



LITTLE SPARKS

IGNITING CHILDREN'S IMAGINATION

**CURRICULUM
+ OPERATIONS MANUAL**



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IMAGINE...

... a place where children between the ages of 2 and 5 can naturally play, learn and truly experience the beautiful game of soccer.

... somewhere international, professional coaches can tailor soccer to a child's needs; creating a positive, fun and safe environment for children to develop and grow.

... parents and children to take their first steps in soccer together. To build relationships and be introduced to sporting role models.

... Igniting children's imagination



WELCOME TO LITTLE SPARKS!



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**“The most effective kind of education
is that a child should play amongst
lovely things.”**

- Plato



CREATING THE FIRE - WHAT IS LITTLE SPARKS?

The Little Sparks Curriculum has been uniquely designed to standardize the delivery of all Chicago Fire's preschool (2-5yrs) soccer programming. This is the framework when delivering Little Sparks sessions in the community.

The curriculum will provide staff with a guide on how to deliver, safe, enjoyable and appropriate activities to preschool children, working towards key experiences and learning outcomes.

THE KEY WORD FROM THE LAST SENTENCE IS **"GUIDE"**. As an experienced soccer coach we want you to continue using your creativity and knowledge, to take control of your own session planning, and to adapt the program to meet the needs and abilities of different children.



The aim of Little Sparks is to "Ignite Children's Imagination"; providing a safe and supportive learning environment through soccer and imaginative, playful activities, for children and families to begin developing key skills for life.



CREATING THE FIRE - WHAT IS LITTLE SPARKS?

Chicago Fire's Soccer in the Community; Little Sparks is an educational soccer program designed to introduce and challenge children aged 2-5 years, with support of mom and dad.

Our mission is to provide a long term program for families that focuses on developing the whole child through the play of soccer. Using play and educational philosophy, Little Sparks challenges and facilitates a child's physical, mental, social, and emotional capability while building their cognitive understanding of soccer.

We do this by:

- **Having qualified, trained, and experienced coaches deliver our program.**
- **Following a guided curriculum and activity plan that has been accurately designed to meet the needs of each age group.**
- **Working towards key physical, emotional, and cognitive educational outcomes.**
- **Encouraging parents to participate throughout the session.**
- **Constructing a safe and supportive environment where children can participate confidently.**



CREATING THE FIRE - WHAT IS LITTLE SPARKS?

- **The Little Sparks curriculum and operations manual is a tool that provides our coaches with information and support to deliver the program.**
- **The curriculum standardizes the way Little Sparks looks and is delivered without taking control of content away from our qualified and experienced coaches.**
- **We provide the right guidelines and ideas for coaches to use and adapt to support each child's learning needs and to ensure each program is one of a kind.**
- **Finally our curriculum outlines key outcomes that are worked towards in each activity, support the physical, emotional, and cognitive development of a child.**



CREATING THE FIRE - WHAT IS LITTLE SPARKS?



2 YEAR OLD PROGRAM (CHILD COACH RATIO 1:10)

Focus on movement competences and introduction to the soccer ball



3-4 YEAR OLD PROGRAM (CHILD COACH RATIO 1:12)

