



**NORTHWEST SUBURBAN
FOOTBALL CLUB**

VOLUNTEER COACH HANDBOOK

Learn the Game. Love the Game. Grow Together.

PART I | THE NSFC COACH

A practical guide for first-time and experienced volunteer coaches

WELCOME TO COACHING WITH NSFC

You do not need to know everything about soccer to make a meaningful difference.

Thank you for volunteering. For many families, the coach is the person who most directly shapes their experience with NSFC. Players will remember whether practices felt organized, whether they were encouraged after mistakes, whether they had opportunities to play, and whether soccer became something they wanted to keep doing.

Our job as a club is not to hand you a team and hope for the best. This handbook gives you a common foundation, practical guidance, and a place to turn when you need help. Bring your own personality and experience. If you are new to soccer, lean on the resources we provide. If you have coached or played before, use the curriculum as a framework and add what you know.

Most importantly, remember that you are not expected to do this alone. Ask questions. Call us when something is unclear. Tell us early if you need coverage or support. We would much rather help solve a small problem than allow a volunteer coach to become overwhelmed. And lastly, THANK YOU. Thank you for your support, your time, your commitment to our players.

Andy Grygo – NSFC President

Liberato Cascone – NSFC Vice President

Coach in 5 Minutes

If your first practice is tomorrow and this is all you have time to read, remember these eight things:

1. Keep it positive.

Correct the skill without embarrassing the child.

2. Keep them moving.

Short explanations, few lines, lots of ball touches.

3. Give everyone meaningful playing time.

Skill level or a close score is not a reason to leave a child on the bench.

4. Let players make decisions.

Coach less from the sideline and teach more at practice.

5. Come with a purpose.

Know what you want the team to improve before practice begins.

6. Communicate.

Tell families where to be, when to be there, what to bring, and when something changes.

7. Choose safety.

Stop for lightning, adhere to protocols, involve parents, and call for help when needed.

8. Ask NSFC for help.

Coverage, rules, practice ideas, parent communication, safety - you are not on your own.

1 | THE NSFC WAY

Our mission, values, and the coaching culture we want every family to experience.

Our Mission

Our Mission is to provide a positive, inclusive, and development-focused soccer experience for youth players of all skill levels. Northwest Suburban Football Club is committed to teaching fundamental skills, encouraging teamwork, and modeling sportsmanship in a supportive environment that prioritizes player growth, confidence, and enjoyment of the game. Through age-appropriate training, quality coaching, and community involvement, we strive to develop not only better soccer players, but respectful teammates and engaged young individuals - on and off the field.

For a coach, the mission becomes visible in ordinary moments: how you respond when a player makes a mistake, whether the beginner receives the same attention as the leading scorer, whether players learn to compete respectfully, and whether children leave the field more confident than when they arrived.

Our Vision

Our Vision is to unite families across neighboring communities through an accessible, community-driven youth soccer program that inspires a lifelong love of the game while promoting teamwork, sportsmanship, and personal growth.

NSFC is building more than individual teams. We are building a soccer community. A welcoming first practice, a teammate helping another player, a respectful handshake after a difficult game, and families returning season after season are all part of that vision.

Lead Ourselves. Lift Our Team.

These two values describe how we expect coaches and players to think. Lead Ourselves means being prepared, dependable, composed, accountable, respectful, and willing to learn. Lift Our Team means noticing every player, encouraging effort, building confidence, supporting teammates, respecting opponents and officials, and helping the entire group become better together.

What the NSFC Way Looks Like

We do not expect every coach to have the same personality or run identical practices. We do expect a recognizable culture. Player development comes before short-term results; every child belongs; positive reinforcement will outweigh criticism; mistakes are part of learning; and players should gradually learn to see the game and make decisions for themselves.

Try to win. Develop everyone. Compete with character. If players improve, gain confidence, learn to be teammates, and want to come back and play again, the season is moving in the right direction.

2 | THE NSFC COACH

Freedom to coach with your own personality comes with responsibility to represent the club well.

When you step onto the field as an NSFC coach, families see more than a parent who volunteered. They see the club. That does not mean you need professional credentials. It means players and families should be able to count on you to be prepared enough to lead, humble enough to learn, dependable enough to be trusted, and patient enough to teach.

Come to practice with a simple plan. Communicate early when work, family, illness, or another conflict affects your availability. Missing an occasional practice does not make someone unreliable; failing to communicate and repeatedly leaving families without leadership does. If your schedule becomes difficult, contact NSFC so we can help arrange coverage or discuss other options.

