodies, the space, the other players, and the pace of the game.

2 We come together when they have it.

When the other team has the ball, we run together to take it back.

3 We spread apart when we have it.

When we have the ball, we make the field big. Wide. Deep. Open.

4 We attack, defend, and hold.

Three modes. We choose the right one for the moment.

5 We notice the four moments.

We have it, we just lost it, they have it, we just won it. The whole game fits inside those four moments.

6 We learn new skills together.

We watch, we do something once, we do it three times in a row, we make it our own, we collect more skills, we combine them, we teach what we know.

7 We master the basics.

We master the ball, first touch, dribbling, passing, receiving under pressure, and shooting. We master the field with defensive positioning, tackling and winning the ball, spatial awareness, movement off the ball, communication, and decision making.

For Parents — The Team's Whole Approach

THE FOUNDATION: CONTROL

Everything starts with control — not just of the ball, but of your body, space, other players, and the pace of the game.

THE TWO MOVEMENTS

When the other team has the ball → the team **comes together** — converges, presses as a unit, wins the ball back. Coach calls "**Converge!**"

When our team has the ball → the team **spreads apart** — uses the full field, finds passing options, stretches the opposition. Coach calls "**Space!**"

THE THREE MODES

Attack — forward energy toward the opposition goal · **Defend** — getting back, organising, protecting our goal · **Hold** — brave stillness, the choice point between attack and defend

THE FOUR MOMENTS

We have it — in possession, building · **We just lost it** — defensive transition, react fast · **They have it** — organised defending · **We just won it** — offensive transition, go fast

The transitions are where most goals are scored — for and against.

The thread running through everything: **Control the Ball**. We control the ball by controlling ourselves, the space, the other players, the pace — and then, through all of that, the ball itself.

The 12 things we work on at training.



GOZZIE SAYS:

"You don't have to be good at all of them right away. Just keep practising."

#	Skill	What it is
1	Ball Mastery	Lots of touches with both feet — the feel for the ball
2	First Touch	Bringing the ball under control when it comes to you
3	Dribbling	Moving with the ball, going past players
4	Passing	Getting the ball to a teammate
5	Receiving Under Pressure	Staying calm when other players are close
6	Shooting	Striking the ball at goal
7	Defensive Positioning	Standing in the right spot to defend
8	Making Space	Being useful without the ball — finding the gaps
9	Spatial Awareness	Knowing what's happening around you
10	Movement Off the Ball	Running into space when you don't have the ball
11	Communication	Talking to your team
12	Decision-Making	Choosing the right thing to do

These 12 skills are the foundation of soccer at every level — junior to elite. The concepts in this handbook teach your child how to *think* about the game; these skills make the concepts real.

HOW EACH SKILL MATTERS

1. **Ball Mastery** — the foundation; without it nothing else lands
2. **First Touch** — decides what's possible next
3. **Dribbling** — the courage to take the ball forward
4. **Passing** — football is a connection game; passing is the connection
5. **Receiving Under Pressure** — composure when it counts
6. **Shooting** — the joy of finishing
7. **Defensive Positioning** — defending starts before tackling
8. **Making Space** — the intelligence of being useful without the ball
9. **Spatial Awareness** — the foundations sit underneath everything
10. **Movement Off the Ball** — most of soccer happens without the ball
11. **Communication** — the team's connective tissue
12. **Decision-Making** — the meta-skill that integrates the other 11

HOW TO SUPPORT AT HOME

- Pick 1–2 skills to gently focus on at a time. Rotate every few weeks.
- Practise the foundations at home: ball mastery (toe taps), passing against a wall, dribbling around chairs in the backyard.
- Let your child lead — ask: "*Which one do you want to work on this week?*"
- Notice progress — even small wins. Praise the moment.

WATCH OUT FOR

- Comparing your child's skills to other kids' skills.
- Focusing only on the "exciting" skills — shooting and dribbling get highlights; communication and spatial awareness change games.
- Skipping the foundation — Ball Mastery is boring. It's also the most important.

Control the Ball



More than just kicking it!



● WHAT IT IS

Controlling the ball is more than just kicking it. It's controlling **everything** — your body, your space, the other players, the pace of the game.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- You control **YOUR BODY** — calm, balanced, head up
- You control **THE SPACE** — you know where the gaps are
- You control **THE PACE** — slow to think, fast to go
- You control **THE BALL** — your touch, your pass, your shot

● WHEN TO DO IT

All the time. Even when the ball isn't at your feet — you're always controlling something.

