



FOOTBALL / / / / /
DEVELOPMENT
/ / / / / **MODEL**

FAQs

ON FOOTBALL SAFETY



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Running a league can feel like you're on the hotseat 24/7. Questions come early and often from both coaches and parents. Some are easy to answer - when does the season start? How much does it cost to register? But others can put you on your heels.

We created this guide to help answer some of the common questions you have as a league as well as provide USA Football-approved answers to the ones you get from coaches and parents.

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GENERAL QUESTIONS

Q Is football safe?

A Every sport our kids love to play offers an abundance of physical, emotional and social advantages. Enjoying any sport comes with a chance for injury. However, sports today – including football – are taught and played smarter and safer than ever before. It begins with trained coaches and forward-thinking developmental frameworks.

Q Are your child's coaches certified through a nationally accredited coaching curriculum?

A If they're certified by USA Football, then yes, they are. USA Football's Youth Coach Certification provides your child's coaches with a fundamental education in heat and hydration, sudden cardiac arrest, concussion recognition and response, age-appropriate Football Development Model modules, tackling, blocking and equipment fitting (for tackle football coaches) and abuse prevention and reporting.

Q Is your child participating in a league that is utilizing USA Football's Football Development Model?

A If so, your league is utilizing a new approach to coaching, learning and playing the sport that meets young athletes where they are developmentally and guides them on a life-long path to health and fitness through the fun of America's favorite sport. USA Football believes parents know their children best and should own the decision of the right football experience for them and their family. The Football Development Model encourages leagues to offer multiple entry points into the sport, providing smart options for parents.

Q How common are concussions?

A There is insufficient data on the frequency of concussion in youth football (pre-high school) to accurately answer this question due to a number of factors like restrictions under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, availability of funding, use of human subjects and others. USA Football encourages more robust research in the area of concussion occurrence so the medical community can better assess the prevalence of the issue.

Q What are the signs and symptoms of a concussion?

A According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), concussion symptoms reported by an athlete in any sport include:

- Headache or "pressure" in head
- Nausea or vomiting
- Balance problems or dizziness
- Double or blurry vision
- Sensitivity to light
- Sensitivity to noise
- Feeling sluggish, hazy, foggy or groggy
- Concentration or memory problems
- Confusion
- Just not "feeling right" or is "feeling down"

Across all sports, the CDC cites the following concussion signs observed by parents/guardians:

- Appears dazed or stunned
- Is confused about assignment or position
- Forgets an instruction
- Is unsure of game, score or opponent
- Moves clumsily
- Answers questions slowly
- Loses consciousness (even briefly)
- Shows mood, behavior or personality changes

For more information, check out the CDC's **"Concussion Fact Sheet for Parents."**

Q How does USA Football make coaching and playing football safer?

A USA Football provides resources to coaches on proper technique as well as athlete health and safety. More than 700,000 coach certifications have been completed through USA Football. This means millions of athletes across all ages have been coached using better and safer techniques.

Q What's the best helmet available?

A A properly fitted helmet – regardless of manufacturer – is a key step in reducing the risk of concussions, facial lacerations and fractures.

USA Football has partnered with Riddell to educate coaches on properly fitting helmets as part of USA Football's Youth Coach Certification and to help parents by providing helmet fitting guidelines, [available here](#). Coaches and parents should continue checking helmet fittings frequently throughout the season to ensure the helmet is still properly fitting the player.

Also, helmets should have a National Operating Committee on Standards for Athletic Equipment (**NOCSAE**) seal. We encourage you to insist that your youth football program follows the reconditioning guidelines of the helmet manufacturers.

Q What does reduced contact mean? / How are you reducing contact?

A The Football Development Model (FDM) spans three categories of football with a range of game-types across each:

- Non-Contact (flag)
- Limited Contact (Rookie Limited Contact™ and Senior Limited Contact™ through padded flag)
- Contact (Rookie Tackle® and Senior Tackle™).

Within each category, the amount of contact differs. For example, Rookie Limited Contact™ is a bridge game where athletes wear traditional equipment, plus flags. Athletes learn how to block, track and engage an opponent with proper form and technique, all while staying on their feet. For the full breakdown and description of these game types, [click here](#).

