



## What's unique about football

Football is a fun, inclusive sport that helps children stay active, healthy, and happy. Every child can experience success, build confidence and celebrate progress through our flexible formats and meaningful competition.

Football's simplicity and teamwork focus make it ideal for creating a SEND specific competition that will help children with SEND to build physical and social skills, as well as increase their confidence and give them a sense of belonging.

It also allows you to meet sensory needs and ensure children who may not usually have the opportunity to play in their school team have a positive experience of competition.

In SEND football there are different formats of the game The Football Association 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, it 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 experience for everyone.
- **5v5** – helps players begin to understand basic positional play while still enjoying frequent touches on the ball. The slightly larger team size encourages 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 more detailed understanding of team shape. The increased field size supports the development of spatial awareness, longer passing, and movement off the ball.

For SEND football in schools 7v7 is the maximum format we recommended, as larger formats introduce offside and become more complicated. This is also the largest format that tends to be played across disability football in the grassroots game. However, should you wish to play 9v9 or 11v11 please see the secondary school resources which can be found by [clicking here](#).

When setting up activity you may need to adapt the game, or rules, to suit the ability of the players you are engaging. Think inclusively using the STEP principle, here are some ideas:

- **Space:** Adjust the playing area – increase or decrease space to suit mobility needs and create rest areas where players can take a break if needed.
- **Task:** Modify the rules if required to ensure all children can play the game. Play shorter games if players tire easily and keep instructions simple and use visual aids.
- **Equipment:** Change the equipment to meet specific needs, consider softer foam or plastic balls for those new to the game. Also think about brightly coloured or audible balls to support players with visual impairments.
- **People:** Adjust player numbers on each team to balance the game and allow players to use assistive devices where required.





# Football for SGOs

SEND

## What is the intent of your format



Develop confidence and competence within physical activity/sport skills



Build social skills and connections (i.e. sense of belonging)



Provide inclusive opportunities



SEND

## Target group benefits

Football encourages engagement by offering a fun, energetic environment where players can enjoy success. The excitement of team play, skill development, and friendly competition helps develop confidence and competence.

Football's simple rules naturally promote inclusion, communication, teamwork, and cooperation as players work together toward a shared goal. It provides opportunities to build friendships, develop empathy, and strengthen a sense of belonging within a supportive team setting.

Football truly is for all and by offering a range of different formats you can support children and young people to access the game in the best way possible. It can be intimidating for children with SEND to play larger formats, especially when they are new to the sport.

By providing the option of smaller formats you can support children with SEND who may not have been exposed to the sport previously to get involved and build their confidence.

## 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.





# Football for SGOs

SEND

## How to run inter-competition:



### How to set up

We would recommend a 'round-robin' competition, utilising multiple pitches, if possible. If you don't have these pitches marked out, then using cones works great!

[The Disney Inspired SEND Shooting Stars](#) festival provides activities and a clear structure for you to follow when delivering an introductory 3v3 SEND competition.



### Age group

Lower KS2 (7–9-year-olds)

- 3v3 or 5v5

Upper KS2 (9–11-year-olds)

- 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7

KS3 (11–14-year-olds)

KS4 (14-16-year-old)

- 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7

For larger formats (9v9 and 11v11) please see the secondary resources which can be found by [clicking here](#).



### 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 multiple schools participating in a SEND specific competition 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 should help you adapt your 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:

- [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
- [Disability Football Formats](#): Discover the different formats of disability football via the England Football website
- [Para Football Talent Pathway](#): Discover the route for players with specific impairments to get to one of the England Para squads.

## 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
- [Squad](#): Fun, social, inclusive football for girls aged 11-16.

## 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.





## WHY SEND football for your school?

Football is a fun, inclusive sport that helps children stay active, healthy, and happy.

Creating a SEND specific offer at your school will help children with SEND to build physical and social skills, as well as increase their confidence and give them a sense of belonging. It allows you to meet children's sensory needs and ensure they have a positive experience.

In SEND football there are different formats of the game The FA 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, it 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 experience for everyone.
- **5v5** – helps players begin to understand basic positional play while still enjoying frequent touches on the ball. The slightly larger team size encourages decision-making, simple passing combinations, and awareness of both attacking and defending transitions.
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For SEND football in schools 7v7 is the maximum format we recommended, as larger formats introduce offside and become more complicated. This is also the largest format that tends to be played across disability football in the grassroots game. However, should you wish to play 9v9 or 11v11 please see the secondary school resources which can be found by [clicking here](#).

