



### What's unique about football

Football offers children and young people the opportunity to develop fundamental movements, teamwork, and game understanding through an inclusive and fun sport. Every child can experience success, build confidence, and celebrate progress at their own pace through flexible game formats and meaningful competition. Football's simplicity and teamwork focus make it ideal for all schools, spaces, and abilities.

Football's simple rules make it accessible for all abilities and easy to organise. Competition opportunities created should be inclusive of children with SEND, for those individuals that can cope in a mainstream sports environment. Think inclusively, for example allow deaf players to wear hearing aids/cochlear implants and amputees to play using their prosthesis (see prosthesis guidance [here](#)).

For children that a mainstream sports environment does not suit, a SEND specific competition offer should be created to ensure everyone engaged is playing in a suitable environment and getting a positive and meaningful experience. Our SEND offer can be found by clicking [here](#).

In secondary, there are different formats we recommend playing depending on the experience and ability of the young people you are engaging.

- **3v3** – is ideal for those new to the game of football or competition. This format will help ensure all players get more touches of the ball as well as success in a less pressured environment. It will allow you to engage all players at the same time as well as group players who have similar abilities, creating a positive and meaningful experience
- **5v5** – helps players begin to understand basic positional play while still enjoying frequent touches on the ball. The slightly larger team size encourages early decision-making, simple passing combinations, and awareness of both attacking and defending transitions
- **7v7** – introduces more defined roles such as defenders, midfielders, and forwards, giving players a deeper understanding of team shape. The increased field size supports the development of spatial awareness, longer passing, and movement off the ball
- **9v9** – bridges the gap to the full game, allowing players to explore more complex tactical concepts like building out from the back, switching play, and maintaining compactness. At this stage, players refine technical skills under moderate pressure and start developing game management
- **11v11** – is ideal for young people who are confident and experienced with the game of football. It involves more tactical responsibility, full positional structures, and advanced understanding of systems of play. This format helps players apply their technical and tactical abilities in a realistic, full-size match environment.

School Games football is intended for children who have little or no experience of football or competition. We would recommend the maximum format utilised is 7v7 to ensure a positive experience for those engaged, as larger formats introduce offside and become more complicated.





### What is the intent of your format



Develop confidence and competence within physical activity/sport skills



Engage new/target groups of young people (tackling inequalities)



Create positive experiences

### Target group benefits



All young people

Football builds fundamental movement skills and teamwork helping children build confidence, feel capable and proud of their progress, boosting self-belief and motivation.

The flexible formats and team focus of football make it accessible for all children, regardless of background, gender, or ability. Encouraging inclusion and helping remove barriers to participation.

Football is social and fun. It promotes friendships, fair play, resilience and teamwork. Helping create a sense of belonging and enjoyment that inspires children to stay active for life.

Football truly is for all and by offering a range of different formats you can support children to access the game in the best way possible. It can be intimidating for some children to play larger formats, especially when they are new to the sport or have SEND. By providing the option of smaller formats you can support those who may not have played the sport previously to get involved and build their confidence.

If a SEND specific environment better suits the children you are engaging then this offer can be found by clicking [here](#).

### It's just not football if you...

- 1** Take away the fun: Football is all about enjoyment, playing with friends, being active, and celebrating. Without fun, it loses the energy and excitement that make children want to play and keep improving.
- 2** Forget teamwork and fair play: Football is built on cooperation, communication, and respect for others. Teamwork and honesty are essential values that define the spirit of the games.

- 3** Remove goals and scoring: Aiming to score while defending your own goal gives football its excitement and challenge. Without this shared objective, it stops being the game we know and love.





### How to run inter-competition:



#### How to set up

We would recommend a 'round-robin' competition at a central venue, utilising multiple pitches, if possible.



#### Age group

Lower KS2 (7–9-year-olds)

- 3v3 or 5v5

Upper KS2 (9–11-year-olds)

- 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7



#### Gender

Mixed / Female



#### Participant numbers

Minimum of 12 players to create four teams for a 3v3 round-robin tournament.

With the 3v3 format you could cater for up to 96 players playing at one time on a full size 11v11 pitch.