● YOUR MOVE

1. **Stop** — settle the ball
2. **Look** — eyes up
3. **Choose** — pick your pass, run, or shot
4. **Act** — make it happen

Calm head. Eyes up. Choose.

Control the Ball

— For Parents

MEANING

Controlling the ball is **whole-system control** — body, space, other players, pace, and through all of that, the ball itself. The ball is the end result; the control is everything that produces it.

IS NOT

- Just kicking the ball
- Only what the player with the ball does
- A skill for one player alone

IS

- Every player controlling their part
- Body, position, space, pace
- The foundation every concept depends on

WHY THIS MATTERS

A player who can settle the ball, look up, and choose what to do next makes good decisions. The deeper teaching: control isn't just about *the ball* — it's about *the whole game*. When your child understands they're always controlling something — their body, the space, the pace — they stop being a passenger and start being a driver.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- Does your child stop or settle the ball before doing anything with it?
- Does their head come up when they get the ball?
- When they don't have the ball, do they look engaged — moving, scanning, positioning?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the **moment of control**, not just the kick. "Nice control" is more useful than "Good kick."
- Praise off-ball play: "I saw you moving when Sam had the ball — well done."
- Play "soft pass and control" at home: pass gently, let them stop it, look up, then pass back.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice control.*
- " • *Eyes up — good.*
- " • *Good off-ball — you were ready.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- The urge to yell instructions during games — the coach handles in-game coaching.
- Only watching the player with the ball. Watch the players *without* the ball too.

Come Together



Together we take it back!



Coach Call: "Converge!"

● WHAT IT IS

Coming together is when the whole team runs to the ball as one. We close down space and make it hard for the other team to do anything.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- The closest player goes first
- The next closest comes to support
- Two or three of us press together
- The other team has less time, less space, less choice

● WHEN TO DO IT

When the other team has the ball — especially when they look unsure. Don't wait. Run together.

● YOUR MOVE

1. See the ball
2. Run hard toward it
3. Press together (not alone)
4. Win it back

Run together. Press together. Win together.

Come Together

— For Parents

MEANING

Coming together is the team converging on the ball as a unit when the other team has possession. The goal is to compress the opposition's time and space until they make a mistake.

IS NOT

- Chasing the ball as a single player
- Standing and watching while one kid runs

IS

- Multiple players closing the ball-carrier together
- Coordinated team pressure
- A team action, not individual

WHY THIS MATTERS

At under-8, the default defending instinct is either to chase the ball alone (the "hero") or to stand and watch (the "spectator"). Coming together teaches the team that neither works. When two or three players press the ball together, the opposition runs out of options. This is the foundation of team defending — a concept that will serve them through every level of soccer they ever play.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the other team gets the ball, does your child react fast — not slow?
- Do multiple teammates close down the ball together?
- Does the team look organised in the press, or chaotic?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the **supporting players** — second and third to arrive, not just who wins it.
- After training, ask: "Who came to help you press?"
- Watch professional soccer and point out moments two or three players press as one.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice press together.*
- " • *You came to support — that's the work.*
- " • *The whole team got involved.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Confusing "come together" with "everyone chases the ball." The team converges on the ball-carrier but maintains shape behind.
- Praising only the player who wins the ball — the supporting players do equally important work.

Spread Apart



Make the field as big as you can!



Coach Call: "Space!"

● WHAT IT IS

Spreading apart is when the team uses the whole field. We make ourselves big — wide, deep, everywhere — so the other team can't cover us all.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Players go wide to the sides
- Some players push up, some stay back
- The field looks open, not crowded
- There's always somewhere to pass

● WHEN TO DO IT

When our team has the ball. The other team will try to crowd us. We make space by spreading.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Don't bunch up with teammates
2. Find space away from them
3. Get into a passing lane
4. Stay open — show for the pass

Wide. Deep. Open. Everywhere.

Spread Apart

— For Parents

MEANING

Spreading apart is the team using the full width and depth of the field when in possession. Wide players stretch the opposition; deep players give safe outlets; forward players threaten the goal.