Focus on movement competences and building dynamic movements

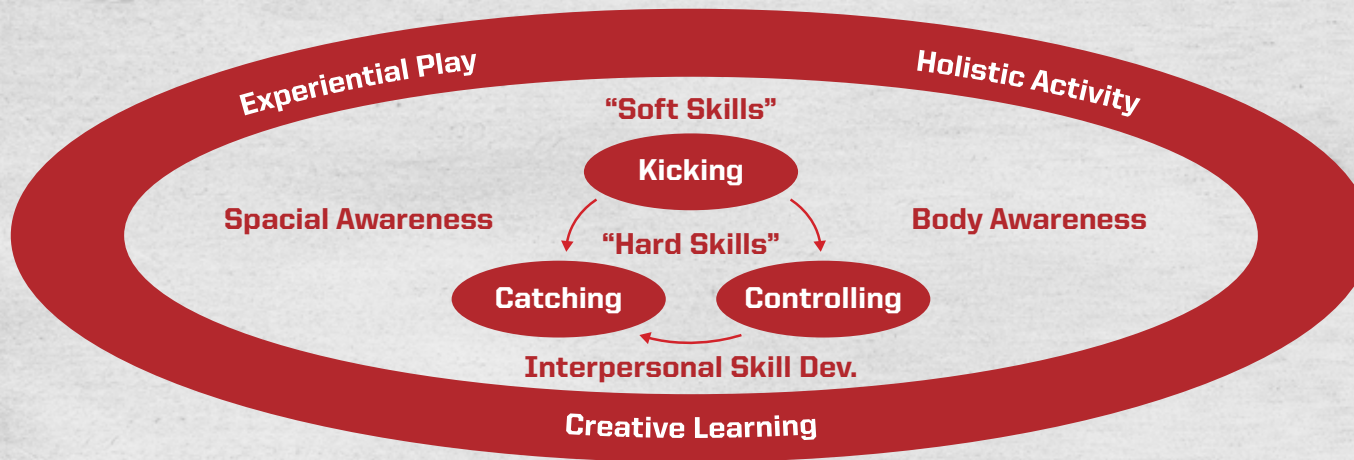


4-5 YEAR OLD PROGRAM (CHILD COACH RATIO 1:12)

Focus on advancing soccer competence for use in game-play scenarios and begin exercising a child's ability to make decisions and work with others.



CREATING THE FIRE - WHAT IS LITTLE SPARKS?



Little Sparks uses three key principles (experiential play, creative learning, holistic activity) to build an environment for children to learn and explore different outcomes associated with soccer and self development.

CHILDREN WILL EXPLORE THEIR CAPABILITIES TO:

- Learn fundamental soccer skills (Kicking, Controlling, Catching and Throwing)
- Learn fundamental movement skills (Agility, Balance, Coordination and Speed)
- Learn key social and emotional attributes (self-esteem, self-awareness, relationship dev)

HOW A TYPICAL PROGRAM LOOKS?

1 HOUR
PER SESSION

1 SESSION
PER WEEK

4 WEEKS

10 CHILDREN
PER COACH



CREATING THE FIRE - WHO ARE THE COACHES?



All Little Sparks coaches are full-time professional coaches from Chicago Fire Soccer in the Community.

A Little Sparks coach has the ability to truly inspire and support preschool children develop key skills for tomorrow, creating a welcoming environment for both child and parent to play, experience and learn.

A Little Sparks coach is more than just a program deliverer. You are a role model, You are a motivator, You are a significant other, You are an inspiration to children and parents.

You take personal responsibility for what you do and how you do it.



CREATING THE FIRE - WHO ARE THE COACHES?

We encourage Little Sparks coaches to:

FACILITATE MAXIMUM PARTICIPATION:

Not to use elimination games and frequently modify activities to enhance participation. Provide sufficient equipment so child can make choices.

ALLOWING FOR REPETITION AND VARIATION:

Coaches provide a variety of learning experiences that emphasize the same motor skills across different activity contexts, allowing for gradual development of desired movement patterns.

PROVIDE AN ADEQUATE AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT:

Prepare a physically and psychologically safe environment in which there is adequate space for children to move freely and explore their capabilities. Provide a choice of equipment to freely play.

FOSTER PARENT-COACH COMMUNICATION:

Coaches work in partnership, communicating regularly with parents. Keep parents informed and engaged.

INVOLVING PARENTS:

Parents are the corner stone to this program. Get them involved with every activity and ensure that they also have a enjoyable experience at the same time as the children.

PROMOTING SUCCESS FOR ALL CHILDREN:

Provide children with opportunities to practice skills at high rates of success, within a “try, try and try again” environment. Coach will provide opportunities for children to practice skill independently and do not use competition between children as a motivator.



