

Coaching pathways

The Australian Football League and its state affiliates recognise that at all levels of Australian Football the coach has significantly more influence upon players than any other person. As such, all coaches need to be appropriately accredited to their level. Coaches are the primary reason why players either stay or leave football – there is nothing more directly linked to drop out than having an abusive, angry, bad-tempered, or inadequately trained coach.

Training in coaching and communication techniques with primary and youth-aged children is critical for a number of reasons:

- › coaches influence the forming and **development of the personalities in their care**;
- › the primary years are the ‘golden years’ for the development of fundamental motor skills and learning sports-specific skills. This is the most rapid learning phase of young lives and the **failure to develop such skills in these pre-youth years is a major factor influencing teenage drop-out in sport**.

Learning is an active process

Learning is an active process linked to the development of young people. There are:

- › identifiable phases in learning physical skills; and
- › learning processes change over time as young people gain experience.

Strategies for helping young people learn include letting them:

- › watch, listen and then experiment for themselves;
- › try the activity first, and then refine the skills with the help of feedback; and
- › watch other young people.

How young people like to learn differs with the particular skill, their experience and the way they learn best.

Learning is developmental

Learning changes as young people grow and mature with:

- › physical changes in their size and strength;
- › social, emotional and psychological development; and
- › their experience as they progress from beginner to intermediate to advanced skill levels.

With experience young people adapt to changing circumstances with greater speed and ease.

Key characteristics of more experienced players include their ability to:

- › identify and sift relevant cues in their playing environment quickly and accurately; and
- › decide what information is relevant to their performance.

Learning is multi-dimensional

People typically learn more than one thing at a time.

In the process of building sports skills, young people are also learning:

- › what is expected of them as a player;
- › how to work with friends and teammates; and
- › the skills they are best at.

This highlights the complexity of acquiring skills and how the broader social aspects of life also affect young people as they learn sports.

Aims of quality coaching

Coaches aim to pass onto young people a sound understanding of:

- › skills, tactics, strategies and rules; and
- › etiquette and behavioural standards.

This aims to help players develop an ability to make decisions independently and to participate within the ethos of the sport.

Coaches aid learning best by being flexible and not overly directive. They need to plan:

- › what they will teach;
- › how they will facilitate; and
- › how they will structure tasks.

Coaching courses – training

The development of Australian Football, particularly at grass-roots and club football level, depends primarily on the environment where the game is organised and played.

The following are key elements in establishing a first-class environment for the recruitment and retention of Australian Football participants:

- › how football clubs and facilities are managed by club personnel;
- › how football activities and games are presented and managed by coaches;
- › how games are umpired; and
- › how players are supported by trainers and sports medicine personnel.

The AFL, through its Game Development Department, develops, implements and conducts training programs to develop coaches, umpires, trainers and club management. These programs are generally conducted through the AFL's state and territory affiliates. In line with the Australian Sports Commission's education programs and sport industry vocational programs, the AFL's accreditation programs for coaches, umpires, trainers and administrators are competency based.

Mandatory accreditation

All state and territory football bodies have a mandatory accreditation policy; coaches **MUST** complete an approved AFL coaching course if they are coaching children. There are no second chances; children need to be appropriately coached through these formative years.

The coaching of children at AFL Auskick centres is the most important aspect of the program. Failure to develop coordination and basic skills is the single greatest factor in children opting not to continue participating in their chosen sport, or sport generally.

Parents can access courses that are highly practical in their content and presentation.

Accreditation courses

The specific accreditation courses offered by the AFL are described below. As part of each course:

- › candidates will be assessed practically in course time and/or on the job;
- › excellent AFL coaching manuals and further presenters' notes are provided as part of the course;
- › coaches must agree to and sign the AFL Coaches' Code of Conduct as part of their accreditation; and
- › as accredited coaches, successful candidates receive the appropriate AFL coaching certificate and are entered on the national coaches' database.

