



**Connecticut Junior
Soccer Association**

Connecticut Junior Soccer Association

Starter Kit for New TOPSoccer Programs



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[Click here to view a listing of CJSA Club Representatives](#)

INTRODUCTION

Thank you for your interest in developing a TOPSoccer Program in your area. TOPSoccer provides a much needed outlet for our children with mental and physical disabilities. One of the great things about our programs is that each program chooses its own destiny to a degree. While most programs are similar, each program decides what works best for them and how to achieve their goals. The intent of this starter kit is to give you some best practices that several programs have had success with. If you ultimately choose to do things differently that is your choice. The only requirement we have is that in order to call yourself a TOPSoccer program, you must be affiliated with the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association (CJSA) and participate in their insurance program. There are different ways to do this which will be covered in the Risk Management section.

A successful TOPSoccer Program should include the following:

- Placement of players by ability, not age
- Emphasis on ability, not disability
- Player involvement
- Meaningful experience for the players
- Dependability and stability of coaches
- FUN!

TOPSoccer has become a "family" of like minded people who look to promote each other's programs and provide support to each other. I encourage you to reach out to other programs within your state and nationwide. You'll be pleasantly surprised at the amount of help and encouragement you will receive. The Connecticut Junior Soccer Association is committed to the success of our TOPSoccer programs and is always available for you as you begin your journey into TOPSoccer. You will not regret your decision to get involved with these great kids.

Please do not hesitate to contact your District TOPSoccer Director or the CJSA President or Director of Recreational Services for any assistance or additional information.

BUSINESS NEEDS

The first decision you need to make is whether or not you want to affiliate yourself with a soccer club that already exists or if you want to start your own entity.

If you want to join an existing organization, seek out a local recreational or travel team soccer club that is already a member of the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association to see if they will support you in your mission. If they will, you can take advantage of an organization that already has likely achieved non-profit status. This will protect you as individual (since they are already a corporation) and provide both you and your players with insurance coverage.

It is strongly encouraged that all TOPSoccer programs team up with the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association club in the town they reside in.

If you want to start your own entity, we encourage you to follow these steps before you recruit players:

- Develop a constitution and by-laws
- File Articles of Incorporation with the Connecticut Secretary of State

Once you are established as an entity it is helpful to develop a website so that you have a way for people to find your program and a location to keep important information regarding your program. If you are part of an already established program, having a separate page devoted to TOPSoccer is a must.

It is helpful to have business cards or handouts for your program available so that they can be handed out when you see players that might benefit from the program.

SELECTING A LOCATION

This is probably the most important item to take care of first. You will need to determine whether or not you want to play indoors or outdoors or both. There are advantages and disadvantages to both.

Outdoors – Advantages:

Lots of fields to choose from

Often available for no cost

Outdoors – Disadvantages:

Weather conditions could require cancelling program dates

Grass fields may be difficult for children with physical disabilities

Hot weather may put kids at risk for dehydration and sunburn

Often do not have restrooms nearby

Indoors – Advantages:

Always available despite weather conditions

Often have bathrooms available and nearby

Sometimes have storage space available for equipment

Indoors – Disadvantages:

May require rental fees

May have limited availability due to competing programs

Here are some good ideas on where you can go to secure a location:

- School Districts
- Park Districts
- Churches with Gym space
- Indoor Soccer locations
- Soccer clubs that have their own locations

Be sure to bring some information about your program to give them a good idea what TOPSoccer is all about and you'll find that many organizations will donate or waive rental fees for your program.

EQUIPMENT NEEDS

The basic equipment needs for TOPSoccer are the same needs for most soccer programs:

- First Aid Kit
- Balls (size 5, big, soft, rattle, textured)
- Cones
- Jerseys or T-shirts for Players and Buddies
- Pinnies (I like different colors for players and Buddies)
- Goals (I like iGoals, Pugg or Bownets for their portability and safety)
- Sandbags or anchors for portable goals

There is adaptive equipment available that work well for TOPSoccer players:

- Rattle balls (great for visually impaired children and Autistic players) available from SCORE
- Pool Noodles (good for moving goal exercises and tag)
- Exercise balls (the large ones used for core workouts) for children in wheelchairs

Anything can be used for equipment, get creative, just keep safety in mind.

Some additional equipment is helpful for registering players before the practice/game:

- Portable table
- Portable Chair(s)
- Portable Filing cabinet
- Clip boards
- Deposit wallet (if you collect fees)
- Notepad
- Pens
- Registration Forms

You may want to budget for some small gifts for the players and/or buddies at the end of the season. Certificates, medals and small trophies are reasonably priced. Contact local soccer clubs to see if they have any leftover trophies from seasons past.

RECRUITING PLAYERS

Recruiting Players can be challenging at first. Do not get frustrated if your program takes some time to develop. Creating awareness of your program never ends. Often, the only way to reach players with disabilities is through word-of-mouth with the parents. If they enjoy the program ask them to bring a friend with a disability to try it out. If you have one player, you have a program. Never stop recruiting players, they will come.

Flyers are essential to spreading the word. Develop a good flyer and have them available both electronically and in paper form. Make sure the flyer contains:

- Description of the program
- Who is eligible to participate
- Date, time and location
- Costs
- Contact information for questions and website address

Some good places to approach for players include:

- School Districts (contact all the school districts within a reasonable driving distance)
- Social Service agencies
- Easter Seals
- Soccer leagues and Clubs (ask them to put a link to your website on their website)
- Physical, Speech and Occupational Therapists (give them some flyers and business cards to hand out to their patients)

Develop relationships at each location and be sure to contact them at least a month before each programming session to promote your program.