IS NOT

- Standing isolated and waiting
- Spreading regardless of context

IS

- Players positioned to give options
- The team using the full field
- The opposite of bunching

WHY THIS MATTERS

The under-8 default is to all run to where the ball is — like swarming bees. Teaching kids to spread apart is teaching them to think about *where they aren't* (the gaps) instead of *where the ball is*. It's a hard concept because it requires moving away from the action. But when the team does it, scoring becomes easy because there's always an open player.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the team has the ball, are players spread across the width of the field?
- Are some players staying back to give a safe pass outlet?
- Does the team look "big" on the field, not bunched?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise players who run into empty space — especially when the ball doesn't come to them.
- After training, ask: "When your team had the ball, where were the empty spaces?"
- Watch professional matches and point out how players move away from the ball.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice spread.*
- " • *You found space.*
- " • *Good wide run.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Confusing spreading with isolating. A spread player is still connected to teammates through awareness.
- Praising only the player who gets the ball — the spreading player made the pass possible.

Attack



Forward energy — push for goal together!



Coach Call: "Attack!"

● WHAT IT IS

Attacking is when the team pushes forward as one. We move toward the other team's goal — with the ball, with runs, with intent.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Players face forward, not back
- The team moves up the field together
- Players make runs into space ahead of the ball
- We're trying to score, not just hold the ball

● WHEN TO DO IT

When we have the ball and there's space ahead. Don't waste the chance. Go forward.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Face forward — body and eyes
2. Run with purpose — toward goal or into space
3. Make space for teammates
4. Take the shot when you have it

Forward. Together. Goal.

MEANING

Attack is the team pushing toward the opposition goal with intent. Every player — not just the forwards — contributes to attack. It's forward energy and purposeful movement.

IS NOT

- Only the strikers' job
- Wild kicking forward
- Running with the ball alone

IS

- A whole-team action
- Coordinated forward movement
- Runs, passes, shots at goal

WHY THIS MATTERS

At under-8, "attack" often gets confused with "kick it as hard as you can." But real attacking is the team committing to going forward together — runners ahead of the ball, players supporting, the goal in everyone's mind. When your child sees attacking as a team action they're part of, they engage fully — even a defender can attack by joining the move up the field.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the team has the ball, are multiple players running *forward* — not just the player with the ball?
- Are the runs purposeful — into space, toward goal — rather than random?
- Does your child make forward runs even when they don't have the ball?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise off-ball forward runs as much as goals.
- After training, ask: "When the team was attacking, where did you run?"
- Watch professional attack moves and point out runners who never touched the ball but made the goal possible.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice attack.*
- " • *Good run forward.*
- " • *You committed.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Equating attack with "kick it long." Forward intent isn't the same as launching the ball.
- Forgetting defenders attack too — when the team has the ball, *everyone* attacks.



Get back and protect our goal!



Coach Call: "Defend!"

● WHAT IT IS

Defending is when the team gets back, organises, and stops the other team from scoring. We protect our goal as a unit — together.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Players run back toward our goal
- The team gets into a defensive shape
- Each player covers their part of the field
- We stop easy forward passes

● WHEN TO DO IT

When the other team has the ball — especially if they're moving toward our goal. Get back. Get organised.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Get back fast
2. Find your spot in the shape
3. Stay between the ball and our goal
4. Cover your teammates

MEANING

Defending is the team retreating and organising to protect our goal when the other team has possession. It's about shape, position, and accountability — not just one player chasing the ball.

IS NOT

- Only the defenders' job
- One player chasing the ball-carrier
- Standing in front of the goal

IS

- A whole-team action
- Organised retreat into shape
- Each player accountable for their part

WHY THIS MATTERS

At under-8, defending often looks like "the closest kid runs at the ball" while everyone else watches. Real defending is the whole team getting back, finding their position, and covering each other. When kids learn this, they stop being spectators when their team doesn't have the ball — and that's where most defending actually happens.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the other team gets the ball, does your child run back toward their own goal — not stand still?
- Does the team look organised when defending, not scattered?
- Does your child track an opponent or cover a teammate even when not near the ball?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the **get-back**, not just the tackle.
- After training, ask: "When the other team had the ball, what did you do?"
- Watch professional defending and point out players who aren't near the ball but are still working hard.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Good get-back*
- " • *You found your spot.*
- " • *Nice cover.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Praising only the player who wins the ball — the four others who got back into shape made it possible.
- Confusing defending with kicking the ball away. Defending is about position; clearing is just one outcome.



Hold

Pause. Look. Choose. Be brave!



Coach Call: "Hold!"