If you had 200 children at an inter-school event you could run games across multiple pitches, whether your event is utilising the 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7 format.

You could even deliver multiple formats as part of the same event to support a larger number of players and a variety of choice of which format to play.



#### Target audience

Select the format that is the most appropriate to achieve the required outcomes for the children you are engaging.

This will enable all children, regardless of ability or experience, to be involved!



#### Benefits for YP

Young people will:

- Have fun and enjoy themselves
- Develop friendships and meet new people
- Become more determined and demonstrate resilience
- Understand and demonstrate the importance of respect for others
- Learn to develop self-control and manage emotions
- Experience being part of a team and understand your contribution to it.



#### Roles for YP

Young people can be a:

- **Team Coach:** When off the pitch children can act as team coaches, leading reflections, highlighting skills developed and encouraging their teammates
- **Referee:** Children can take turns officiating games, using a whistle or sound-maker, to ensure fair play and promote respect.



#### Progression

Having played short, small-sided games within a familiar environment, children will feel more confident in testing their new skills against different children in a new environment.





### Additional support

Football is a fully inclusive sport. To support you to adapt your practice, check out the [SEND Inclusion Toolkit](#) co-created by YST and the National Disability Sports Organisations (NDSOs) who are the leading experts within inclusive sport. They provide advice, support and opportunities for people of all ages with specific impairments. [The toolkit](#) provides you with an introduction to each Special Educational Needs and Disability, key top tips for creating an inclusive environment and signposting to further training and development opportunities within each National Disability Sport Organisation. It will help you adapt any practice in addition to our suggestions to make it inclusive for all.

### Physical Literacy

Football is a powerful tool for developing physical literacy as it naturally enhances fundamental movement skills. It also encourages young people to move, think, feel and connect. There are suggested adaptations across all formats to ensure football can be enjoyed by everyone, but if they are not suitable then use the THRIVE principle to remove barriers, make changes and give ownership to your young people.

For further support, look to the Physical Literacy Enactment Guide - Community, which can be found by [clicking here](#), and going to the “Getting Started” guide section to download it.

### NGB regional contacts

- There is a network of local County Football Associations who are responsible for the development of football in their area. Find your local County FA [here](#).

### Personal development

The FA have a range of additional learning opportunities that can be accessed through the below links:

- [PE Playlist](#): Additional guidance for teachers by England Football Learning
- [EE Playmaker](#): A free online entry-level football course perfect for anyone interested in taking a more active role in grassroots football
- [Behaviours and Emotions](#): Understanding children’s behaviours and emotions can help you create a positive environment and experience. Here are some techniques you may find useful
- [Introduction to Coaching Disabled Footballers](#): This online course will help you apply coaching tips and ideas to support the inclusion of disabled footballers
- [Journey to Inclusion](#): A toolkit and training workshop that collectively brings you everything you need to know about welcoming and embedding disabled people in your sessions.

### Where to participate next?

If a child is interested in taking part in football activity in a fun, safe and inclusive environment outside of school please see the options below:

- [Comets](#): Disability Football – a safe space for SEND children, aged 5-11, to kickstart their football journey
- [Wildcats](#): Girls Football – non-competitive football for girls who want to play football, have fun and make friends.

### Where to compete next?

If a child is interested in joining a local club and playing in a competitive team you can find local opportunities on our [Find Football](#) platform.

You can also find local sessional opportunities for [Comets](#) and [Wildcats](#) via the same link.





### Why football for your school?

Football is a fun, inclusive sport that helps children stay active, healthy, and happy. It builds teamwork, communication, and confidence while encouraging fair play and respect.

Football's simple rules make it accessible for all abilities and easy to organise. Competition opportunities created should be inclusive of children with SEND, for those individuals that can cope in a mainstream sports environment. Think inclusively, for example allow deaf players to wear hearing aids/cochlear implants and amputees to play using their prosthesis (see prosthesis guidance [here](#)).

For children that a mainstream sports environment does not suit, a SEND specific competition offer should be created to ensure everyone engaged is playing in a suitable environment and getting a positive and meaningful experience. Our SEND offer can be found by clicking [here](#).

