

Simple Rules of Soccer for Parents

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

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. [Advanced reading about handling the ball rules.](#)

2. 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 over the head.

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

3. 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.

4. 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.**

5. Direct and Indirect Free Kicks (*all kicks in U-9 are Indirect*)

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.

6. Penalty Kick *(not used in U-9 House Division)*

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, 12 yards in front of the center of the goal.

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.

7. 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.

8. Yellow and Red Cards *(not used in U-9 Rec Division)*

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 is required to 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. 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.)

9. Offside

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

This rule will be called "loosely" in U-9. So you may be off the hook for now. However, if you are a U9 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.

[Read more about offside here.](#)

10. 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!

[More on Sportsmanship](#)

We have special rules for our young rec players. Read more:
[Special Rules for TPSL U-9 and U-10 Rec Divisions](#)