Orientation course

- › Introductory 3-4 hour course.
- › Conducted through the practical hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel.
- › Designed for parents/helpers who, regardless of their football background, would like to assist in running activities.
- › Outlines the conduct of a typical AFL Auskick session and how it fits into a season-long program.
- › Introduces appropriate warm-up activities.
- › Demonstrates the skills of Australian Football.
- › Shows, through practical involvement, how to teach these skills to children.
- › Demonstrates a variety of skill games and activities.
- › Introduces the principles of conducting and umpiring modified football games.
- › Offers credits to the AFL Auskick Level 1 Certificate.

Level 1 – AFL junior course

- › The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation for coaching children 5-12 years old in both AFL Auskick centres and community clubs is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › Designed for parents/helpers who want to assume a coaching role, organise activities, teach the skills of the game, and conduct modified games. It focuses on issues surrounding the participation and practices appropriate to the development and enjoyment of players in this age range.

- › Topics include the:
 - role of the coach;
 - planning and organisation of the training session;
 - teaching the basic skills of Australian Football;
 - skill games and modified games/forming a basic team plan;
 - growth and development/safety issues/legal issues.
- › The **teachers' Level 1 AFL Auskick** course takes into account the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and is an abbreviated course.

AFL Auskick coaching coordinator course

- › Designed for coaches who want to develop their skills to manage a coaching program as a leader coach.
- › As with other higher qualifications in coaching, such as the Level 2 Youth/Senior accreditation, this course would normally be conducted over a long weekend in a live-in environment.
- › Coaches undertake activities and are assessed over a full season (in this case an AFL Auskick season) by qualified staff.
- › Improving the coaching knowledge and skills of candidates, along with their technical planning and management skills, are the course's priorities.

Level 1 AFL youth course

- › **The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation** for coaching participants aged 13-18 years is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › The course has a focus on understanding youth participation in Australian Football, which permeates all aspects of the course. It has a specific focus on the things that motivate and demotivate youths in football, the social aspects of working with and managing players in this age range, specific communication skills and how to develop higher-level skills and a higher-level understanding of the game.
- › Topics include:
 - the role of the coach;
 - communication with youth-aged players;
 - issues surrounding youth participation in Australian Football;
 - growth and development factors;
 - planning for participation and development;
 - teaching the skills of Australian Football;
 - organising the training session;
 - team play and tactics;
 - fitness for football/recovery and rehabilitation;
 - coaching and safety issues; and
 - practical assessment.
- › The Teachers' Level 1 Youth Course takes into account the recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and is an abbreviated course.

Level 1 – AFL senior course

- › The AFL's minimum coaching accreditation for coaching adult participants aged 18 years and older, is conducted over about 14 hours.
- › Conducted through the practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of trained personnel and expert presenters.
- › Topics include:
 - the role of the coach;
 - planning;
 - teaching the skills of Australian Football;
 - organising the training session;
 - team play and tactics;
 - fitness for football/recovery and rehabilitation;
 - coaching and safety issues; and
 - practical assessment.

Level 2 – AFL (youth/senior) certificate

- › The AFL's coaching accreditation for coaches involved in coaching at a higher level (representative team, development squad, club coordinator etc.) or for coaches who have an aptitude and genuine interest in improving themselves. The course starts with a live-in weekend with a review day at the end of the season (around 30 hours of course work is required, in addition to practical involvement).
- › Conducted through practical, hands-on involvement of participants under the guidance of the relevant state director of coaching and expert presenters, this course's focus is on preparing a coach to plan, prepare, conduct, review and adapt a year-long program of coaching.
- › Topics include:
 - evaluating a coach's performance;
 - planning/periodisation of training;
 - developing the skills of Australian Football;
 - team play and tactics;
 - sports psychology and communication;
 - principles of physical preparation;
 - coaching and safety issues;
 - fitness;
 - the coach and umpiring; and
 - practical assessment.

Level 3 – AFL high performance

- › **The AFL's coaching accreditation** for coaches operating in, or aspiring to coach in the AFL, state leagues, TAC Cup, the under-16 and under-18 national championships, AIS-AFL Academy or other elite programs. Coaches, including talented coaches not yet operating at this level, apply to be invited to this week-long, live-in program.
- › This is the highest accreditation offered by the AFL and covers in greater depth those areas dealt with in Level 2, while also covering up-to-date issues, such as emerging technology, media relations and coaches as program managers and mentors.