● WHAT IT IS

Holding is a brave kind of stillness. When you have the ball and players are coming at you, instead of kicking it away, you **pause, look, and choose**.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- You trap the ball under your foot
- Your head comes up, you see who's open
- You take a breath
- You play a smart pass — not a panicked kick

● WHEN TO DO IT

Whenever the ball comes to you under pressure. The hardest moments are the most important ones to hold.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Trap the ball
2. Look up
3. Choose your pass
4. Play it calmly

Brave. Calm. Choose.

Hold

— For Parents

MEANING

Holding is the moment of patient stillness when a player keeps the ball calm under pressure — looking, choosing, then playing — instead of panicking and kicking it away.

IS NOT

- Standing still doing nothing
- Holding the ball selfishly
- Hesitating from fear

IS

- Brave stillness under pressure
- Active looking and choosing
- The opposite of panic-kicking

WHY THIS MATTERS

This is the hardest concept on this list and the most important. The under-8 instinct under pressure is to KICK — anywhere, as hard as possible. Holding is the opposite: stop the ball, look up, choose. Kids who learn to hold become the players who score and assist most because they make *decisions* instead of *reactions*. Holding is a skill of nerve and timing — it takes practice and praise. Lots of praise.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When players close on your child with the ball, do they panic-kick or do they settle?
- Does their head come up when pressure arrives?
- Do they play short passes under pressure (vs. long kicks aimlessly forward)?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the moment of holding *especially* when the result wasn't a goal. "You held that under pressure — really brave."
- **Don't yell during pressure moments.** Yelling triggers panic-kicking. Silence supports holding.
- At home, play 1v1 keep-away: gently pressure, child must stop the ball, look, then dribble or pass.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Brave hold.*
- " • *You stayed calm.*
- " • *Good pause — then good pass.*

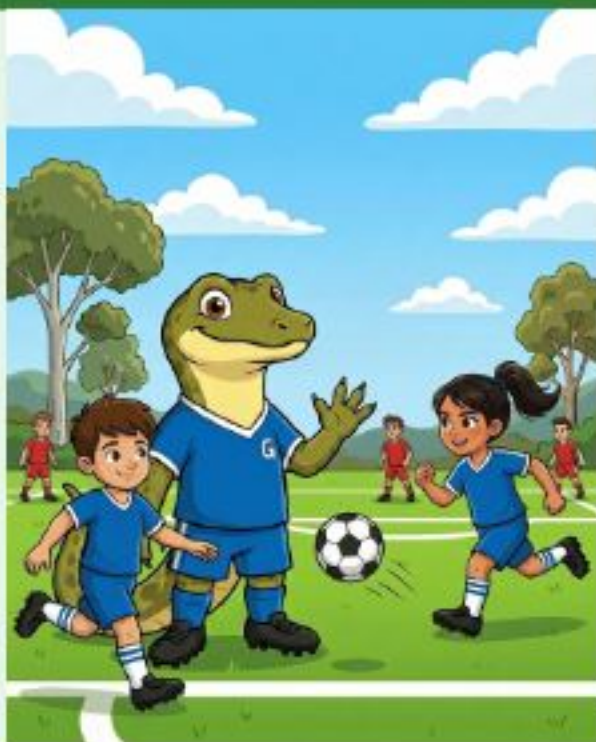
WATCH OUT FOR

- The instinct to yell "kick it!" during pressure — the opposite of what teaches holding.
- Praising only the successful pass. The hold is the success.

We Have It



Keep it moving — we've got the ball!



Coach Call: "Keep it!"

● WHAT IT IS

This is the moment when our team has the ball. Our job is to **keep** it — by passing, moving, looking up — until we find the chance to score.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- Players move the ball with passes
- The team keeps possession
- Players look up and find teammates
- We build toward the other team's goal

● WHEN TO DO IT

Every moment our team has the ball. From the first touch to the last.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Look around before you receive
2. Keep the ball moving
3. Find a teammate
4. Build toward the goal

Have it. Keep it. Use it.

MEANING

When we have the ball, the team is in possession — and possession is precious. Every touch is a chance to build, to find a teammate, to threaten the goal.

IS NOT

- Just holding the ball
- One player keeping it forever
- Slowing down for its own sake

IS

- The team passing, moving, building
- Each player ready to receive
- Possession with purpose

WHY THIS MATTERS

At under-8, possession is fragile. The team gets the ball and within seconds someone has kicked it forward, lost it, or given it away. Teaching kids that "we have it" is a precious state — not just a setup for the next kick — changes how they play. They start to take care of the ball. They start to see teammates as options, not bystanders. Possession becomes the team's most valuable asset.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the team has the ball, are they making short passes between players?
- Does your child look *before* receiving (so they know their options)?
- Does the team keep the ball for a few passes before trying something risky?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise patient build-up: "Five passes before the cross — great."
- Praise care with the ball: "Nice protection — you didn't give it away."
- After training, ask: "What was your favourite passing combination?"