Ask your active volunteers to carry some business cards with your contact information and website address in their wallets and purses. When you encounter a family that might

benefit from the program, politely introduce yourself give them a card and let them know about the program. Ask them to visit the website at their convenience and contact you if they are interested or have questions. If you are not sure whether or not to approach someone, err on the side of caution.

RECRUITING BUDDIES

Most programs feel that this is the easiest part of the program. You will need to reach out to various groups to solicit buddy volunteers and I suggest you build a good size “pool” of volunteers as they will not always be available for every session.

It is suggested that your buddies be at least 12 years old but younger brothers and sisters often do very well.

Good places to recruit buddies include:

- Parents
- Siblings
- High School students (entice them with community service hours)
- College students (especially special education majors)
- Best Buddy organizations
- Soccer players (U13 and up, High School, College) sometimes an entire club will become involved.
- Boy & Girl Scouts

When they participate, it is helpful to have a specific color pinnie or t-shirts for the buddies to wear so players always know who the buddies are.

If your volunteer is 18 or older, you absolutely must perform a background search prior to them working with the players. (see Risk Management section)

FUNDING THE PROGRAM

Some programs charge a fee, some do not. A new program may need to rely on program fees as they begin and then consider moving to a self funded program at a later date.

Typical fees are between \$20-\$50 dollars and may or may not include a t-shirt or jersey.

Nearly every program will need to rely on fundraisers to help support the program.

Some good sources of fundraising include:

- Golf tournaments
- Jeans day at work
- T-shirt sales
- Candy sales
- Silent auctions
- Local business sponsors (e.g. pizza parlor)

Look for corporate sponsors that will match funds whenever possible. It doubles your money.

It is helpful to have non-profit status to solicit cash donations so that it is tax deductible for the donor. Also, if you collect products or services for an auction, you are more likely to receive a donation with a letter stating that you are a non-profit organization and listing your tax ID number.

Try to reward your sponsors with small gifts like a team photo or taking the team to the pizza place for an end of the season awards celebration.

Some programs rely solely on receiving Grant money but this will require some research to find the grants that your program can qualify for and some expertise in writing grant proposals.

RISK MANAGEMENT

The safety of our players is our first priority. We must ensure a safe place to play soccer. We also need to protect the interests of the program so that it can continue to provide soccer programming for many years to come.

Things that need to be in place before any player steps on the field:

- A First Aid Kit and an action plan for emergencies
- A fully charged mobile phone
- A completed registration form for each player with emergency contact information
- Properly maintained equipment
- Shinguards for all players
- Background checks on every buddy who is 18 or older
- A physician form stating that any player with Downs Syndrome did not test positive for Atlanto-Axial Instability (Players with Positive results should not take part in TOPSoccer at all)
- Medical and Image releases signed by the player's parent or guardian

It is highly recommended that the coaches have the following training:

- USYSA TOPSoccer Training Course
- Basic First Aid
- CPR training
- Heads Up Concussion in Youth Sports training (available online from CDC)

Protect your organization by having comprehensive forms dealing with

- Player Registration
- Medical and Image waivers
- Buddy Registration (including background check information for buddies 18 or older)

- Lightning Policy
- Parent Manuals
- Buddy Manuals

Keep in Mind the following when dealing with Special needs children:

- TOPSoccer players may tire more easily and need multiple breaks
- Certain disabilities are more prone to dehydration, have frequent water breaks
- Some skills such as slide tackling and heading are not recommended for this group
- Some players may be more prone to have balancing issues
- Parents/Guardians must be present at all times.
- Children with Downs Syndrome should be cleared by their physician for Atlanto-Axial Instability (AAI) which is a life threatening condition
- Children should never go to the bathroom alone, find the parent and have them take them

FORMATTING PROGRAM SESSIONS

Each Program has a different way of providing their programming. Here are some of the different ways to format your program.

Practice/Play: You spend some of the time practicing skills work through different exercises and then end the session with intra-squad scrimmage games. This works well for new programs while building their programs.

Practices & Games: If you have a large enough group, you can have different teams that practice together on some days and play games on different days. More like a true soccer league. You need a good amount of players available in order to use this format or multiple TOPSoccer programs in your area.

Academy Program: Each session is geared towards developing a specific skill set and all lesson plans are decided upon and shared with the players prior to the beginning of the season. This style is very good with children with mental disabilities who may crave structure and have a hard time dealing with transitions.

Special Training days: Some programs have special days where they work on different skills that may or may not be associated directly with soccer. (e.g. a day working on speed skills)

Special events: Tournaments or Festivals (tournaments where a certain number of games are played with less emphasis on winning games) can be a good way to start and end a season. Trips to High School, College or Professional games are fun and you can usually get on field for something special, a halftime demonstration game or an autograph session before or after the game.

You can choose one format or a combination of any of them. Choose what works best for your organization.

Never be afraid to try something different and creative. Use what works well for your kids and forget what doesn't.

NETWORKING & RESOURCES

In addition to these resources, cultivate relationships with program directors from other TOPSoccer programs in your state and throughout the US.

Region I also holds a TOPSoccer Symposium every year, as does the Connecticut Junior Soccer Association, where different topics and best practices are discussed, guest speakers are brought in and additional training sessions are usually held. Try to attend these conventions to get to know the TOPSoccer community better.

Get to know the people heading up programs near you and look to share information and possibly have some fun games together. [Click here for The Connecticut Junior Soccer Association's district contacts:](#)

There are several great downloads on the www.usyouthsoccer.org website. Be sure to check out the following:

- KIDSAFE brochure on risk management
- Coaching Special needs children
- Parent Guide Brochure
- TOP AAI disclaimer and form
- TOPSoccer Grant information