The Curriculum Is a Resource, Not a Script

NSFC provides age-specific practice plans because no first-time coach should be standing at the field wondering what to do with ten children for the next hour. New coaches should lean on the curriculum heavily. Experienced coaches are encouraged to bring their own activities, knowledge, and personality. The objective is consistent development, not identical practices.

If your team needs another week on a concept, repeat it. If an exercise is not working, change it. If the previous game exposed a clear need, address it. The better question is not whether you followed a page exactly; it is whether the session helped the players become better.

Support First, Accountability When Necessary

NSFC wants volunteer coaches to succeed and will help with practice planning, rules, coverage, player behavior, equipment, communication, or other challenges. At the same time, volunteering does not remove accountability. Repeated unexplained absences, inappropriate treatment of players, confrontations with officials or opponents, disregard for safety, inappropriate communication, or other conduct inconsistent with club standards may require club leadership to counsel the coach, establish corrective expectations, limit responsibilities, or remove the coach when necessary.

Before the Season

Every coach must complete the required background screening, acknowledge the Coach Code of Conduct, and attend the preseason coach orientation. Orientation will review the age-group game format, specific rules that should be focused on, the curriculum, safety expectations, and where to find help. You do not need to memorize the Laws of the Game; you do need to understand the rules that affect the players you coach.

3 | COACHING CHILDREN

Good youth coaching is less about how much soccer you know and more about how well you help children learn.

Children are not miniature adults. Their attention spans, coordination, confidence, and ability to process instruction change dramatically with age. An explanation that makes perfect sense to an experienced player may mean nothing to a beginner. Start with one clear idea, demonstrate it, let players try, and add detail only when they are ready.

Meet Players Where They Are

At U4, soccer is largely movement, imagination, and becoming comfortable with a ball. At U6, players need many touches while learning to dribble, stop, turn, shoot, and begin passing. At U8, they start connecting themselves, the ball, and teammates. U10 players can increasingly understand why space, support, scanning, and transition matter. By U12, players can connect technique with more advanced team ideas - but a recreational U12 team may still include a first-time player. Coach the children you have at their level.

Use demonstrations more than lectures. Correct one important thing at a time rather than listing every error you noticed. A player who receives five corrections after every attempt soon becomes afraid to try. Good coaches know what to correct; great youth coaches also know what can wait.

Connection Before Correction

Learn names quickly, greet players, notice improvement, and build trust. Correction is still necessary, but it should teach positively. Avoid sarcasm or comments that make a child feel foolish. Sometimes the right response to a mistake is a technical cue; sometimes it is simply, 'You're okay - try it again.'

Praise should also have a purpose. 'Great job looking up before that pass' means a lot to a player. Notice recovery runs, communication, unselfish decisions, weaker-foot attempts, and the player who keeps trying after failure. What you praise tells the team what you value.

Develop Decision-Makers

Soccer moves too quickly for players to wait for the sideline to tell them what to do. Ask questions: Where is the open space? What did you see? Where could you move to help? Give players time to answer and opportunities to solve problems. A player who is afraid to make mistakes eventually becomes afraid to make decisions.

Different Players Need Different Challenges

Fair coaching does not mean identical coaching. An advanced player may need a smaller space, a weaker-foot challenge, fewer touches, or a leadership responsibility. A beginner may need more space, less pressure, a shorter distance, a supportive teammate, or a simpler instruction. The goal is to make the next step achievable without removing the challenge.

Avoid labeling young players too early as 'the defender,' 'the goalie,' or 'the best player.' Rotate responsibilities, especially at younger ages, so children experience the game from different places and continue developing a broad range of skills.

Every NSFC player deserves meaningful playing time regardless of skill level or the competitive situation of the match. Normal substitution differences will happen, but ability alone - or the desire to protect a close score - is not a reason to repeatedly leave a developing player on the sideline. Players develop by playing.

Positive Does Not Mean Unstructured

Children need simple boundaries. Listen when the coach needs attention. Respect teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, equipment, and the field. Give an appropriate effort and participate. When behavior becomes a problem, first look at the activity itself: long lines, long explanations, confusion, or boredom often create the behavior we are trying to correct. When individual correction is needed, be calm, direct, and private when possible.

Do not use humiliation, punishment, or excessive conditioning as discipline. Whenever possible, fitness should come from playing soccer. Competition is a useful teaching tool, but it should build effort and resilience. Children who treat teammates or opponents poorly need to be addressed properly.

