



Teaching Kids to Kick



By Ben Johnswood

A Parent's Role in the NAB AFL Auskick Program

The owners of a pint-sized tyro who can already kick, mark and handball will burst with pride as other parents notice the prodigy they have been developing.

Conversely the embarrassment is obvious on the faces of the owners of a child who battles with the skills and is clearly not as advanced as the other children.

A parent in the latter group will ask themselves whether they have been teaching their child the wrong way or, worse still, not teaching them at all. Will their child be laughed at by the other children? Are the parents to blame? It is only natural for parents to be worried about how this reflects on them or that their child will be left behind.

No one wants to be an overzealous ugly parent but likewise no one wants to be the parent of the kid who spends most of the time eating the grass.

So what should parents be doing?

A Parent's Role in Their Child's Skill Development

The most important thing for parents to remember when teaching their child to kick is don't do any coaching. The importance of this absolutely cannot be overstated.

A five year old (or even an eight or nine year old for that matter) should not be receiving any technical advice on their kicking. If they are consciously thinking about what they should be doing with their hands or their feet it will sabotage the skill and will not allow them to develop a natural kicking style.

Teaching a Child to Kick Using Games

The best thing parents can do to help their child with kicking is to play lots of games. 'Games' mean activities such as kicking it back and forth to see how many marks can be taken in a row or by trying to kick 'goals' between the garage and the lemon tree in the back yard. Five out of ten goals means that their child is Champion of the World and gets extra dessert. Without necessarily having any technical knowledge themselves, parents can invent simple games and tasks like this that are fun and that their child has a chance to experience some success in.

As their child improves, parents can slowly start changing the environment by making the games slightly harder. For example; longer kicks, tougher angles or aiming for six out of ten instead of five. Changing the type of ball is good too. A soccer ball for instance adds a new dimension to the skill being taught. Indoors, a balloon is fantastic and won't break anything! Darren Jarman learned to kick by threading a balloon between the doorways in his home.



Parents should always make it into a game and never make it 'practice.' In the eyes of a child, games are fun but practice is boring. Learning without awareness is best. No one remembers how they 'learnt' to ride a bike.

The worst things parents can do are:

- Measure their child against other children their age
- Fill their child's head with (well meaning) technical advice
- Get frustrated with their child's progress
- Point out what their child is doing wrong

Learning to Love AFL Football

Once their child is old enough and coordinated enough, they will be ready to hear some technical advice on grip, run up and balance. They will learn it when they are ready and receptive. At five years of age though, the aim for parents is that their child associates having fun with playing football. If they start to make that link then their job is done.