**“Almost all creativity
involves purposeful play”**

- Abraham Maslow

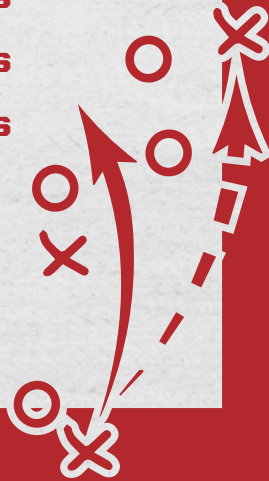


LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

SESSION

A TYPICAL SESSION PLAN:

Kick Start	15mins
Imaginative Story	15mins
Imaginative play	10mins
Goals, Goals, Goals	10mins
Final Whistle	10mins





LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

SESSION BREAKDOWN

15 MINUTES	Kick Start	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class Welcome• My Body In Space• Skill Mastery	Introduction to key movement (agility, balance, coordination and speed) and soccer control skills.
15 MINUTES	Imaginative Story	Skill Development <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Kicking• Controlling• Catching/throwing• Guided Play• Themed activity	A themed story will lead children through activities working with and without the ball. 3 activities Max.
10 MINUTES	Imaginative Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Free Play• Child Led	Coach facilitates an environment where child can interact playfully and freely; providing various pieces of equipment. The focus is for the child to determine their own space and learning.
10 MINUTES	Goals, Goals, Goals!	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Spatial Awareness• Achieving outcome	Coach provides a wide range of scoring opportunities for children.
10 MINUTES	Final Whistle	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social and emotional development practice• reflection and reward	Opportunity to reflect on experiences and to leave with positive feeling of self.



LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

KICK START

1) CLASS WELCOME

Children will prepare for the start of the session by finding and sitting in a hula hoop. The coach can use this as an opportunity to welcome everyone to the class and to explain some of the sessions key activities.

2) MY BODY IN SPACE

Activities are used by children to work on key movement skills that prepare the body for action, whether it is stretches with the ball, making shapes or static/dynamic activities, the focus is on non-soccer related activities.

Activity Ideas:

- (1) ABC Shapes
- (2) Animals
- (3) Human Statues
- (4) Hula Move

3) SKILL MASTERY

Soccer ball is introduced to the session. Two key activities can be delivered to encourage skills development:

Static skills:

Foot Skills, Juggling Skills, Handling skills
(within hula hoop)

Dynamic Skills:

Chase (kicking exercise where children attempt to chase the grown-up with the soccer ball)



LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

IMAGINATIVE STORY

This is an opportunity for children to engage in formal play; play that is themed and explored and led by a coach. One key theme/ storyline will be followed in each session and used to focus on the development of kicking, controlling, catching and throwing the soccer ball.

This is a form of “Implicit learning” meaning that children learn key soccer skills without even knowing it!

Coaches are encouraged to get the children involved in the decision making process by using open questions; offering suggestions to what happens next in the storyline.

Story Themes:

EXPLORING THE JUNGLE - Children go on a journey through the rainforest. They will have to make their way around trees and lakes, escape from wildlife and find fruit and nuts to stay healthy!

PIRATES - Children will explore the seven seas in the search for buried treasure. They will explore deserted Islands, battle against sharks and find treasure to bring back to the ship.

DINOSAURS - Children will travel 65 millions years back to a time dinosaurs ruled the earth. They may have bitten off more than they can chew!

PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOBILES - travel either around the world to different countries or going downtown to the grocery store, Just make sure that children drive safely!





LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

IMAGINATIVE PLAY

PUTTING THE POWER BACK IN THE HANDS OF CHILDREN! This unique aspect to the program provides the opportunity for child-led play; where children decide how they participate and interact with their environment.

Whether it is playing with their parents or family members, kicking a soccer ball into the goal with other children or simply sitting down and playing with cones, Children take control.

HOW TO ORGANIZE?

KEEP IT SIMPLE!

After Imaginative story is ended, have all children sit back in their hula hoops.

Introduce different types of equipment to children and explain the possibilities for play

ROLE OF THE COACH?

Interact with children and parents, play and keep children safe.

WHY PLAY?

Play is the purest form of learning, allowing children to explore, be creative and imaginative with their own ideas.

Play allows children to make their own decisions, improving confidence and self-esteem.

Play builds interactions between others and helps to develop social skills.



LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES

GOALS, GOALS, GOALS!

Children love to score goals, so let them!

Children will have the opportunity to score into 5-6 different soccer goals of different sizes.

Children will dribble, control the soccer ball and make decisions to which soccer goal to go towards.

Coach can assign tasks and obstacles to different goals. This could be having some children as goalkeepers, or having to dribble around cones before scoring.

