

Fun Games for 8 and Under

DRIBBLING:

Explode – Every kid has a ball. You get them all around you dribbling their balls as close as they can get. Make sure they begin dribbling using the insides of both feet...no toe balls at the first practice! Make them keep control of the ball (always within one step) and don't let them run into one another or dribble their ball into another ball or another player. Keep telling them to get their heads up and see the open spaces. Yell "Explode!" at which point they all run away dribbling their balls as fast as they can. The first one to get to a boundary or cone wins.

Flags – Players start with a ball and two flags (a flag is a cloth strip about two inches wide and a foot long). Flags are stuck into the waistband of the player's pants at each side. A player is eliminated when they lose both flags and their ball. A ball is lost when it is kicked out of bounds by another player with a ball or stolen by a player with at least one flag but no ball. You can only take someone's flag away when you have a ball. The first flag usually goes quickly. The real fun comes when they learn to protect both the ball and the remaining flag by using the flagless side to shield.

Dribble Relay – Set up an obstacle course with cones as "gates." Divide the players into two teams. Team A races Team B (the players have to go out and back). If they lose control and miss a gate, they have to regain control and go through the gate. A variation is to have a small square at the end. Players then have to stop the ball in the square, and then sprint back and high-five the next player before that player can take off. Another variation is to have several parents positioned at different places along the "course" and have a different one hold up a number of fingers at random times during the race and award points to the player that sees it and correctly yells out the number first. This gets the players' heads up.

Freeze Tag – Set up a large rectangle with cones and have the players dribble in the rectangle. After a short time, take the ball away from one or two players who then become "it." Any player whose ball is touched by an "it" player becomes frozen and has to stop dribbling, spread his legs apart, and hold his ball above his head. He is "frozen" in position until another player dribbles his ball between the "frozen" players' legs. Switch the "it" players often and make it a contest to see who can freeze the most at one time.

Red Light/Green Light – Each player lines up with a ball at one end of the penalty area. A coach stands at the other end and yells, "Green light," and turns his back to the players. The kids race across the penalty area to see who can reach the coach first. After a few seconds, the coach yells, "Red light." At that command, the players must stop and put a foot on top of the ball. The coach turns back around and looks for players whose balls are still moving. Those players must move a certain distance back to the starting line. Repeat calling "Red light/Green light" until someone wins the race. This game encourages fast dribbling while keeping the ball close.

Simon Says – Just like the children's game, the coach gives instructions like, "Simon says...dribble the ball with your left foot" or, "Simon says...switch balls with someone." The players only follow the instructions if they begin with "Simon says..." Anyone following instructions that don't start with "Simon says..." are knocked out. But the knocked-out players should be doing something with the ball and not just watching the game continue. Continue the game until there is one player left.

Follow the Leader – Pick a "leader" and have that player dribble anywhere on the field, encouraging that player to make lots of turns, change speed, etc. All other players have to follow the leader and do whatever that player does. Switch leaders often.

Dribbler's Alley – Four or more players are needed. Set up one less pair of cones ("gates") than the number of players you have in a line. Each "gate" should be about six feet wide and have about 10 feet between each. Every player guards a gate and the remaining player attempts to dribble through the gates.

Last One Out – Two or more players are needed. All players stand at a cone about 20 feet from a group of balls. There is one less ball than the number of players. On the coach's command, the players run to the balls, get one, and begin dribbling. The player who didn't get a ball tries to steal one from the others. The coach keeps time and, after a pre-set period has passed, stops the game. At that time, the player who doesn't have a ball is out. Remove one ball from the group and repeat until there is only one player with a ball.

Tag – This drill is based upon the children's game of tag. Mark off a circle or grid. Everybody needs a ball. Whoever is "it" must dribble to another player and tag him. The other players avoid being tagged by dribbling away from the one who is "it." If the player being chased loses his ball outside the grid or circle, dribbles out of the area, or is tagged, that player is "it" and the game continues.