USA Football's Levels of Contact and Youth Practice Guidelines, endorsed by football and sports medicine leaders across the country, also define contact and seek to limit full contact in practices while teaching football smarter. This approach assists the development of young athletes and allows them to learn the game and related contact and non-contact skills in a progression that best suits them. This path offers more opportunities to enjoy the sport and choose the game-type kids and parents wish to play.

Q Where can I learn more about the Football Development Model (FDM)?

A Head to fdm.usafootball.com for more information. There are sections for leagues, parents and coaches to learn more with details on how it all works. You can also sign up for more content and updates on the future of football.





PARENT QUESTIONS

Q How do I know if my coach is properly trained?

A Coaches have a lot on their plate, but you can always start by asking your coaches if they earned USA Football certification before stepping on the practice field. Some coaches choose to wear or have their certification badge visible on the sidelines.

Q My coaches said they're certified. What does that mean?

A That means they completed their certification requirements for this year, which includes health and safety topics, proper technique and coaching modules customized for players' age range based on our Football Development Model.

All youth coaches must earn their certificate every year to be certified.



Q What can I do to get my league involved with the Football Development Model (FDM)?

A The first step to bringing the Football Development Model to your community is enrolling your organization with USA Football. Enrolling will gain you access to resources to implement game-type progressions, improve operations within your league, as well as coach certification and educational resources.

After enrolling, you'll also be invited to take the next step and become a USA Football Recognized League. The League Excellence Program recognizes youth football organizations based on how they operate their leagues against the best practices as established by USA Football.

Q How can I prioritize athlete safety in my league?

A The USA Football League Excellence Program recognizes organizations that are continuing to improve youth football for our kids. Through your league's participation in the program, you'll be asked to verify compliance with operational standards to determine your eligibility for recognition from USA Football as a Gold, Silver or Bronze league.

A league's recognition within the program is dependent on factors including, but not limited to, coach certification, utilization of a game-type progression, adherence to USA Football recommendations on contact, emergency preparedness, performing satisfactory background checks on coaches, and maintaining appropriate levels of insurance.

The League Excellence Program provides structure to prioritize key safety features and recognizes your commitment to implement them for your players and families.

Learn more at usafootball.com/excellence.

Q Does the Football Development Model make the game safer?

A The Football Development Model is designed to make America's favorite sport safer by reducing contact and teaching it in a way that meets athletes where they are in their development. The model centers on physical literacy and age-appropriate skill instruction. It teaches the right skill at the right time and builds athletic foundations through progressive skill development. The model reimagines how football is presented, practiced and coached from youth through adulthood across multiple game-types and options.

Dr. Brian Hainline, the NCAA's Chief Medical Officer and Football Development Model Council Chairman, says, "The Football Development Model is an athlete's roadmap – at any age – to enjoy the fun of football by participating in sport activities that are developmentally appropriate physically, mentally and socially. Part of the model's forward thinking is that you learn to become an athlete before you learn to become a player. When sports programs adopt the FDM, athletes will perform better, play longer and gain a lifelong path to athleticism, health and wellness through football."



COACH QUESTIONS

Q How do I inform other coaches of safer techniques?

A Coaches may have their own views on how to teach and coach the game, but some critical areas that deal with contact take extra care and effort to master. Make sure every coach in your league or on your staff is certified by visiting usafootball.com/certification.

Q How do I help parents who just became new coaches learn the game?

A Every year, thousands of new coaches teach America's favorite sport. All coaches should be certified before stepping on a practice field or interacting with children. They can get certified at usafootball.com/certification.

Additionally, USA Football offers a variety of supplemental resources to coaches. Make sure to visit blogs.usafootball.com or footballdevelopment.com for access to free and premium resources to best coach our game.

Q Should I spend more time teaching skills like blocking and tackling or on running plays at practice?

A Prioritizing proper technique is important and should be a coaches' main focus. X's and O's are important, too; it's about finding the proper balance.

