



**How do  
children make  
decisions? ▶**

**S**porting situations usually require quick and complex decision-making. Which pass should I use? With how much force? In which direction should I kick?

For children, making decisions in a new situation is a slow process. With their limited experience, they are much slower at making decisions than adults. And when their young minds are distracted by the stress or tension that comes with playing sport, it becomes even more difficult to make good decisions.

A child's capacity to learn new skills and to make decisions is limited by his or her capacity to process information. The more distractions children must cope with, the more difficult it is to learn. To enhance learning, a coach must free the child's attention from such distractions to make learning and decision-making easier.

To help children learn, coaches should adapt the sport for youngsters. Children are baffled by too many choices. A small group of players reduces the number of choices open to them and simplifies decision-making. Once children are confident, coaches can present more difficult situations which offer a larger number of possibilities. Therefore, three-a-side or four-a-side may be appropriate at the younger levels.

Coaches can also simplify the rules. Rules are normally written for games played at an adult level. Coaches should try to be flexible and think of rules as a framework that may need to be built upon slowly. Introduce rules as they are needed, and adapt them in order to focus on what you want the children to learn. Coaches can focus on a few simple, key words that allow for a gradual progression of skill learning.

Coaches can also teach children how to make decisions by creating a comfortable environment. A three-on-two practice drill requires easier decision-making than a two-on-two drill. Coaches must accept that making wrong decisions is part of the learning process. Teaching youngsters decision-making skills is a vital link to encouraging their self-reliance and making their experience enjoyable.