Bumper Car Dribble – The whole team participates in this in a small grid. Try to match players of similar height. Have one player dribble while another partner tries to nudge them off the ball shoulder-to-shoulder. This teaches them to dribble under physical pressure and shows them contact is good and can be fun. Before games, I have two players inside a circle formed by the rest of the team playing for possession of the ball for 30 seconds. It gets players in the mode of fighting for the ball on the field.

Musical Chairs – There should be one less ball than the number of players in the drill. Players run around in the goal areas in a scramble until a whistle is blown. The players race to get the ball from the center circle and dribble to score on a goal. Players without balls help get the balls to the center, repeating until only one player is left. Make sure to keep things moving along; don't wait too long to blow the whistle.

Once the players have the concept, start adding in defenders. One more that may work for you is to use the ball as the goal. Have players match up by ability. Throw one ball out as the goal. Throw a second ball out that two players attempt to possess and score. The first player to the ball is the attacker, the second player defends the "goal" (ball) and attempts to gain possession of the ball. If they are successful, reverse the roles. Run this for only 30-45 seconds depending on the players' efforts. I usually have two to three pairs attempting this at once, each with their own "goal" (ball) and playing ball.

PASSING:

Ball Tag – Everybody has a ball and dribbles in a confined area. The player who is "it" must pass his ball so that it hits another player's ball. The player whose ball was hit then becomes "it."

The Name Game – Four or more players needed. Players stand in a circle and pass the ball to one another, but they must call out the name of the person they are passing to. This is great at the beginning of the season so everyone learns names. If the players are doing well and you have enough players, add additional balls.

Monkey in the Middle – The players form a circle with one player (the monkey) in the center. The other players attempt to pass the ball around and the monkey attempts to intercept it. When the monkey gets the ball, he joins the circle and the player who made the "fatal" pass becomes the monkey. This game can be modified by increasing the number of monkeys and/or balls that are used.

Marbles – Split your team into two groups and line them up behind two opposing lines. Each player should have a ball. Place an unusual color (or size) ball in the middle. This is the marble. Have the players attempt to move the marble across the other team's line by striking it with a ball. After the game begins I don't require the players to use their own ball. If they lose their own ball, they are free to use any other ball they can find.

Who's Open – Four or five players form a circle about 15 yards in diameter (adjust for age). All players except one have a ball at their feet. Two players are inside the circle – one designated as the attacker and the other as the defender.

To begin, the attacking player moves and calls out the name of the player he wants to serve him a ball. He must control the ball and return it to the open player who did not have a ball at the start of the game (you can't give it back to the player who served it). The attacker then asks for another ball (calling the player's name and making the appropriate run) and repeats the exchange. The defender attempts to dispossess the attacker.

JUGGLING:

P-E-L-E – Two or more players needed. The first player juggles one, the second player has to match. The first player then juggles two and the second player has to match again. The first player then juggles three and so on. When a player misses, the other player gets a letter – first P, then E, then L, then E. After awarding a letter, the players start out at one again. The first player to spell PELE is the winner. This game can be played with thighs only, feet only, head only or any combination.

Blackjack (21) – Play with two or more players. The first player juggles as many touches as they can and keeps track of the count. The second player begins after the first player misses. After the second player misses, the first player starts again, starting the count where they missed in their first turn. For example, if a player got five touches before missing in their first turn, they would begin the second turn at six. The first player to 21 wins. This game also can be made more challenging by restricting it to certain body parts.

Combinations – Work to get “called” combinations. For example, “Around the World” would be left foot, left thigh, head, right thigh, right foot.

Juggling With Movement – Start at one spot and walk, jog or run while juggling the ball. See how far you can go without dropping the ball. One variation of this is to start at the outside of the penalty area on the field, juggle up to the goal area and shoot or volley the ball into the net without letting it hit the ground.

Timed Juggles – See how many touches the player can get in a certain amount of time. We do a three minute timed contest. They don't have to be consecutive without a miss. This works great for getting the players focused and working hard for a certain period of time is great for aerobic fitness.