

Principles of Successful Coaching for Girls U9 –U19

Developed by the EMSA Girls in Soccer Committee

The following is intended to be a short introduction for EMSA soccer coaches to cover the key principles for successfully coaching girls aged U9 and older. There has been extensive research into this topic and a reading list is provided for coaches who wish to gain a deeper appreciation of the difference between coaching girls and boys.

Introduction

As the coaches of girls, we should seek to understand the preferences of the girls on our teams, and tailor the delivery of coaching to meet those preferences. The needs of girls are generally considered be different to boys, and this affects how they should be coached. It is recommended that coaches of girls should consider the five principles noted in this paper:

- Team dynamics are extremely important to girls and need to be nurtured
- All communication from the coach to girls should aim to build their confidence and self-esteem
- Conditioning and balanced nutrition is key to the ongoing success of girls in soccer
- Coaches must behave ethically and appropriately towards the girls they coach
- Practices for girls should appropriately balance skills and drills with scrimmaging and competition

Principle 1 – Team dynamics are extremely important to girls and need to be nurtured

Girls generally feel the need to be liked by their teammates. They want to build relationships and to be interconnected with each other. Their need for acceptance drives other behaviours, notably how they deal with competition within the team and on the soccer field. Forcing girls to compete with their teammates to create a pecking order can be counterproductive and damaging to the team dynamics. Girls have a strong desire to belong and social time and team building activities are very important. When a team of girls does not get along then it can have a real impact on their ability to work together on the soccer field.

Coaches need to take care to treat girls fairly and not to play favourites. Failing to treat girls equally can create division in the team. Cliques and strong friendships that ostracise certain players need to be addressed. Constantly changing which girls are playing together or running drills together helps to broaden relationships across the team.

Principle 2 – All communication from the coach to girls should aim to build their confidence and self-esteem

Self-esteem and self-confidence is key to the performance of girls on soccer teams. Girls can find it difficult to maintain their confidence consistently, and this affects their performance game to game, and even within a single game. Coaches must boost the ego of girls on their teams. Girls are highly verbal

and rely on the opinions of others rather than their own impressions of their strengths. They need to hear from their coaches that they did a good job and that the coach is proud of them.

Girls are quick to take criticism personally, even if it is directed at the team as a whole. It can be easy for a coach to make a comment, particularly in a game setting, which is intended to improve performance which actually reduces the confidence of players. During a game, coaches are pressed for time and need to quickly deliver messages. Girls are looking for detailed information, personalised to them and delivered sensitively which is best done one-to-one and away from the soccer field.

When coaches speak, girls are listening both to what they say as well as the tone of voice being used. Always seek to encourage. If required, criticism needs to be handled gently, and should be directed to the individual and not delivered in front of the whole team.

All people show their emotions, and it is perfectly normal for girls to cry for a variety of reasons. Be prepared for tears and have a strategy to deal with them.

Principle 3 – Conditioning and balanced nutrition is key to the ongoing success of girls in soccer

Soccer is a game that requires lots of running, but paradoxically girls generally do not enjoy running for conditioning. Girls will generally be more receptive to the idea of conditioning if the coach explains why it is required and the benefits of it. Making the conditioning specific to soccer is also helpful. Rather than have the girls run around the outside of the field have them undertake an activity with a ball that involves running.

Stretching is an important component of injury prevention. Girls are prone to specific kinds of injuries, particularly knee injuries. Coaches should teach their teams an age-appropriate regimen of stretches that specifically addresses the needs of female athletes and oversee their teams in completing these stretches during practices and games. Girls will be motivated to take part in stretching activities if the coach explains the rationale for these.

((add Girls in Soccer stretching info here))

Coaches should advocate for appropriate nutrition for practices and games. Girls can be highly sensitive to comments regarding their physique, and coaches should restrict their comments to teaching appropriate nutrition.

((add Girls in Soccer nutrition info here))

Principle 4 – Coaches must behave ethically and appropriately towards the girls they coach

Coaches can make a very real difference in the life of their players. They are in a privileged position, and often build very close relationships with their teams. Girls tend to see their coaches as a role model and want to be close to their coach. They may confide things to the coach that they do not share with their parents.

Physical touch should be limited and appropriate. Do not create situations where you are alone with a player. Have a female adult present if you need to speak to a player alone. Always act ethically and in a manner that is beyond reproach.

Principle 5 – Practices for girls should appropriately balance skills and drills with scrimmaging and competition

A desire to win and to beat an opponent is an essential part of soccer. Generally speaking, girls prefer working cooperatively to competing. Girls will willingly work on technique, and enjoy skills and drills. They have the discipline to train and will listen to a coach who explains how they can improve. However, many girls are not by nature competitive. Scrimmaging in practice can produce anxiety, and many girls will shy away from competition during a game.

There are many reasons why girls appear not to be competitive. Some girls want to be liked and are eager to please and do not want to upset their opponents or teammates. Other girls are worried to try and fail, and so will not engage.

It is important to deliver practices that are enjoyable and fun. Girls will generally enjoy skills and drills, but they need to learn to be comfortable with competition. That means consistently and repeatedly introducing competition into practices. Girls who learn that competing in practices is fun will be more actively involved in games. In order to reduce anxiety it can be useful to alternate skills and drills with competitive play. Coaches should also explain why it is important to learn to compete.

Reading List

Deboer, Kathleen J (2004) "Gender and Competition: How Men and Women Approach Work and Play Differently", Coaches Choice

Sullivan, Vanessa and Tully, Mike (2015) "Was It Something I Said? A Guide to Coaching Female Athletes", CreateSpace Independent Publishing

Wenjen, Mia and Foley, Alison (2018) "How to Coach Girls", Audrey Press

Dicicco, Tony and Hacker, Colleen (2003) "Catch Them Being Good: Everything You Need to Know to Successfully Coach Girls", Penguin Books

Deboer, Kathleen J "Practice like a Girl, Compete like a Boy: Training the Total Athlete"

www.sirc.ca blog "Coaching Boys or Girls: Is There a Difference?"

Coffin, Karen "Coaching Girls – A Survival Guide"

Steiner, Terry "The Differences in Coaching Women and Men"