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice keep.*
- " • *You kept it moving.*
- " • *Good first touch.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Confusing "keep it" with "never lose it." Risks are OK; reckless waste isn't.
- Praising only the goal-scorer — the players who moved the ball before the shot deserve equal credit.



We Just Lost It

React fast — win it back now!



Coach Call: "Take the ball!"

● WHAT IT IS

This is the moment when our team has just lost the ball. It's the most dangerous moment of the game. We have to **react fast — together** — to win it back.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- The closest player goes hard at the new ball-carrier
- The next closest comes to support
- Others get back to cover
- We press together in the first three seconds

● WHEN TO DO IT

Right after we lose the ball. The first few seconds are everything. Don't wait.

● YOUR MOVE

1. React fast — don't freeze
2. Press the ball-carrier
3. Get help close
4. Win it back

React. Press. Take it back.

We Just Lost It

— For Parents

MEANING

The moment after losing the ball is the most dangerous in soccer. If we react fast and press together, we can win it back before the opposition organises. If we don't, they organise and attack.

IS NOT

- Walking back disappointed
- Watching the opposition get away
- Slow reaction or hands on hips

IS

- Immediate counter-press
- Multiple players closing the ball-carrier
- Hunger to win it back

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most under-8 teams concede goals in the first five seconds after losing the ball, because they don't react fast enough. When kids learn to counter-press *immediately*, they often win the ball back high up the field and create scoring chances. This is also a great resilience lesson — losing the ball is not the end of the play; it's the start of the next one.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the team loses the ball, does your child react in the first second — not the fifth?
- Do multiple teammates close the new ball-carrier together?
- Does your child run hard to recover, even when not the closest?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise immediate reactions to losing the ball
- Praise effort to recover — running back hard, even when they don't win it.
- After training, ask: "When you lost the ball, what did you do next?"

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Great reaction.*
- " • *You went hard to win it back.*
- " • *Press right away — good.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Treating "losing the ball" as a failure. It's a moment, not a verdict.
- Slow body language after losing the ball — hands on hips, walking back. Praise the opposite.



They Have It

Stay organised — find your player!



Coach Call: "Mark a player!"

● WHAT IT IS

This is the moment when the other team has the ball and we're defending. Our job is to **stay in shape, mark our players, and not let them score.**

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- We get back into our positions
- Each player has someone to mark
- We stay close to opponents
- The goal looks well-protected

● WHEN TO DO IT

Any time the other team has the ball — especially when they're trying to attack. Stay organised. Don't panic.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Find your player
2. Stay close to them
3. Don't let them get past you
4. Stay between them and our goal

Organised. Close. Steady.

MEANING

When the other team has the ball, defending is about *organisation* — staying in shape, marking opponents, making it hard for the opposition to find space.

IS NOT

- Chasing the ball as a swarm
- Standing and watching
- Only the goalkeeper's job

IS

- Organised defensive shape
- Each player marking an opponent or covering space
- Steady, focused teamwork

WHY THIS MATTERS

At under-8, when the other team has the ball, kids tend to either swarm the ball (everyone chases) or zone out (waiting for someone else). The middle path — staying organised, each player accountable for one opponent — is the foundation of all good defending. This teaches kids that even when they're not near the ball, they have a job. Their position matters.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When the other team has the ball, is your child marking an opponent (not the ball)?
- Does the team look organised — players spread, each accountable?
- Does your child track the player they're marking, even when the ball is elsewhere?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise marking discipline, not just tackles.
- After training, ask: "Who did you mark today?"
- Watch professional defending and point out players staying with their marker even when the ball is far away.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Good mark.*
- " • *Stay tight.*
- " • *You were ready.*

