

# Heading Guidelines



## HEADLINES

NO HEADING TRAINING IN THE EARLY DEVELOPMENT STAGES. STAGES INCL ACTIVE START, FUNDAMENTALS & LEARN TO TRAIN (7V7 SMALL-SIDED MATCH)

GRADUATED APPROACH TO HEADING FOR PLAYERS IN THE SOCCER 4 LIFE (U14+)

AGE GROUP	HEADING FREQUENCY	HEADING EQUIPMENT	NECK & CORE STRENGTHENING	TECHNICAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT
U5-U11	Heading should not be introduced in training sessions at this age	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Resistance Band Look-Aways With Partner</li> <li>Neck Flexion</li> <li>Neck Extension</li> <li>Shoulder Shrugs</li> <li>Prone Cobra</li> <li>Hip Bridges</li> <li>Side Plank With Neck Resistance</li> </ul>	<p><b>TIMING</b> - Eyes open to attack the ball at the optimum point.</p> <p><b>BODY POSITION</b> - Use your body as a barrier, bend the knees, stiffen the neck by tucking the chin towards the chest, etc.</p> <p><b>CONTACT WITH BALL</b> - Contact on forehead between eyebrows and hairline, head moves towards the ball (strike it don't let it bounce off the head), use legs to drive through the ball, etc.</p>
U12-U13	Heading remains a low-priority 1 session per month & max 5 headers	Light soccer balls, beach balls, volleyballs, etc.		
U14-U17	Heading remains a low-priority 1 session per week & max 5-10 headers	Regular & light soccer balls, beach balls, volleyballs, etc.		

	Age	Ball Size	Frequency of heading in any one (1) training session	Match Context
Early Development / Learn To Train Pt. 1	U5-U6	3	HEADING SHOULD NOT BE INTRODUCED IN TRAINING SESSIONS AT THIS STAGE.	<p>The Early Development Stages are designed to create a fun and memorable experience for young kids. At this age, the primary focus is on engaging them in enjoyable activities while developing their physical coordination and technical skills.</p> <p>In today's modern approach, children play on smaller pitches with fewer players, adhering to the retreat line rule to encourage dribbling and passing through different areas of the field.</p> <p>There is now a stronger emphasis across all levels on increasing the number of touches on the ball per player, ball retention and enjoyment, with minimal use of headers in small-sided matches.</p>
	U7	3		
	U8-U9	3 (or 4 light)		
	U10-U11	4 (or 4 light)		

	Age	Ball Size	Frequency of heading in any one (1) training session	Match Context
Learn To Train Pt. 2	U12-U13	4	<p>HEADING REMAINS A LOW PRIORITY AND OUR EXPECTATION IS THAT HEADING SHOULD NOT BE INTRODUCED AT THIS STAGE.</p> <p>However, if coaches feel it necessary to introduce the technique of heading, due to the increased heading activity in the game, we strongly advise a maximum of <b>one session per month (for U12s) or one session per week (for U13s)</b> with light soccer balls, limited repetition of a <b>maximum of five headers</b>, using self-serve or short distances. Coaches should use a variety of balls (e.g., light soccer balls, beach balls, volleyballs, etc.) to support the introducing of the technique of heading and should always be unopposed.</p>	<p>The Learn To Train (9v9 Game Format) stage continues to ensure a rewarding and memorable experience for young players. As they progress, the emphasis is remains on enjoyment, engagement, and mastering both physical and technical skills.</p> <p>At this stage, players are ready to tackle more decision-making challenges, both in training and during games, within a supportive and positive environment.</p> <p>While there may be a slight increase in the use of headers in this age group, it remains a secondary focus compared to other technical aspects of the game.</p> <p>Coaches should continue to maximize their time with players to enhance the development of crucial skills that are frequently utilized at this stage of play.</p>

**RECOMMENDATION:** IF HEADING IS PRACTICED USE LIGHTER BALLS OR A BALL WITH PSI AT THE LOWEST END OF THE RECOMMENDED RANGE (E.G., 11.6 PSI for a range of 11.6-14.5).

	Age	Ball Size	Frequency of heading in any one (1) training session	Match Context
Soccer 4 Life (FIFA Regulation Match Format)	U14	5	<p>HEADING REMAINS A LOW PRIORITY.</p> <p>Players can be introduced to the basic concepts in training with limited repetition. Coaches should not focus on heading practice more than <b>one session per week</b> and limited repetition of a <b>maximum of 10 headers per session</b>. Gradual approach to introducing opposition to the practice of heading. Coaches should recognize when players can jump and head the ball with appropriate form before introducing opposition. Coaches should use a variety of distances relative to the game at this age.</p> <p>As the game begins to replicate the adult game coaches should use a variety of heading situations players will experience during a game. This includes the introduction of contested headers. While you may now use match balls in the session light balls can still be used in training when practicing the technique of heading.</p> <p>It is advised to limit heading practice to <b>one session per week</b> and limited repetition of a <b>maximum of 10 headers per session</b>. Players should take responsibility for monitoring their own heading activity.</p>	<p>The Soccer 4 Life (FIFA Regulation Match Format - 11v11) stages continue to ensure a fun and memorable experience for young players, prioritizing engagement and mastery of both physical and technical skills.</p> <p>Players at this stage are ready to handle increased decision-making responsibilities, evident in the challenges presented during training and matches, all within a supportive and positive environment.</p> <p>As players' understanding of the game and physical capabilities grow, there will be a noticeable tactical use of restarts, leading to more instances of headers.</p> <p>When introducing heading technique as part of a well-rounded program, it's crucial to consider several key factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing and adjusting to the flight of the ball</li> <li>Attacking the ball at the optimal point</li> <li>Achieving proper head and ball contact to control direction and distance</li> </ul> <p>Different types of headers will also be introduced, allowing coaches to incorporate position-specific movement patterns.</p>
	U15			
	U16			
	U17			

**RECOMMENDATION:** LIMIT HEADING IN TRAINING. GRADUAL APPROACH TO TRAINING CONTESTED HEADERS. USE LIGHTER BALLS OR A BALL WITH PSI AT THE LOWEST END OF THE RECOMMENDED RANGE (E.G., 11.6 PSI for a range of 11.6-14.5).

### References:

- Cairns, R., Duffield, R., Jones, M., McCall, A., Meyer, T., Oxenham, V., & Peek, K. (2023). *Where are We Headed? Evidence to Inform Future Football Heading Guidelines*. Sports Med 53, 1335–1358.  
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- The Football Association. (2024). *Heading in Football*. England Football.  
<https://www.EnglandFootball.com/participate/learn/brain-health/heading-in-football>

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