4 | RUNNING GREAT PRACTICES

A simple plan, lots of ball contact, and purposeful play beat a complicated practice every time.

Before choosing drills, decide what you want the players to learn. A practice might focus on dribbling, receiving, passing, finishing, defending, creating space, support, or transition. Once you know the theme, activities should connect to it rather than feeling like unrelated drills pulled together at random.

Plan the Season. Coach the Team in Front of You.

The NSFC curriculum provides a developmental roadmap, but it cannot watch your team play. You can. The previous game is one of your best sources of information. If players crowded around the ball, struggled to receive under pressure, failed to support the player in possession, or repeatedly faced another problem, use the next practice to recreate that soccer situation while it is still fresh and relatable.

Keep the conversation about the team problem, not the child who made a mistake. 'Saturday we had trouble finding space when we won the ball' creates a learning opportunity. 'Remember when Jack lost it and they scored?' creates embarrassment. We correct situations, not children.

A Simple Practice Flow

ARRIVE & PLAY	WARM UP WITH THE BALL	DEVELOP THE THEME	PLAY THE GAME
Small-sided soccer as players arrive.	Touches, movement, coordination, simple challenges.	One or two activities: learn it, add pressure, solve the problem.	Finish with soccer and let the theme appear naturally.

For a 60-minute practice, those phases might roughly be 10 minutes, 10 minutes, 20-25 minutes, and 15-20 minutes. Treat the clock as a guide. If players are engaged and learning, you do not need to stop because the plan says twelve minutes. If an activity is failing, change it.

Keep Players Active

Watch how many children are standing. One player shooting while eight wait in line produces very few repetitions. Use multiple balls, smaller groups, shorter lines, or a game-like setup. Five minutes of setup before practice can save fifteen minutes during it, so arrive early when possible and have the first activity ready.

Start Simple. Add Challenge.

Demonstrate briefly, give one or two coaching points, and start. You can add rules later. The best activities create a soccer problem rather than requiring constant instruction: a 3v1 naturally teaches support, a dribbling game with changing targets encourages players to look up, and a small-sided game can teach width more effectively than repeatedly shouting 'spread out.'

If an activity is too difficult, increase space, reduce pressure, shorten distance, add an attacker, or simplify the objective. If it is too easy, reduce space, add pressure, create another decision, use a time challenge, or ask an older player to use the weaker foot. The question is simply: what can I change to make this the right level of difficult?

When Practice Is Not Working

Change it. Simplify the rules, adjust the teams, make the field bigger, remove a defender, add another ball, or abandon the activity and play soccer. There is no prize for finishing every drill on the page. Coaching means observing what is actually happening and adapting.

The NSFC practice test: Were players active? Did they get plenty of ball touches? Did the activities connect to something we wanted to teach? Did they get to play soccer? If yes, the practice was probably productive.

5 | GAME DAY

Prepare the team, manage the environment, and give players room to compete.

Games are where players apply what they have practiced under real pressure. They are also where coaches can feel the strongest urge to control every moment. Your job is to prepare the players, manage substitutions and safety, provide appropriate guidance, maintain perspective, and then let them play.

Before Kickoff

Arrive early enough to confirm attendance, organize equipment, identify goalkeeper responsibilities where applicable, think through substitutions, and warm up. Use familiar activities and a few simple reminders rather than introducing new tactics. Young players perform better when they understand one or two responsibilities, not ten.

Playing Time and Positions

Every player must receive meaningful playing time. Minutes will not always be mathematically identical because of attendance, injury, goalkeeper responsibilities, behavior, safety, and the natural flow of substitutions, but coaches should intentionally prevent players from sitting for extended periods simply because someone else is stronger.

Give players enough time to settle into the game rather than substituting them after only a minute or two. Assistant coaches can help track rotations. At younger ages, rotate positions over the season so players learn the game from different perspectives. Do not permanently assign a child to a specific position (ex. goalkeeper or defense) simply because that choice makes the current team easier to manage.

Coach Less From the Sideline

Constant commands - pass, shoot, turn, clear it, go left - make players dependent and often arrive after the situation has already changed. Use occasional cues connected to concepts they know, and see how they progress. When a mistake happens, coach what happens next: recover, reset, keep playing.

Halftime, Winning, and Losing

Halftime should be brief: recognize something the team is doing well, identify one or two adjustments, and give the players a clear second-half focus. When you win, celebrate effort and good soccer without embarrassing the opponent. When you lose, allow disappointment without turning the postgame into a list of failures. The result matters, but it does not define the players.