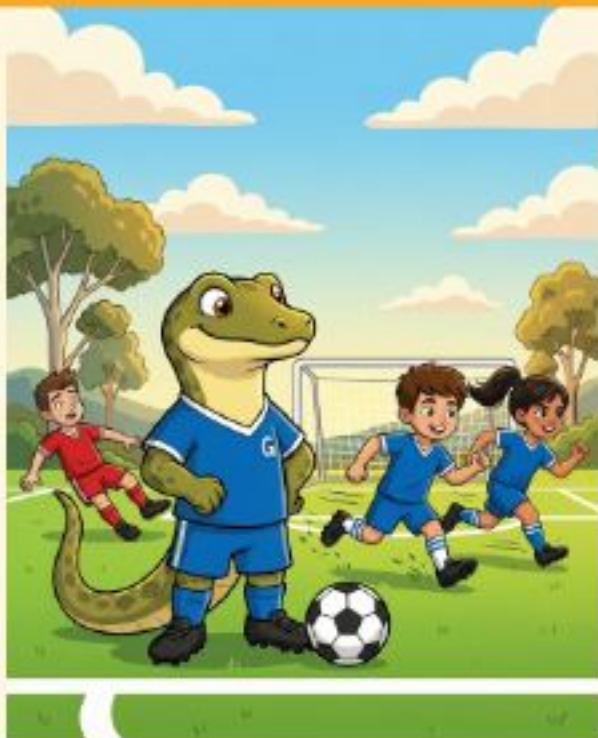
WATCH OUT FOR

- Confusing marking with chasing. Marking is staying close to a player; chasing is following the ball.
- Praising only tackles — the defender who stops the pass by being in position deserves equal credit.



We Just Won It

Win it and go fast — NOW!



Coach Call: "Push forward!"

● WHAT IT IS

This is the moment when our team has just won the ball back. The other team is out of position. If we **go forward fast**, we can score before they get organised.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- The player who wins the ball looks forward right away
- Teammates make runs ahead
- We move the ball quickly up the field
- We attack before they can recover

● WHEN TO DO IT

Right after we win the ball back. The first five seconds are gold. Don't slow down.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Look forward right away
2. Run hard into space
3. Move the ball fast
4. Try to score

Win it. Go fast. Score.

MEANING

The moment after winning the ball is a golden opportunity — the opposition is out of shape, gaps are open, and a fast attack can become a scoring chance.

IS NOT

- Slowing down to "set up the attack"
- Passing backward to consolidate
- Waking the ball forward

IS

- Immediate forward intent
- Fast runs ahead of the ball
- Quick passes that move the ball up

WHY THIS MATTERS

Most goals in modern soccer come from transition moments — and this is the most dangerous transition for the opposition. When kids learn to play forward FAST after winning the ball, they create chances that wouldn't exist if they slowed down. This is also a great lesson in soccer: opportunities are short, and recognising the moment is the difference between scoring and not.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- When your child or team wins the ball, do they look forward immediately?
- Do teammates make forward runs to support?
- Does the team move the ball quickly up the field after winning it?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the runners ahead of the ball, not just the player on it.
- Praise quick forward passes after winning the ball.
- After training, ask: "When you won the ball, what was your first move?"

WHAT TO SAY

- * • *Go fast — well done.*
- * • *Great run ahead.*
- * • *Quick forward — good choice.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Slowing down after winning the ball — the instinct is to "settle," but settling kills the chance.
- Praising only the goal — the three-second break that led to it deserves equal credit.

Make It Yours



Watch, try, repeat — then own it!



Coach Call: "Watch and try!"

● WHAT IT IS

Making a move yours is how you really learn a new skill. You **watch** it. You **try** it. You do it **three times in a row**. Then you **add your own style** — and now it's yours.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- You watch carefully — see how a player does the move
- You try it once — your first attempt
- You do it three times in a row — it's becoming a habit
- You add your own style — it's yours now

● WHEN TO DO IT

Whenever you want to learn a new skill at training. The order matters: watch first, then try, then repeat, then own it.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Watch a player who does it well
2. Try it once
3. Do it three times in a row
4. Add your style — make it yours

Watch. Try. Repeat. Own it.

MEANING

Making a skill your own is a four-stage process: watch carefully, try once successfully, repeat three times consistently, then add your own style. Skills aren't learned all at once — they're built stage by stage.