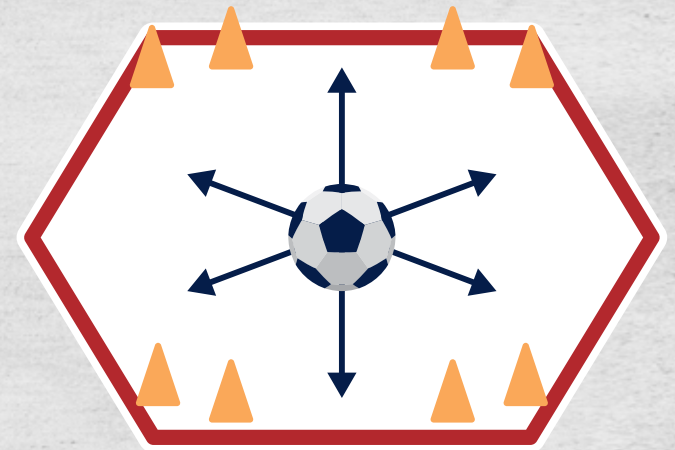
NO THANK YOU TO SCRIMAGES

Little Sparks does not advocate the use of two sided soccer games or “scrimmages” for children under the age of six.

Scrimmages promote:

- **Structure**
- **Rules**
- **1 ball**

Little Sparks is all about each child and providing as much contact and practice with the ball as possible and scoring as many goals as possible.





LITTLE SPARKS SESSION GUIDELINES


FINAL WHISTLE

1) CLASS WELCOME

Coach concludes the session by having all children return back to their marker and the coach will reviews the activities.

If there is time, the coach can also use the opportunity for a “final goal”, where each child will step up at a time to complete an obstacle and score to end the session.





**“Play is the highest form
of research.”**

- Albert Einstein



CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

The Little Sparks Curriculum outlines key objectives to work towards to develop key psychological, emotional, social and physical abilities.

To be a holistic child development program we need to consider the development of the whole child, reinforcing key attributes which support a child's learning and growth.

These key objectives are split into three key developmental themes:

I`M MOVING

Improving the awareness and understanding of how their body can move and be controlled in space.

I`M LEARNING

Improving the awareness and understanding of fundamental soccer skills.

I`M FEELING

Improving a child's awareness and understanding of how they control and communicate their feelings and how their emotions affect others



CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

I'M MOVING	OUTCOME
Movement Skills, Competencies and Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am learning to move my body well and understanding what my body does.• I am exploring how to manage and control my body and where my body moves.• I am understanding how to use space and share it.• I am enjoying opportunities to participate in different kinds of energetic play.• I am building on my ability to move and control my body in various ways.
I'M FEELING	OUTCOME
Psychological, Emotional and Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am aware of and able to express my feelings in a suitable way.• I am developing the ability to talk about my feelings.• I am developing the ability to build trustful relationships with others and understanding to care for others.• I am confident to make my own decisions during play.• I am feeling happy when I am involved in physical activities.
I'M LEARNING	OUTCOME
Soccer skill development, Social Development and Health and Wellbeing Concepts	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• I am learning how to judge the flight and speed of an object and to successfully catch, throw, control and kick objects during various activities.• I am learning the correct way to use my feet to stop and control a ball without using my hands.• I am learning how to kick the ball accurately towards a specific space or target.• I am learning how to follow rules, listen to others and follow instructions when required .• I am learning about different roles in adults life.• I am learning new stories of past and present events and key life tasks.



“The environment must be rich in motives which lend interest to activity and invite the child to conduct his own experiences.”

- Dr. Maria Montessori



CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

THE GUIDELINES:

**Physical Activity Guidelines for preschool children.
(National Association for Sport and Physical Education, 2006)**

- **Preschool children should accumulate at least 60 minutes of daily structured physical activity .**
- **All children under 5 should minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary (being restrained or sitting).**
- **Preschools should develop competence in movement skills that are building blocks for more complex movement skills.**

THE FACTS:

- **The early years of a child's life have been identified as the critical period in which building blocks for all future development are formed.**
- **Preschool children require a range of experiences to practice, rehearse and develop their abilities to perform key tasks.**
- **The preschool years are known as the 'Golden Age' of motor development. It is during these years (3 to 5 years of age) that important skills are developed.**





CHILD DEVELOPMENT AND LEARNING THROUGH PLAY

PRESCHOOL

“Children need the freedom to play. Play is not a luxury. Play is a necessity”

“Play Stands at the centre of Human development, especially in the formative years.....”

