

Here are the short and simple soccer rules you need to know as a parent.

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1. No Hands, please

I bet you knew that one. Most people who know nothing about soccer still know that you aren't supposed to use your hands unless you're the goalie.

A couple of points to clarify.

First, the rule for a hand ball includes using any part of the arm from the tips of the fingers to the shoulder.

Second, the proper way to look at this soccer rule is that a player cannot "handle" the ball. A ball that is kicked and hits a player's hand or arm is not a hand ball (even if they gain an advantage from it). This means that the referee must use his or her own judgment to some extent in determining whether or not a hand ball is accidental contact or a purposeful attempt to gain an advantage.

Particularly in the younger ages, a ball striking arms deliberately held against the body for protection will not be deemed handling the ball (unless in the opinion of the referee, the player then directs the ball with them).

Believe it or not, there is also a situation in which the goalie cannot use his/her hands. This is sometimes called the back-pass rule. Goalkeepers cannot pick up a pass that came directly from one of their teammates. In this case, the goalkeeper must use his feet. Infraction of this soccer rule will result in an indirect kick from the point of the infraction.

2. Equipment

The basic equipment for soccer required by the FIFA Laws of the Game are:

- a jersey or shirt
- shorts
- stockings
- shinguards
- footwear

Most youth recreational soccer leagues will provide everything but the shinguards and the footwear.

Shinguards

According to FIFA, shinguards should be "covered entirely by the stockings, made of a suitable material (rubber, plastic, or similar substance), and provide a reasonable degree of protection. This leaves a lot of wiggle room!

Most soccer leagues will not allow a person to play or practice soccer without shinguards. Purchasing good shinguards should be a top priority for every parent.

Footwear

There are no requirements by FIFA that your child have shoes with cleats. Technically, regular tennis shoes are fine - not recommended, but legal. Of course, local league rules may apply.

There is also this general safety clause in the FIFA rules:

A player must not use equipment or wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player (including any kind of jewelry).

No necklaces, earrings, nose rings, belly rings, bracelets, or tiaras. Soft "scrunchies" in the hair are generally allowed as are soft head stockings.

If a child just had their ears pieced, the studs should be covered with tape or removed. Many leagues will require that the studs be removed. As one fellow commented, is the hole going to grow back in an hour?

Lastly, the goalkeeper must wear colors which distinguishes him/her from the other players, the referee, and the assistant referees.

3. Start and Restart

A kick-off is the way a soccer game is started or restarted:

- at the start of a game
- after a goal has been scored
- at the start of the second half (or each quarter in younger ages)
- at the start of each period of extra time, if used

The ball is placed in the center of the field. All players must be in their own half of the field and the opponents of the team taking the kick-off must be at least 10 yards from the ball. This distance is indicated by the center circle on the field and will vary some with age.

Normally the referee will blow his/her whistle to indicate they are ready for the kick-off. The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves forward.

Note that the two-touch rule applies here (see Rule 9).

After a team scores a goal, the kick-off is taken by the other team.

4. Throw-ins

A throw-in is taken when the ball crosses a sideline and leaves the field. The two basic soccer rules for a proper throw-in are to have both feet on the ground and to throw the ball with both hands from behind the head and over the head.

For teaching purposes it is common to allow players under the age of 8 to take more than 1 attempt.

5. Corner Kicks & Goal Kicks

A corner kick or goal kick is taken when the ball leaves the field across the endline – you know, the end of the field. (By the way, unlike American football, all of the lines on a soccer field are in bounds. A ball is not out until "all of the ball crosses all of the line.")

If the offensive team kicks it out, play is restarted with a goal kick. If the defensive team kicks it out, play is restarted with a corner kick.

The goal kick is taken from anywhere inside the “goalie box” as it is affectionately called. It can be taken by any player, not just the goalkeeper.

The corner kick is taken from – yes, you guessed it – the corner nearest to where the ball left the field.