IS NOT

- Trying a move once and giving up
- Copying without making it your own
- Drilling endlessly without trying first

IS

- A four-stage learning process
- Watch → try → consistent → style
- How every great player learns

WHY THIS MATTERS

Kids often expect to be good at a new skill immediately. When they're not, they get frustrated and stop trying. Teaching them that mastery has STAGES — and each stage is a small win — changes their relationship with practice. They stop seeing failure and start seeing progress. This is the foundation of growth mindset: you don't have to be good yet.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- Does your child watch other players (or videos) before trying new moves?
- Do they keep trying after the first attempt doesn't work?
- Do they show signs of repetition — practising the same move week after week?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise the **watching**: "I saw you really studying that player."
- Praise the **trying**, especially when it doesn't work yet: "Good attempt — you'll get it."
- Celebrate the "three in a row" milestone: "You did that three times in a row — it's almost yours!"
- At home, learn a small skill together and walk through the four stages.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Nice try — you'll get it.*
- " • *I saw you watching.*
- " • *Three in a row — it's almost yours!*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Comparing your child to kids who already have a skill — every skill goes through the four stages.
- Praising only the final stage (the polished move) — the earlier stages deserve more praise.



Share what you know —
everyone grows!



Coach Call: "Show your team!"

● WHAT IT IS

Teaching is what happens after you've learned a skill. You see something cool, make it your own, then **show it to a teammate** — so they can have it too.

● WHAT IT LOOKS LIKE

- You watch and learn a new skill
- You add your own style
- You show it slowly to a teammate
- They try it — you help them
- Now both of you can do it

● WHEN TO DO IT

At training, when you've got a skill that a teammate doesn't have yet. Don't keep it to yourself. Share it.

● YOUR MOVE

1. Learn the skill yourself first
2. Show it slowly to a teammate
3. Help them try
4. Be patient

Learn. Share. The team gets stronger.

MEANING

Teaching is the final stage of mastery — when you've learned something well enough to share it with someone else. It's also where growth becomes a team practice: each player makes the whole team better.

IS NOT

- Showing off what you can do
- Bossing a teammate around
- Pretending to be the coach

IS

- Generous sharing of a skill
- Patient demonstration
- Team-building from the inside

WHY THIS MATTERS

The deepest learning happens when you teach. When your child explains a skill to a teammate, they understand it more clearly themselves. They also build their relationships with teammates and learn that being good isn't just about individual skill — it's about making the team better. This concept is the foundation of leadership, generosity, and shared growth. It's also the long-term skill that matters most beyond soccer.

HOW TO SPOT IT

- Does your child offer to help teammates who are struggling?
- Do they explain or demonstrate skills they've learned?
- Are they patient with teammates who are still learning?

HOW TO REINFORCE

- Praise teaching moments: "I saw you helping Liv with her turn — that was great."
- Set up small teaching opportunities at home: ask your child to teach you a skill.
- Watch professional soccer together and point out players who support each other.

WHAT TO SAY

- " • *Great teaching.*
- " • *You made the team better today.*
- " • *Patient — well done.*

WATCH OUT FOR

- Confusing teaching with bossing. Teaching is offering; bossing is demanding.
- Praising only the player who learns — the teacher's patience deserves equal credit.

Coach Cues Dictionary

Every word the coach calls from the sideline, and what it means.

The Coach Calls	What You Do (Kid)	What's Happening (Parent)
"Control the ball!"	Stop the ball. Look up. Choose where it goes.	A moment that needs calm composure under pressure.
"Converge!"	Come together with teammates to take the ball.	The team needs to press the ball-carrier as a unit.
"Space!"	Spread out. Find open space. Don't bunch up.	The team needs to use the full width and depth of the field.
"Attack!"	Push forward. Run at the goal. Take it on.	Forward intent — the team should commit to the attacking move.
"Defend!"	Get back. Find your spot. Stay between the ball and our goal.	The team needs to retreat into defensive shape.
"Hold!"	Stop the ball. Take a breath. Look up. Choose a smart pass.	Pressure has arrived; the player needs patience, not panic.
"Keep it!"	Pass it to a teammate. Don't kick it away. Build slowly.	The team is in possession and needs to be patient with it.
"Take the ball!"	We just lost it — go hard at the new ball-carrier.	The most important moment; immediate counter-press needed.
"Mark a player!"	Pick an opponent. Stay close. Don't let them get past.	Defensive accountability — each player owns one opponent.
"Push forward!"	We just won it — run fast toward the other goal.	The team has the ball back; speed is the weapon.
"Watch and try!"	Look at a player who does it well. Then try it yourself.	A new skill is being introduced; observation precedes attempt.
"Show your team!"	Teach what you've learned to a teammate.	A player has mastered something; sharing makes the team stronger.

For Parents — Using This Dictionary at Games

When you hear a coach call: don't worry — they're teaching the team. Look up the cue above, watch the team's response, then after the game ask your child: "Did you hear the coach call X? What did you do?" This is the shared language at work.