When setting up activity you may need to adapt the game, or rules, to suit the ability of the players you are engaging. Think inclusively using the STEP principle, here are some ideas:

- **Space:** Adjust the playing area – increase or decrease space to suit mobility needs and create rest areas where players can take a break if needed
- **Task:** Modify the rules if required to ensure all children can play the game. Play shorter games if players tire easily and keep instructions simple and use visual aids
- **Equipment:** Change the equipment to meet specific needs, consider softer foam or plastic balls for those new to the game. Also think about brightly coloured or audible balls to support players with visual impairments
- **People:** Adjust player numbers on each team to balance the game and allow players to use assistive devices where required

It is also 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

The School Games formats for SEND football reflect our grassroots disability 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 young people.

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

- **Comets in Schools** – A safe Space for SEND children to kickstart their football journey – contact your [Lead Inclusion School](#) for more information
- **[Disney Inspired SEND Shooting Stars](#)** – A resource developed specifically to engage young people with SEND in physical activity and football.





## Additional support

Football is a fully inclusive sport. To support you to adapt your, 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 should 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.

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.

## Personal development

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

- [Online PE CPD for Teachers](#): For educators who are keen to learn more about delivering football sessions through PE lessons you can access our FREE online learning module. This also has a range of downloadable resources
- [PE Playlist](#): Additional guidance for teachers by England Football Learning including managing difference
- [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
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## Where to compete next?

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## How to run intra-competition:



### How to set up

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

If you don't have these pitches marked out, then using cones works great!

[The Disney Inspired SEND Shooting Stars](#) festival provides activities and a clear structure for you to follow when delivering an introductory 3v3 SEND competition.



### Age group

Lower KS2 (7–9-year-olds)

- 3v3 or 5v5

Upper KS2 (9–11-year-olds)

- 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7

KS3 (11–14-year-olds)

KS4 (14-16-year-old)

- 3v3, 5v5 or 7v7

For larger formats (9v9 and 11v11) please see the secondary resources which can be found by [clicking here](#).



### 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 multiple schools participating in a SEND specific competition 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

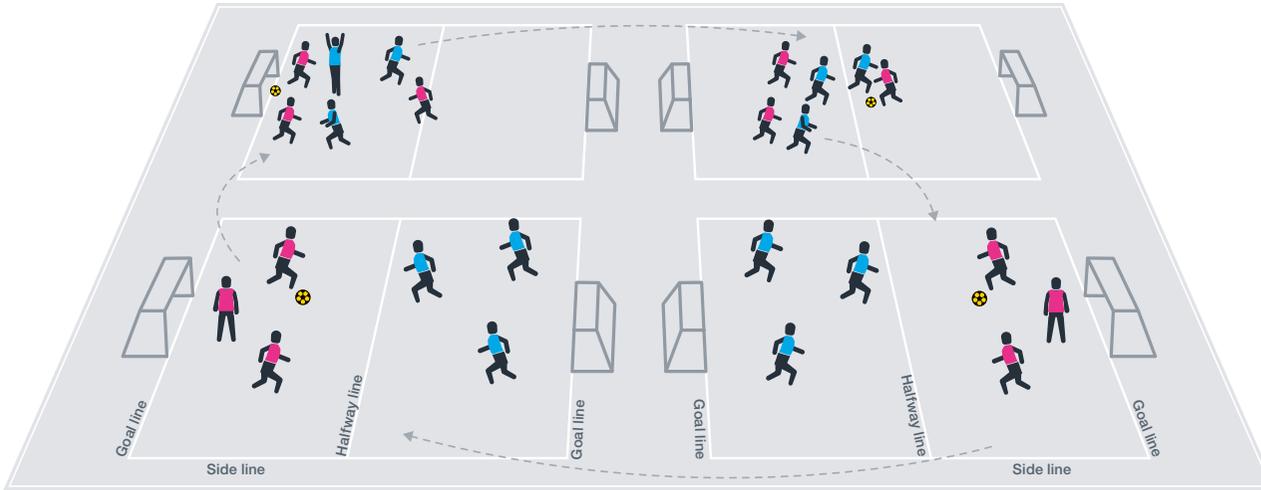
Engage with your SGO to find inter-school opportunities to play for those young people who have enjoyed playing intra-school formats.





# SEND Football – 3v3 (Years 3-11)

SEND



## 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), 4 (YR 7-8), 5 (YR 9-11)
-  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

- Use a larger, lighter ball (e.g. foam or plastic football)
- 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

- Make the pitch smaller
- Introduce touch limits (e.g. max 3 touches before passing)
- For a 3v3 SEND event consider utilising the [Disney Inspired SEND Shooting Stars Festival](#) resource

## 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?



# SEND Football – 5v5 (Years 3-11)

SEND



## 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.

## 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), 4 (YR 7-8), 5 (YR 9-11)
- Cones Bibs: at least two different colours
- Goals: Recommended 12ft x 6ft.



## 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 show your love for football, 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?



# SEND Football – 7v7 (Years 5-11)

SEND



## 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?

## 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), 4 (YR 7-8), 5 (YR 9-11)
-  Cones  Bibs: at least two different colours
-  Goals: Recommended 12ft x 6ft.