In primary, there are different formats. The Football Association (The FA) recommend playing depending on the age, experience and ability of the young people you are engaging. The smaller formats provide an excellent opportunity to engage children who may not take part in other football teams in school, offering them a chance to represent their school in a fun and accessible way.

- **3v3** – is ideal for those new to the game of football or competition. 3v3 will help ensure all players get more touches of the ball as well as success in a less pressured environment. It will allow you to engage all players at the same time as well as group players who have similar abilities, creating a positive and meaningful experience
- **5v5** – helps players begin to understand basic positional play while still enjoying frequent touches on the ball. The slightly larger team size encourages early decision-making, simple passing combinations, and awareness of both attacking and defending transitions
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School Games football is intended for children who have little or no experience of football or competition. It is important to give a voice and choice to your pupils, asking them which formats they might like to play. This helps them to have ownership over their experience of football and can increase motivation to play.

### How to use activities in curriculum time

Football's School Games resources reflect our grassroots football offer where the format played progresses throughout the players' journey. In a school setting, formats are flexible, and you are free to use the one that suits the level, experience and choice of the children.

To prepare children for School Games competition, The FA have the following programmes and resources:

- [PE Resources](#) – for football
- Comets in Schools – A safe Space for SEND children to kickstart their football journey – contact your [Lead Inclusion School](#) for more information
- [Primary Curriculum Resources](#) – A variety of resources to support and enhance the delivery of high-quality PE
- [Inclusive Football Programmes for Girls](#) – PlayHers, an inclusive football programme created especially for girls aged 7 – 11 and Disney Inspired Shooting Stars, supporting the engagement of girls aged 5-11 in sport at school.





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Thrive isn't a checklist – it's a lens to help you sense check quality and inclusion, so consider the following when choosing which format to deliver and how it supports your young people to have a positive experience with physical activity:

- **TAILORED:** does your event support the needs, strengths and circumstances of the group?
- **HOLISTIC:** do the selected activities support young people to move, connect, think and feel?
- **REFLECTIVE:** have you built in time to allow young people to reflect on their engagement and to make choices about what they want to take part in next?
- **INCLUSIVE:** does your event support all young people to engage, feel welcome and included to take part?
- **VARIED:** have you planned for activity differentiation with equipment, space, task and outcome to provide appropriate challenge and maintain interest for all?
- **EMPOWERING:** have you consulted your young people to ask what they want to do, and how they want the event to run? Often, they create better rules and adaptations than we do, which gives them ownership and a positive experience.

For further support, look to the Physical Literacy Enactment Guide - Education, which can be found by [clicking here](#), and going to the "Getting Started" guide section to download it.

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#### Target audience

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#### Progression

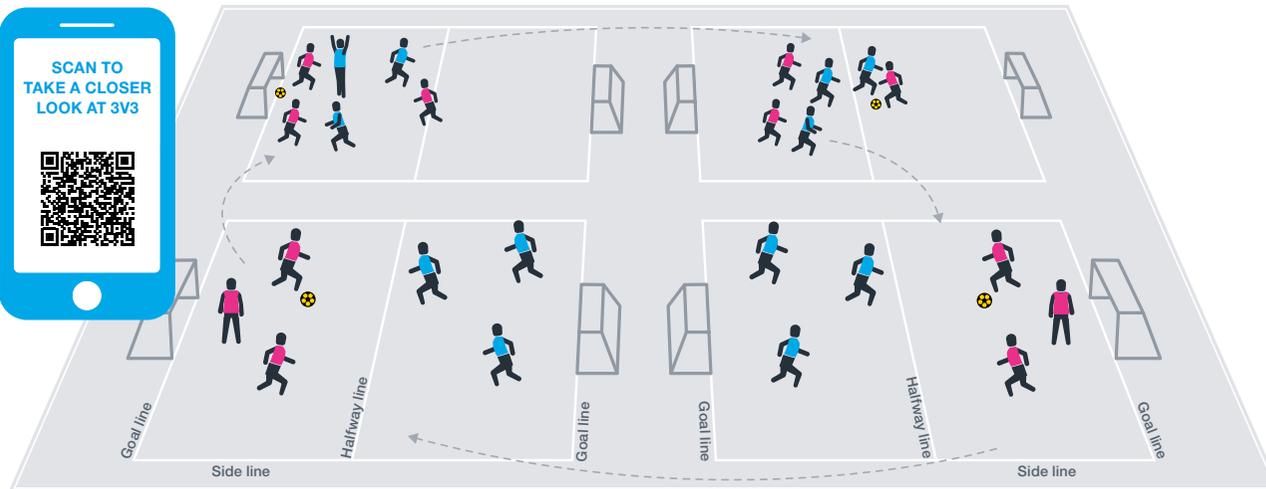
Having played short, small-sided games within a familiar environment, children will feel more confident in testing their new skills against different children in a new environment.