You may be confused at times in youth soccer games to see a goal kick retaken. This is because the FIFA soccer rules state that the ball is not back “in play” until it leaves the penalty area, the large box outside of the “goalie box”. No one can touch the ball until it leaves the penalty area, and if the ball is not kicked properly to leave the area, the kick must be retaken.

6. Fouls

The common rule of thumb on fouls is “If it looks like a foul, it probably is.”

Too true. A player cannot kick, trip, jump at, charge, strike, push, hold, or spit at an opponent.

So what’s the problem?

Soccer can be a physical, contact sport when two opposing players both want the soccer ball and no parent likes it when little Johnny loses the ball and ends up on the ground!

“Foul!” cries the parent. “Little Johnny was pushed!”

What you need to know as a parent is that bumping or going shoulder-to-shoulder while competing for a ball is *not a foul* until the hands or elbows come up. This is a bit of a judgment call and not all referees will call it the same way. Some soccer rules are actually not black-and-white.

In most situations the referee may take several seconds before stopping play to determine whether or not the team that was fouled would have an "advantage" if play continues without a free kick. If so, the referee can choose to let play continue (indicated by putting both arms out front).

Remember though, **the referee is ALWAYS right.**

7. Direct and Indirect Free Kicks (*all kicks in U-8 and below are Direct*)

The simple difference between the two is this: On a direct kick you can score by kicking the ball *directly* into the goal. On an indirect kick you cannot score. An indirect kick must be touched by another player before it can go into the goal – that is the kicker and a second person.

As a parent on the sideline, you can tell whether the kick is direct or indirect by looking at the referee. For an indirect kick, the referee will hold one arm straight up in the air until the second person touches the ball. No arm up, it’s a direct kick.

There are many soccer rules around what causes a direct or indirect kick.

In general, a direct kick comes from a contact foul or hand ball. Everything else is indirect.

8. Penalty Kick *(not used in U-8 and below)*

A penalty kick results from a contact foul or hand ball by the defending team within the penalty area – the large box on either end of the field. So it's a type of direct kick also.

The ball is placed on the penalty spot, 8 - 12 yards in front of the center of the goal. The distance varies per age group.

All players must remain outside the penalty area and the penalty arc until the ball is kicked. The goalkeeper must have both feet on the goal line until the ball is kicked.

If after the ball is kicked, it rebounds off of the goal or the keeper and stays on the field, the ball is "live" and anyone can play it. Exception: If the ball rebounds directly off of the goal to the kicker, the kicker may not touch it again until it has touched another player. See Rule 9.

9. Two-touch Rule

A player cannot touch the ball twice in a row when putting the ball in play. You will see this called many times in youth soccer. It applies everywhere. You will see it frequently on kick-offs or direct and indirect kicks. If a kid barely hits the ball and decides to take another swipe at it, that is a two-touch.

This also applies to throw-ins. A kid cannot throw the ball in and then kick it. Nope. No way. No can do.

10. Yellow and Red Cards *(not used in the U-8 or below)*

This is the way punishment is given in soccer. The FIFA soccer rules give the guidelines for when to give a yellow card to a player and when to give a red card. I'm not going to get into the specifics here.

In youth soccer, when a player is "cautioned" with a yellow card, the player may be substituted out - sort of a 'time out' and a chance for the coach to take a teaching moment and chat about the reasons for the card. The player may be substituted back in as early as the next substitution opportunity.

If a player is given two yellow cards in the same game, that is equal to a red card. A red card can be given at any time without the player first receiving a yellow card. When a player gets a red card, they must leave the game and their team must play short. An ejected player cannot be replaced (some youth leagues will allow a player to be replaced

for the duration of the match, if a substitute is available). Red cards are reported to the Club and may require the player to miss at least the next game as well.

On rare and unfortunate occasions, a coach or fan may also be dismissed from the field - usually for arguing with the referee, which is against the rules of soccer at any level. (You might guess that such a coach or fan might end up in hot water with the Club and you'd be right.)