Lopsided Games

When NSFC is comfortably ahead, continue playing soccer while changing the challenge: rotate positions, give developing players greater responsibility, encourage combinations, use weaker feet, or ask frequent scorers to create chances for teammates. Avoid announcing that nobody is allowed to score; that can be just as humiliating to the opponent. If NSFC is behind, give players achievable goals such as connecting several passes, creating one good chance, or winning the next few minutes.

Officials and Opponents

Ask referees for clarification respectfully and then move on. This should be done after the game. Repeated arguing, sarcasm, yelling, intimidation, or encouraging the sideline to challenge officials is not acceptable. Many youth referees are learning too. Introduce yourself to the opposing coach, handle situations away from players whenever possible, and bring any serious concerns to NSFC leadership post match.

Use the Game to Teach the Next Practice

After the game, ask what the team did well, where it struggled, what situation kept repeating, and what previously practiced ideas appeared successfully. That creates a simple coaching cycle: Practice, Play, Observe, Teach, Play Again. One of the best signs of development is seeing players solve a problem on Saturday without looking to the coach for the answer.

6 | PARENTS & COMMUNICATION

Clear, consistent communication helps families focus on the soccer instead of the logistics.

Parents should not have to wonder when practice begins, where the team is meeting, whether a game changed, what their child needs, or whether the coach received an absence notice. You do not need to communicate constantly; you need to communicate reliably.

Set Expectations Early

At the start of the season, introduce yourself and your assistants, explain where official schedules and team messages will be found, and establish arrival, attendance, and equipment expectations. Briefly explain that NSFC emphasizes development, meaningful participation, teamwork, sportsmanship, enjoyment, and healthy competition.

Make the Basics Easy to Find

A short weekly message is often enough: practice date and location, game time and requested arrival time, what players should bring, and a reminder to report absences. When schedules, fields, weather decisions, or coaching coverage change, communicate as early as possible and reinforce official club information rather than creating competing messages.

Players will occasionally miss practices and games. Families have school, vacations, illness, and other commitments. Ask for reasonable notice, especially for games, because attendance affects planning. The same courtesy applies to coaches: life happens; communicate.

Parents Remain Available at the Field

Parents or guardians are expected to remain at the field and reasonably available during practices and games. A player may become injured or ill, need medication or individual care, become upset, or need to leave unexpectedly. The coach remains responsible for the entire team and cannot appropriately become a substitute caregiver for one child.

Bathroom and personal-care needs are the parent's responsibility. At the end of practices and games, especially with younger players, children should leave with their parent, guardian, or designated responsible adult rather than walking away unattended.

Communicate Through Adults

For younger players, scheduling and official team information should flow through parents or guardians and club-approved channels. Do not rely on children to carry important information home. Treat family information with discretion; another player's attendance, development, behavior, or personal circumstances should not become sideline conversation.

Volunteer coaches are not expected to be available around the clock. A reasonable response time is fine. What matters is following through: if you tell a family you will find an answer, get back to them. Clear communication builds confidence that the team is organized and cared for.

7 | SAFETY & PLAYER PROTECTION

When there is uncertainty, choose the safer option and involve the right people.

You are not expected to diagnose injuries or become a medical professional. You are expected to use good judgment, follow club and facility procedures, involve parents, and contact emergency services or NSFC leadership when appropriate.

When in doubt, choose safety. There will always be another practice or game.

Weather and Lightning

At our parks, if the Thor Guard warning sounds or the warning light is active, stop activity immediately and direct players to leave the field and take shelter. Do not finish the drill or wait to see whether conditions improve. Activity resumes only when the applicable all-clear has been given (this is at minimum 30 minutes after the warning system sounds). The same safety-first approach applies to excessive heat, poor air quality, severe weather, and unsafe field conditions.

Injuries and Concussions

NSFC provides coaches with a basic first-aid kit and ice packs for appropriate minor situations. For a more significant injury, stop activity and involve the parent or guardian. Do not diagnose, pressure a player to return, or personally transport an injured player for treatment. If emergency care may be needed, call 911. Significant injuries must also be communicated to NSFC leadership.

A player with a possible concussion is removed from activity and does not return that day. Notify the parent and NSFC. A concussion or major injury requires appropriate medical clearance before the player returns to NSFC soccer activities. Coaches do not make return-to-play decisions.

Medical Needs and Emergency Information

Parents remain responsible for any medications and individual medical needs (including inhalers). Coaches will not be involved in any type of medical treatment (outside of providing first aid if necessary). Parents should, however, tell the coach what is reasonably necessary for safe participation - for example, that a player has asthma and may require the parent's assistance.