# Primary Football – 3v3 (Years 3-6)

PRIMARY



## How to play

- Kick Off: The ball starts from the centre of the pitch, on the halfway line, at kick-off
- Restarts: All restarts (goal line, corners, sidelines and free kicks) provide players with the option to either dribble or pass in
- Free Kicks: Any free kick should be at least 3m from the goal
- Retreat Line: For goal line restarts opposition players must retreat to their own half of the pitch
- Goalkeepers: there are no goalkeepers and no penalty areas.
- Substitutes: No, all children should play. If you have smaller/odd numbers, consider playing 2v2 or 2v3 to ensure that everyone can play
- Each game will last between 6 and 10 minutes
- Match Officials: No – games are supported by pitch facilitators with players empowered to self-officiate
- A player must be in their opponent's half (over the halfway line) when shooting for a goal to count
- After scoring, all players from that team return to their goal line, and the opposition team restarts the game from their own goal line
- There are no penalty kicks, offsides or heading.

## Safety

- When setting up multiple playing areas ensure all the activities are set up with a gap between pitches, of at least 3m
- Check the playing surface for hazards before starting
- Players should wear shin pads and appropriate footwear for the surface they are playing on.

## Equipment required

- Football size: 3 (YR 3-6)
- Cones Bibs: at least two different colours
- Goal size:  
Recommended 4ft x 2.5ft  
Maximum 5ft x 3ft  
If goals are not available use cones or consider playing with end zones.

## How to make it easier

- Group players of similar ability to compete
- Allow players to play with the ball in hands, throwing to each other, before progressing to feet
- Give teams a point for a shot on target. Goals could be worth two points
- Give the losing team a power play where their goals count for double points for a certain amount of time

## How to make it harder

- Decrease pitch size
- Introduce touch limits (e.g. maximum three touches before passing)
- If you have uneven numbers, put players who would benefit from additional challenge as a team of two

## Space required

- Pitch size: Recommended 10m x 15m / Maximum 15m x 20m
- Games can be played on grass (real or artificial) or a hard court (indoor or outdoor)
- A competition setup will need more than one pitch to get everyone active, set up as many pitches as you can for the number of teams playing.

## Estimated set-up time

- 15 minutes.

## Difficulty level



## Spirit of the Games



- How did you and your teammates support each other during the game?
- What did you do to make sure everyone was involved and could enjoy the games?



- How did you show respect to your opponents during the game?
- What does fair play look like in a 3v3 football match?





# Primary Football – 5v5 (Years 3-6)

PRIMARY



## How to play

- Kick Off: The ball starts from the centre of the pitch, on the halfway line, at kick-off
- Sideline Restarts: If the ball leaves the pitch over the side line, players can choose whether to dribble or pass the ball to restart the game
- Goal Kicks: If the attacking team kick the ball over the goal line the defending team's goalkeeper restarts the game with a goal kick from the penalty area
- Retreat Line: For goal kicks, opposition players must retreat to their own half of the pitch
- Corner Kicks: If the defending team kick the ball out over their own goal line, the game restarts with a corner kick for the attacking team.
- Free Kicks: All free kicks are direct, and the defending team should be 5yds from the ball
- Penalty Kicks: Yes
- Goalkeepers: Yes, goalkeepers are introduced at 5v5.
- Substitutes: rolling substitutions are allowed at any time
- Match Officials: Yes, match officials are introduced at 5v5 to officiate games
- After scoring, all players return to their own half and the game restarts from the centre of the pitch, with a kick off by the team that conceded the goal
- Games last between 8 and 10 minutes, in a round-robin or festival format. In a standard 5v5 match, game duration is 2 x 20-minute halves
- There are no offsides or heading.

