

# JUGGLING CIRCLE



*A Juggling Circle takes 5 minutes to discover how kids play in a game and identify what they need to improve.*

## OBSERVATION

*All kids have eyes, ears, mouths and minds. A Juggling Circle gives them the freedom to open them and play their own game.*

The Juggling Circle is a microcosm of the game and gives an insight into how individual players behave in a team environment. All kids make mistakes. In a teaching system, we stop their mistakes so we can correct their techniques but they keep making the same mistakes. In a learning system, we observe their mistakes so we can identify their underlying cause. We learn how to eliminate the basic mistakes.

In a Juggling Circle, up to 8 skilful players juggle a ball together and keep a count of their passes. The first thing you notice is that these kids can't put 10 passes together without losing control of the ball. Some of them stand dead still, some remain dead quiet and some of them seem dead scared of making the wrong decision. Talented kids look great when we tell them what to do but they become lost when they have to think for themselves and create their own moves.





## KIDS

*All kids are different and there's a different key to every kid.*

A Juggling Circle is an Activity Centre where we can activate talent, energy and intelligence. There are so many different ways to improve all Soccer kids. **Inactive kids** need exercise and encouragement so they can develop self esteem. **Reactive kids** need the confidence to make mistakes so they can think for themselves. **Interactive kids** need to be included more because they look, listen, communicate and learn. **Active kids** need a training environment where they can practice skills and tricks with their mates. **Proactive kids** need the freedom to run training drills so they can develop their leadership qualities. **Hyperactive kids** have a tremendous amount of natural energy that needs to be channelled so they don't lose it. **Overactive kids** need to relax so they don't try too hard to kick the ball too hard. **Overreactive kids** need to take more responsibility for their actions and learn the consequences of retaliation. **Distractive kids** need to help new kids so that they think about others rather than themselves.



## NATURAL SKILLS

*Natural skills are the ability to look, listen, call, think, learn, understand, make decisions and move. These are not Soccer skills.*

We're trying to teach perfect striking technique to kids who don't know how to move their feet and don't know what to look at when they kick a ball. Kids have minds and bodies of their own and they need to exercise them so they can achieve their full potential.

In a Juggling Circle, the best advice is to tell kids to make as many mistakes as they like. Note the immediate effect this has on the kids. Tell them to keep the ball up in the middle of the circle and let the ball bounce between passes so that it's easier to control. Every kid is different. Some kids stab at the ball. Some kids try too hard and tense up. Some kids rush and some kids like to be the centre of attention.





## MOVEMENT

*The Juggling Circle teaches possession, control and support.*

All Soccer kids are flat footed, stiff legged and one footed. This is what makes them stab **at** the ball awkwardly instead of striking **through** it smoothly. We spend so much time looking at Soccer skills and so little time looking at the natural skills that all kids have. Soccer kids who stand in a line spend 90% of their time standing in a line.

Flat footed kids lead with their striking foot and rush their kick. Freestyle kids, who understand the importance of footwork, lead with their standing foot and step into the ball swinging their kicking foot. As soon as kids get up on their toes, they move to the ball a lot faster and control it a lot better. Players begin to move together as a team. Confidence is based on facts, not sports psychology. Kids need to know that they're improving. Now they can put more passes together.



## COMMUNICATION

*Calling is the easiest way to turn a group of individuals into a team.*

A lot of kids are too scared to speak up for themselves in case they seem overbearing. Most kids have no idea what to call in a game. The most common call is 'Mine' and that could lead to a yellow card.

Calling provides information. There are at least 20 calls that kids can use in a game to improve team possession. Any coach can easily give players a simple test to discover how many they actually know. In a Juggling Circle, it's important that kids put their name on the ball to avoid clashing with other kids. In a game, there are too many times when two team mates clash simply because they don't call their name. Effective calling is the key to support play. When the ball goes out of the Juggling Circle, kids learn to support the ball player by calling 'square left' or 'square right'. Now the kids are moving and calling.





## INITIATIVE

*When kids reach one level, it motivates them to try for the next level.*

Kids will always improve when they practice. They never flatline. The Juggling Circle is a great way to measure performance and improvement. With practice, any group can put 100 passes together.

