

RFU statement on the participation of very young players in Rugby Union

The Rugby Continuum, published by the Rugby Football Union and the Rugby Football Union for Women, regulates and provides guidance on the playing and coaching of children in the age grades Under 7 to Under 12. Children may enter the Under 7 Continuum age grade on their 6th birthday, but not beforehand.

This statement provides both requirements and guidance to those clubs that run reception groups, where rugby related activities are provided for younger children.

1. Introduction

In providing rugby activity for children under the age of six, it is important that coaches are aware of both the emotional and physical characteristics of this age group. In education terms these youngsters are at Key Stage 1 and good practice would suggest that at this age group we should be seeking to provide a broad foundation of basic movement skills. Youngsters at this age are not generally equipped to deal with too much complexity and their perceptual and social development means that much of the work done with them should be on individual skills gradually progressing to small group activity both co-operative and competitive. Youngsters of this age tend to be preoccupied with their own achievements and some will find the concept of team play quite difficult. It is important to pay due regard to this.

2. Content:

- 2.1 Clubs should provide children with rugby related activities in a safe, enjoyable and un-pressurised environment. The format should be designed to give these children confidence in carrying out basic movement skills, in the context of fair play, sharing and co-operation.
- 2.2 Children should be taught to:
 - a) Develop a broad range of skills in preparation for rugby, including evasion and invasion running, jumping, passing and receiving. These should improve their agility, balance, co-ordination and communication.
 - b) Take part in simple activities involving individual and co-operative play;
 - c) Listen to and respond readily to instructions and signals within established routines;
 - d) Recognise and follow both the relevant rules and the safety procedures for rugby related activity;
- 2.1 Children should be given specific guidance on the skills they need to use and how to use them correctly, as well as positive feedback and praise. Make sure the children have an opportunity to watch others and copy them. Keep to the minimum time spent in pure verbal instruction.
- 2.2 Children may be given an early introduction to Tag Rugby in preparation for Continuum age grade Under 7 Mini Tag. Children need to spend time learning how the game works and its laws, so they become familiar and confident with the game before joining those who are more experienced.

3. Requirements:

- 3.1 All participating children must be registered with that club. Attendance records must be kept including those adults delivering and collecting the children. Consent must be obtained if these are by different people.
- 3.2 The group must be functionally separate from all other age groups and no matches may be played between the children and those of different clubs.
- 3.3 All adults who come into regular contact with these children must be CRB checked and familiar with both the RFU Fair Play Codes and the RFU Child Protection Guidance leaflet.
- 3.4 The club must have close regard to health and safety issues and carry out a risk assessment.

4. Recommendations:

- 4.1 Parents/guardians should be strongly encouraged to remain on the premises throughout. Activities should be located within easy reach of shelter and toilets.
- 4.2 A session should not exceed one hour and there should be at least one break for refreshments. Adults should be alert to the mental and physical capabilities of the individual children involved and be prepared to adapt/curtail sessions in the event that the children become tired or lose concentration. Whilst all children will normally start activities at the same time, their parents/guardians should be instructed that they may withdraw them at any time during the session.
- 4.3 Where there is a wide range of children they should be matched to activities according to age and development. Not all the children need to do the same activity at the same time.
- 4.4 The activity leader should either have experience of working with children of this age or ensure that such a person is present. The activity leader should also attend an RFU tag or mini/midi coaching course and encourage their assistants to also do so. No-one should be directly responsible for the activities of more than 8 children on a regular basis.
- 4.5 These activities should only take place within a club that has achieved or is working towards the RFU's Seal of Approval.

IT IS IMPORTANT FROM THE OUTSET to promote the “spirit of rugby” with both children and their parents/guardians. These wider values of the game include enjoyment, teamwork and respect for the efforts of others. All activities should be directed to encouraging all children to participate and progress. The club should also encourage adults to become involved and provide those that volunteer with practical support.