## How to make it easier

- Use the smaller format, 3v3
- Group players of similar ability to compete
- Give teams a point for a shot on target. Goals could be worth two points
- Give the losing team a power play where their goals count for double points for a certain amount of time, or they can add another player to their team

## How to make it harder

- Decrease pitch size
- Challenge teams to keep possession for a set time (e.g. 30 seconds) before attempting to score

## Space required

- Pitch size: Recommended 37m x 27m
- A competition setup will require multiple pitches to keep everyone active. Set up as many pitches as you can for the number of teams playing.

## Estimated set-up time

- 15 minutes.

## Difficulty level



## Spirit of the Games



- What was your favourite moment during the game that made you feel excited or proud?
- How did you still show enthusiasm, even when things didn't go your way?



- Can you describe a moment when you kept going even though it was difficult?
- What did you do today that showed you didn't give up?

## Safety

- When setting up multiple playing areas ensure all the activities are set up with a gap between pitches, of at least 3m
- Check goals are securely anchored
- Check the playing surface for hazards before starting.
- Players should wear shin pads and appropriate footwear for the surface they are playing on.

## Equipment required

- Football size: 3 (YR 3-6)
- Cones Bibs: at least two different colours
- Goal size: Recommended 12ft x 6ft.





# Primary Football – 7v7 (Years 5&6 only)

PRIMARY



## How to play

- Kick Off: The ball starts from the centre of the pitch, on the halfway line, at kick-off
- Sideline Restarts: If the ball leaves the pitch over the side line, players can choose whether to dribble or pass the ball to restart the game
- Goal Kicks: If the attacking team kick the ball over the goal line the defending team's goalkeeper restarts the game with a goal kick from the penalty area
- Retreat Line: For goal kicks opposition players must retreat to their own half of the pitch
- Corner Kicks: If the defending team kick the ball out over their own goal line, the game restarts with a corner kick for the attacking team
- Free Kicks: All free kicks are direct, and the defending team should be 5yds from the ball
- Penalty Kicks: Yes
- Substitutes: rolling substitutions are allowed at any time
- After scoring, all players return to their own half and the game restarts from the centre of the pitch, with a kick off by the team that conceded the goal
- Games last between 12 and 15 minutes, in a round-robin or festival format. In a standard 7v7 match, game duration is 2 x 25-minute halves
- There are no offsides or heading.

## Safety

- When setting up multiple playing areas ensure all the activities are set up with a gap between pitches, of at least 3m
- Check goals are securely anchored
- Check the playing surface for hazards before starting
- Players should wear shin pads and appropriate footwear for the surface they are playing on.

## Equipment required

- Football size: 3 (YR 3-6)
- Cones
- Bibs: at least two different colours
- Goal size: Recommended 12ft x 6ft.



## How to make it easier

- Use one of the smaller formats, 3v3 or 5v5.
- Group players of similar ability to compete
- Give teams a point for a shot on target. Goals could be worth two points
- Give the losing team a power play where their goals count for double points for a certain amount of time

## How to make it harder

- Decrease pitch size
- Rotate players through specific roles (e.g. defender, midfielder, attacker)
- Use throw-ins rather than kick-in or dribble in

## Space required

- Pitch size: Recommended 55m x 37m
- Multiple pitches can be set up depending on space, plan pitch layout carefully for efficient rotation and player flow.

## Estimated set-up time

- 10 minutes.

## Difficulty level



## Spirit of the Games



- Did you overcome any challenges during the game? If you did, what were they?
- Can you name a moment you kept going even when it was tough?



- Did you ever admit a foul or mistake today without being told?
- Why is being honest on the pitch important for fair play?