11. Offside

This is without a doubt the least understood rule by parents and coaches alike.

This rule won't be called for the U-10 teams and below. So you may be off the hook for now. However, if you are a U-10 coach you still need to know this rule so you can begin teaching your players not to be offside.

The first thing to know is that you cannot be offside on a corner kick, goal kick, or throw-in. Don't ask me why. Just accept it and go on. The explanation is too long.

Also, *it is not an offense for a player to be in an offside position*. The player must be *involved* in active play as determined by the referee to be called offside.

As quoted from the FIFA soccer rules:

A player is in an offside position if: *he is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent*.

Clear yet? I didn't think so.

Try this. An offensive or attacking player can't be ahead of the ball and involved in the play unless there is a defender between him and the goalkeeper. Or, you can't hang out at the other team's goal waiting for the ball.

A few other butts. You can't be offside if you are standing on your half of the field. Also, the offside rule is judged from where the player is *when the ball is kicked*, not when the player receives the ball.

Finally, what are the three keys to 'being involved?':

- Playing or touching the ball
- Interfering with an opponent
- Gaining an advantage by being in that position to begin with (for instance, getting a rebound from the keeper or goalpost)

To be honest with you, this can be a hard rule to understand. Don't get too hung up on it. Trust the referees.

12. Sportsmanship

It's all too easy to forget in the heat of battle that this is our Kids' game, not ours. The players are young, the referees are young, and the coaches--whether paid or not--are there for our children. Be good fans:

- Learn the Rules
 - Let the Players play, the Coaches coach and the Referees officiate
 - Cheer good plays on *both* teams
 - Be a model for good sportsmanship for our kids...they're watching!
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13. Specialized Rules

The below listed rules will be adjusted to suit the needs of the club to adapt to the number of players per team, field requirements for games, and number of coaches willing to coach.

U-6

- Three vs. Three, no goalkeepers allowed
- Four eight minute quarters, two minutes between quarters, five minute half time
- A number 3 ball is used for the game
- All kicks are direct
- No penalty kicks
- No offsides called
- No red/yellow cards
- Referee may instruct players how to do free kicks, spread out
- On free kicks, four yard space (instead of the 8 or 10 yards for older divisions)
- Substitutions can be made on any stoppage

U-8 Modified

- Four vs. Four, including goalkeepers
- Four 12 minute quarters, two minutes between quarters, five minute half time
- A number 3 ball is used for the game
- All kicks are direct
- No penalty kicks
- No offsides called
- No red/yellow cards
- Referee may instruct players how to do throw-ins, free kicks, spread out
- Referee will allow one repeat throw-ins
- On free kicks, 4 yard space
- Substitutions can be made on any stoppage

U-10

- Six vs. Six, including goalkeepers
- Two twenty-five minute halves; five minute half time
- A number 4 ball is used for the game
- No offsides called
- Free kicks conform to FIFA Laws of the Game.
- Penalty kicks may be awarded for direct fouls in the penalty area
- Red/yellow cards are used
- On free kicks, eight yard space
- Substitutions can be made on any stoppage

U-12

- Eight vs. Eight, including goalkeepers
- Two thirty minute halves; five minute half time
- A number 4 ball is used for the game
- Offsides will be called
- Free kicks conform to FIFA Laws of the Game.
- Penalty kicks may be awarded for direct fouls in the penalty area
- Red/yellow cards are used
- On free kicks, eight yard space
- Substitutions can be made on any stoppage

U-14 and Up

- FIFA Laws of the Game apply unless playing small-sided games, meaning roster size, duration of the match, field size and etc. may be adjusted.
- Typical duration of a match:
 - U14 35 minute halves
 - U16 40 minute halves
 - U18 45 minute halves

References:

[FIFA Laws of the Game](#)

[US Youth Soccer Small Sided Games](#)

[USYS Small Sided Games Resources](#)