Quick Reference Card

The whole team's approach on one page.

The Foundation

Control the Ball — Body. Space. Other players. Pace. Ball. Everything.

Coach call: "Control the ball!"

THE TWO MOVEMENTS

Come Together

When they have the ball, converge as a unit to win it back.

"Converge!"

Spread Apart

When we have the ball, use the full field. Wide. Deep. Open.

"Space!"

THE THREE MODES

Attack

Forward energy. Push toward goal.

"Attack!"

Defend

Get back. Protect the goal.

"Defend!"

Hold

Brave stillness. Look. Choose.

"Hold!"

THE FOUR MOMENTS

We Have It

In possession. Keep building.

"Keep it!"

We Just Lost It

Defensive transition. Press fast.

"Take the ball!"

They Have It

Out of possession. Stay organised.

"Mark a player!"

We Just Won It

Offensive transition. Go fast.

"Push forward!"

THE GROWTH

Make It Yours

Watch. Try. Three in a row. Add your style.

"Watch and try!"

Teach

What you know, you share. The team gets stronger.

"Show your team!"

Words to Know

Soccer words used in this book — and what they mean.

Attack — When the team has the ball and pushes forward toward the other team's goal.

Build — Keeping the ball with passes, slowly moving up the field.

Coach — The grown-up who runs training and calls out cues during the game.

Combine — When you put two skills together to make a new one.

Cover — When you stand near a teammate so you can help if they get beaten.

Defend — When the other team has the ball and we get back to protect our goal.

Field — The grassy place we play on. (Some people call it "the pitch" — same thing.)

Goal — Both the net we're trying to put the ball into, and what we call it when we score.

Hold — Keeping the ball calm under pressure. Stop, look, choose.

Mark — Staying close to one player on the other team so they can't easily get the ball.

Other team — The team we're playing against. Not the enemy — the kids on the other side.

Pass — Kicking the ball to a teammate on purpose.

Possession — Having the ball as a team. We have possession; they have possession.

Press — Running at the ball-carrier to make them feel rushed.

Shape — How the team is arranged on the field. Good shape = spread well, organised.

Space — An open part of the field where no one is standing. Players run into space to get free.

Spread Apart — When the team uses the whole field, not bunched together.

Teach — Showing a teammate something you can do, so they can do it too.

Touch — How you control the ball when it comes to you. A good touch sends the ball where you want it.

Transition — The moment when the ball changes from one team to the other.

Win the ball — When we take the ball off the other team.

Parent Quick Tips

Everything a parent needs to support their player — on one spread.

At Games — The Top 5 Things TO Do

1. **Watch — don't coach.** The coach is coaching. Your job is to watch and recognise good moments.
2. **Praise the moments, not just the goals.** Notice the hold, the press, the off-ball run.
3. **Stay calm when the team loses the ball.** Your body language is contagious.
4. **Cheer for the team, not just your child.** Your child notices who you cheer for.
5. **Cheer the other team's good plays too.** Modelling respect matters more than any tactical instruction.

At Games — The Top 5 Things NOT To Do

1. Don't yell instructions during play — it makes your child look *down* instead of up.
2. Don't yell at the referee. Even when you're right. Especially when you're right.
3. Don't compare your child to other players.
4. Don't replay the mistakes after the game — they already know.
5. Don't make winning the point. Make it "progress, not perfection". Winning follows.

After Training or a Game — What to Ask

Try one of these instead of "Did you have fun?" or "Did you win?":

- "What did the coach call out today?"
- "Who did you help on the team today?"
- "What did you try that you hadn't tried before?"
- "What moment do you remember most?"

The Phrases That Match the Team's Language

You see them stopping the ball calmly	"Nice control."
Looking up before passing	"Eyes up — good."
Running to support a teammate pressing	"Great press together."
Spreading wide when the team has the ball	"You found space."
Pushing forward boldly	"Nice attack."
Getting back to defend	"Good get-back."
Holding the ball under pressure	"Brave hold."
Reacting fast when the ball is lost	"Great reaction."
Sticking with a player they're marking	"Stay tight."
Going fast after winning the ball	"Go fast — well done."
Trying a new skill	"Nice try — you'll get it."
Helping a teammate learn something	"Great teaching."



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Gozzie's Soccer Handbook

For players. For parents.
For the whole team.

12 Concepts · Coach Cues · Parent Tips
A Reference Manual for Under-8 Soccer

& Ward Pty Ltd · Players Handbook · Beta v1.0