Play in early childhood has been shown to influence the way the child’s brain develops. Research shows that 75% of brain development occurs after birth.

The way in which parents play with their young children can have an effect on their behaviour. Evidence suggest that parent-child play reduced the likelihood of behavioural problems later on in life.

Active play in early childhood helps build strong bones, muscle strength, and lung capacity and, whilst playing, children use their physical skills in spontaneous ways that help them to develop sophisticated physical skills and coordinate movements.

The most important role that play can have is to help children to be active, make choices and practice actions to mastery.





“Plainly, the environment must be a living one, directed by a higher intelligence, arranged by an adult who is prepared for his mission.”



HELPFUL TIPS

DELIVERY CHECKLIST

- Be Organised! Set out all equipment and activities as best as possible before children and parents arrive.**
- Use drink breaks as an opportunity to rearrange equipment for next practices if required.**
- Explain the game or activity as simple as possible, including exaggerated demonstrations.**
- Be very clear, speak slowly and be enthusiastic..... be a cheerleader, be animated, move around.**
- Provide limited instructions/direction while they play.**
- Continue constructive play if one child wanders away with parent.**
- Do not create win/losing environments.**
- Interact and speak to parents.**

HAVE FUN!





HELPFUL TIPS

MOVEMENT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

ACTION AWARENESS (WHAT MY BODY DOES)

TRAVELING ACTIONS			STABILIZING ACTIONS				MANIPULATING ACTIONS		
Walking	Jumping	Galloping	Twisting	Standing	Swinging	Landing	Throwing	Rolling	Open
Skipping	Crawling	Running	Turning	Sitting	Swaying		Catching	Kicking	Close
Hopping	Sliding	Leaping	Balancing	Squatting	Pulling		Bouncing	Trapping	Striking
Climbing	Marching		Curling	Kneeling	Pushing		Tossing	Object Handling	

EFFORT AWARENESS (HOW MY BODY MOVES)

TIME		FORCE			CONTROL	
SPEEDS:	RHYTHM:	DEGREES OF FORCE:	CREATING FORCE:	ABSORBING FORCE:	WEIGHT TRANSFER:	DIMENSIONS:
Slow	Beats	Strong	Starting (Go)	Stopping	Rocking	Single Movements
Medium	Cadence	Medium	Sustained	Receiving	Stepping	Combinations of Movements
Fast	Patterns	Light	Explosive		Rolling	Transitions
Speeding Up					Flight	
Slowing Down						

SPACE AWARENESS (WHERE MY BODY MOVES)

CATEGORIES		DIRECTIONS				LEVELS			PATHWAYS		
Self Space	Shared Space	Up	Right	Forward	Backward	High	Medium	Low	Straight	Curved	Zigzag
		Down	Left	Sideways							



HELPFUL TIPS

MOVEMENT SKILL DEVELOPMENT (CONT.)

RELATIONAL AWARENESS (WITH MYSELF, OTHER MOVERS, + OBJECTS)

BODY PARTS			SHAPES		ROLES	ASSOCIATIONS	LOCATIONS	
Head	Arms	Ankles	Big	Triangle	Leading	Letters	Near To - Far From	On - Off
Hand	Fingers	Toes	Small	Square	Following	Numbers	Around - Through	In - Out
Ears	Chest	Elbow	Curved	Circle	Mirroring	Colors	In Front - Behind	Top - Bottom
Eyes	Wrist	Shoulder	Straight	Rectangle	Unison	Hand Signs	Together - Apart	Over - Under
Nose	Hips	Neck	Wide	Narrow	Taking Turns	Pretense	Facing - Side by Side	
Leg	Waist	Stomach	Twisted	Thin	Solo			
Knee	Bottom	Like			Partner			
Foot	Back	Unlike			Group			





LITTLE SPARKS

IGNITING CHILDREN'S IMAGINATION

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