Juggling a ball in the air combines well with passing a ball on the ground. Kids should alternate 5 minutes of juggling drills with 5 minutes of passing drills. Every time they switch, they can increase the degree of difficulty. Once Soccer kids are naturally active and interactive, they develop the confidence to become proactive.

The next level of the Juggling Circle is One Bounce One Touch which makes kids get up on their toes, call a lot earlier and commit themselves. They must let the ball bounce and can only use one touch.



## REPETITION

*Soccer kids need at least 200 ball touches to develop a feel for it.*

There are plenty of overactive kids who try too hard to kick the ball too hard or they rush at the ball instead of learning to relax under pressure. Close repetition drills give kids confidence on the ball. If they make their own decisions and their own mistakes they can learn.

A lot of coaches tell their kids to keep the ball on the ground but the reality is that a ball is always in the air in a game. The Juggling Circle gives kids a lot experience with a difficult bouncing, spinning ball.

Ball control is a simple motor skill just like walking and running.

Kids need hundreds of ball touches to reach the intuitive level where control becomes second nature. It's important that kids integrate their Soccer skills with their natural skills and coordinate their moves with the rest of the players. We should never separate or isolate techniques.





## COORDINATION

*Football has always been the game for the masses not just for the elite few who are easy to coach.*

The first sign of confidence is when kids start to improvise and create their own moves. When a shy kid suddenly attempts a creative move, it indicates how confident they are in the training environment and we need to encourage self expression so kids become more motivated. A Juggling Circle is the most effective way to overcome team inertia.

Once a group achieves 100 passes you can sense the difference in the players and they're ready to take more responsibility for their training. The next step is to juggle the ball using their weak foot only. At first, they will hesitate but they soon realise that there's nothing wrong with their weak foot. It's only weak because they haven't used it enough.



## CHALLENGE

***Kids need to practice what they can't do not what they can do.  
Coaches need to help kids who can't play not just kids who can play.***

Freestyle kids go as far as they can and from there they can see a lot further. Once they realise how good they are at controlling the high ball, they need to keep pushing their limits until their skill becomes intuitive. By constantly challenging kids, we can stimulate their intelligence. Introduce two balls into the circle and you quickly realise how little we use our natural vision when we all stare at one ball.

Advanced players no longer need to let the ball bounce. They learn to juggle the ball in a circle without letting it hit the ground. These kids learn to control and conserve their energy so that they relax on the ball but are sharp off the ball. They make it happen rather than wait to see what happens. For advanced players, the Juggling Circle becomes a competitive arena where kids challenge each other to be the best.





## CREATIVITY

*Talented kids need the freedom to express themselves and play their own game.*

There are three levels of motor skills. At the cognitive (conscious) level, the inactive and reactive kids focus on their basic control. At the associative (familiar) level, the active and reactive kids begin to take control of the ball. At the autonomous (intuitive) level, proactive kids create their own moves, dictate the play and dominate the game.

Soccer is a language. Freestyle kids can communicate with each other using a ball. They move together as a group and can read each other's moves. Freestyle kids look and think 360 degrees so that they're constantly aware of their team mates and not just the ball. Once the Freestyle kids have concentrated on new skills, the final phase of the Juggling Circle is to unwind with Freestyle improvisation.



## CONTROL CENTRE

*Soccer players need to discover how talented they really are.*

The Juggling Circle is a Control Centre where kids can practice their skills. It's an Entertainment Centre where kids can have fun with the ball. It's a Communication Centre where kids have the confidence to talk to each other and listen to different ideas. It's a Coordination Centre where kids can integrate their Soccer skills with their natural skills and create their own moves without worrying about mistakes.

It's a Correctional Centre where coaches can look at mistakes and correct the techniques. It's an Observation Centre where coaches can learn about players. It's an Activity Centre where coaches can activate talent and deactivate fears. It's a Research Centre where coaches can examine the effects of various drills. It's a Media Centre where coaches can video the training drills. It's an Information Centre where coaches can measure the performance and improvement of kids.