To achieve that balance, every coach should start by using USA Football's youth practice guidelines for tackle football. You can find them at usafootball.com/practice-guidelines.

Additionally, youth coaches who get certified can access 48 practice plans, including 12 for each age and stage (5+, 8+, 10+, 12+). Each practice plan helps coaches teach their kids with USA Football practice and contact guidelines.

Q How do I make sure I properly balance teaching contact in a controlled environment?

A Asking an inexperienced athlete to jump into open field tackling on their first practice and expecting them to succeed won't put them in a position to be successful.

USA Football launched a Prep for Contact curriculum and a game-type pathway in 2020 – both through the Football Development Model. These help ensure that young athletes properly prepare for contact, whether it's the way they play or are simply getting used to making contact with the ground.

It's also important to remember that contact doesn't always need to take place at full speed. Refer to USA Football's Levels of Contact to ensure you're properly structuring your practices. These are available online at usafootball.com/coaches-organizations/levels-of-contact.

Q How should I structure my practice to teach skills properly?

- A** USA Football offers several practice planning resources.
- 48 Practice Plan Templates are available to coaches who complete youth coach certification at usafootball.com/certification.
 - USA Football's current Practice Guidelines should be put to use. Learn more at usafootball.com/practice-guidelines.
 - Ensure you're breaking up contact appropriately by learning the Levels of Contact at usafootball.com/resources-tools/coach/levels-of-contact.
 - The **Coach Planner** app has pre-made practice plans for all stages.

THEME	ACTIVITY	COACHING POINTS	DURATION
CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT/ ATHLETE HEALTH	Recovery	Use TrueSport Recovery Lesson Resources	5 Minutes
	Gallop (2 x 10 yards)		5 Minutes
DYNAMIC WARM-UP	Lateral Shuffle (2 x 10 yards)		5 Minutes
	Single Leg Quad Stretch and Reach (2 x 10 yards)		10 Minutes
ATHLETIC FOUNDATIONS	Jumping Jacks (15x)	What cool moves can you make to get away from the sharks?	10 Minutes
	Sharks and Minnows (5 minutes)	Add in different skills (run, skip, shuffle, gallop, etc.)	2 Minutes
	RaceTrack (5 minutes)		2 Minutes

Q Why should we follow USA Football's skill progressions?

A USA Football has designed Skill Progressions that are appropriate for every age and stage of development. These skill progressions were designed in collaboration with youth, high school and professional coaches to make sure key components of each contact and non-contact skill were documented.

By using Skill Progressions this way, coaches can identify where athletes are succeeding or struggling. They may then properly identify drills to address areas that athletes need to improve to achieve success.

Following a Skill Progression and sharing that with your athletes and fellow coaches will streamline communication across the board, saving time on the field and limiting confusion.

Q What is the value of non-contact games like flag compared to tackle football?

A Non-Contact game-types like flag builds athletes' physical literacy and develops skills that apply to Limited Contact and Contact versions of the sport. USA Football asked some of the country's top college head coaches for their take on flag and here's what they had to say:



"You have to bend your knees and guess what, when you pull a flag and you have no helmet, your head is out of the equation and you bring your arms to pull the flag, you get in proper hitting position and that's what tackling is about."

Herm Edwards // Arizona State University



"At the University of South Carolina, we actually have what we call a tracking tempo. We have a tracking tempo when we talk in terms of tracking the near hip, and I think that flag football and touch football would be perfect for those situations to learn to really set the feet down to when we call 'come to balance' to keep your feet running, but come to balance and track the near hip."

Will Muschamp // University of South Carolina



"My dad was an NFL and college football coach. He taught me that there was a natural progression to the game and really felt that flag was the best way to start that out and it was. To be able to have that development at a young age and to be able to learn how to control my body and be able to learn what it meant to throw a ball, catch a ball, be in a team sport, to learn the accountability of doing things the right way was a great natural progression."

Clay Helton // University of Southern California



"I think flag football is a great way to start the game to get a comfort level with it, to build confidence and then let it grow from there."

James Franklin // Penn State University



usafootball.com/fdm