Emergency contacts are available through TeamLinkt rosters. Know how to access them before the season begins and bring the NSFC first-aid supplies to practices and games. In an emergency: protect the player, get appropriate help, contact the parent, and notify NSFC.

Open, Observable Coaching

Whenever reasonably possible, coach in an open environment with at least two adults present or interactions observable by others. Avoid isolated one-on-one situations and private one-on-one meetings with youth players. Appropriate encouragement such as a high five or fist bump is normal; physical contact should always be appropriate to the activity, observable, and respectful.

When NSFC Needs to Know

Contact club leadership after a serious injury, suspected concussion, emergency medical response, significant safety or behavioral incident, allegation involving an adult or child, or another event likely to require club or league follow-up. If you are unsure whether something should be reported, report it.

8 | COACH COMMITMENT & SEASON CHECKLIST

The quick-reference standards every NSFC coach agrees to uphold.

The NSFC Coach Commitment

NSFC does not expect perfection. We do expect good judgment, appropriate behavior, dependability, and a genuine commitment to the children entrusted to our program. By accepting a coaching role, you agree to:

- Put player safety, development, and well-being first.
- Provide meaningful opportunities to participate regardless of skill level.
- Teach without humiliating, intimidating, verbally abusing, or punishing a player.
- Prepare appropriately and communicate when you cannot fulfill a coaching responsibility.
- Treat players, families, coaches, opponents, officials, league representatives, and the community with respect.
- Model sportsmanship in both winning and losing.
- Maintain appropriate adult-child boundaries and open-environment expectations.
- Follow club, league, and facility safety requirements.
- Report significant injuries, safety incidents, or serious concerns to NSFC leadership.
- Remember that your conduct while coaching represents Northwest Suburban Football Club.

Before the Season

- ☐ Complete required NSFC background screening.
- ☐ Review and acknowledge the Coach Code of Conduct.
- ☐ Attend the preseason coach orientation.
- ☐ Review the rules and game format for your age group.
- ☐ Review your age-group curriculum and first practice plan.
- ☐ Confirm access to roster and emergency contacts in TeamLinkt.
- ☐ Connect with assistant coach(es) and send an introductory message to families.
- ☐ Confirm team equipment, first-aid kit, and ice packs.

Before Each Practice

- ☐ Choose a clear purpose: curriculum theme, previous-game need, or skill needing more time.
- ☐ Arrive early when possible and prepare balls, cones, pinnies, goals, and first-aid supplies.
- ☐ Keep explanations short, players active, and the ball involved.
- ☐ Finish with meaningful soccer play.

Before Each Game

- ☐ Confirm location, arrival time, attendance, and equipment.
- ☐ Think through goalkeeper duties and a simple substitution plan.
- ☐ Provide meaningful playing time and avoid extended bench time.
- ☐ Warm up, give a few simple reminders, and let the players compete.

During and After the Season

Look beyond the standings. Are players improving, becoming more confident, making decisions, supporting one another, and using ideas from practice? At season's end, thank the players, families, assistants, and volunteers; return club equipment as directed; and tell NSFC what worked and what would make coaching easier next time.

Lead Ourselves. Lift Our Team. | Learn the Game. Love the Game. Grow Together.

QUICK REFERENCE

Keep this page handy during the season.

PRACTICE

Purpose <> ball-based warm-up <> develop the theme <> play soccer.

AFTER A GAME

What worked? What repeated? What should we teach next?

POSSIBLE CONCUSSION

Remove from play. No return that day. Parent + NSFC. Medical clearance before return.

PARENT EXPECTATION

Remain at the field and available for injury, reassurance, bathroom/personal care, or early departure.

NEED HELP?

Contact NSFC early for coverage, rules, practice planning, safety, communication, or other support.

GAME DAY

Prepare <> meaningful playing time <> simple cues <> let players decide.

LIGHTNING

Thor Guard warning = stop immediately, leave the field, take shelter.

SERIOUS INJURY

Stop. Involve parent. Call 911 if needed. Notify NSFC.

CHILD PROTECTION

Open, observable environment. Avoid isolated one-on-one interactions and private youth messaging.

THE STANDARD

Develop everyone. Represent the club well.

PART II - AGE-GROUP COACHING GUIDES

U4 | U6 | U8 | U10 | U12

Rules, formations, warm-ups, weekly skill progression, exercises, and NSFC drill diagrams will follow in the next phase.