

ARE YOU IN?



AGE GRADE  
**RUGBY**  
CODES OF PRACTICE

#AgeGradeRugby

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NATIONAL PLAYER PIPELINE MANAGER

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# FOREWORD



**When you read these Codes of Practice, you will see how we're putting the wants and needs of children at the heart of everything we do in Age Grade rugby.**

Being more player-centred means that the focus is on potential rather than current ability and that the emphasis is on enjoyment and encouraging a lifelong love of rugby.

The Codes of Practice help to bring the regulations of the game to life.

What they recommend you may find new and challenging but they are proven by research. This ensures that they can be followed by everyone involved across the age grade game whether in club, school, college and pathway rugby.

**Mark Saltmarsh**

National Player Pipeline Manager



AGE GRADE RUGBY CODES OF PRACTICE

# INTRODUCTION

**The Age Grade Rugby Codes of Practice explain how a rugby coach should approach the development of boys and girls (children) between the ages of U7 and U18. By coach we mean those who teach or coach rugby at a club, school or college.**

Age Grade Rugby was introduced in September 2016. The Codes of Practice are guidance for its implementation and are based on RFU [Regulation 15](#). This details the regulations that relate to Age Grade rugby and which those who are involved with it must adhere to and follow.

**The Codes of Practice put the regulations into context and provide reference, clarification and guidance.**

The Codes of Practice aim to help coaches at clubs, schools and colleges to recognise their responsibilities so that they can put into place a clear, progressive and monitored coaching policy.

Through their understanding of what Age Grade Rugby is and their ability to follow the guidelines, coaches are more likely to meet the needs and wants of the children they coach. This will ensure the emotional, physical and psychological development of each child and help to increase their lifelong enjoyment of the game.

## **Age Grade Rugby ensures:**

- › Consistent age bandings and incremental player progressions.
- › A nationally consistent playing menu and calendar that increases inclusivity, clarifies player priorities and dovetails club, school and college competitions.
- › An integrated England Rugby Player Development pathway and representative framework.
- › Training and Continuous Professional Development for coaches, referees, parents, teachers and others.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 1:  
DEVELOPING THE WHOLE PLAYER**

Focuses on the benefits of developing a positive attitude towards physical activity.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 2:  
ADOPT A PLAYER-CENTRED APPROACH TO  
PLAYING AND TRAINING**

Encourages a focus on enjoyment and improvement regarding training, competition and frequency of play.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 3:  
GROUPING OF PLAYERS**

Focuses on the need to give players an equal opportunity to play, train and develop with their peers.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 4:  
AN INDIVIDUAL PLAYING UP AND DOWN**

Advises on how to approach the rare occasions when children are unable to play with their peer group.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 5:  
COMBINING AGE GROUPS**

Considers how best to combine age groups if this is the only solution.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 6:  
OUT OF SEASON ACTIVITIES, RUGBY  
CAMPS AND TOURS**

Advocates the benefits of children having a break from rugby and experiencing a balanced programme that encourages them to take part in other sports.

**CODE OF PRACTICE 7:  
MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR COACHES AND  
REFEREES**

Recommends standards of practice so that coaches are player-centred and appropriately skilled.

**Each code of practice outlines the intention behind it, the questions coaches should ask themselves and the guidelines to follow.**

Where appropriate, it provides web links to additional information. It also makes clear how [Regulation 15](#) relates to playing, training and all variations of rugby that are allowed within a relevant age grade.

Regulation 15 is the RFU's regulation that governs youth rugby known as Age Grade Rugby. It should be followed at all times. It governs the Codes of Practice which provide reference, clarification and guidance.

The Age Grade Rugby Codes of Practice promote a positive attitude and behaviour towards the coaching of rugby.

Please read it carefully and consider the questions it asks as well as the objectives behind it. Creating a positive coaching environment will see children enjoying their rugby more and fulfilling their playing potential.

The sport will also begin to witness more players transitioning to the adult game. All of this is great for the child, you as their coach and the long-term future of English rugby.

The codes of practice should always be read in conjunction with Regulation 15 together with [Regulation 9](#) (Player Safety) and [Regulation 21](#) (Safeguarding).



# DEVELOPING THE WHOLE PLAYER

## CODE OF PRACTICE 1: DEVELOPING THE WHOLE PLAYER

### > OUR INTENTION

**Playing rugby and other sports should produce young adults who can demonstrate good cognitive skills, resilience and creative thinking.**

They will have a positive attitude towards physical activity, respect for the core values of rugby and a strong love of the game.

Coaches influence the attitude and behaviours of players because of the Age Grade approach they apply. This increases the likelihood that they will transition to adult rugby and share their enthusiasm for the sport with others.

- ▶ Listen to a cross-section of young players tell you what they want from playing rugby with their friends.



**BE PLAYER CENTRED**

### **i** DID YOU KNOW?

- > Early experience of a wide variety of sports has positive implications for long-term sport involvement.
- > Early experience of a wide variety of sports does not hinder elite sport participation where peak performance is reached after maturation. This is the case in rugby, which is described as a late maturation sport.
- > Research into sports where specialisation occurs before the age of 16 has indicated several negatives that include more injuries and less enjoyment.

## **1.1**

# **BALANCING RUGBY AND NON-RUGBY ACTIVITIES**

Coaches should ask themselves:

## **1. Does my approach look to develop the whole child?**



### **GOOD PRACTICE**

All those who work as a coach or referee should be qualified, up to date with current methods, confident in their knowledge of the rules and have completed safeguarding and first aid training. They can then best meet the needs of all players.

## **2. Do I encourage the child to take part in non-rugby activities and lead an active lifestyle?**



### **GOOD PRACTICE**

NHS guidelines state that children should do 60 minutes activity a day. Research also shows that involvement in other sports helps to enhance and develop other skills, which in turn are beneficial to playing rugby. Children who play a wider range of sports have the potential to develop into more rounded athletes at later stages.

## **3.**

### **Do I promote the benefits of obtaining positive outcomes from competitive situations?**



### **GOOD PRACTICE**

Evidence confirms that children find the enjoyment of a competitive match more important than winning. Encouraging positive outcomes at the same time as striving to be the best is more player-led and long term.

While being competitive is an integral part of rugby, prioritising winning weakens the player-led ethos behind Age Grade Rugby.

## **4.**

### **Do I review and check Regulation 15 at the start of each season?**



### **GOOD PRACTICE**

Events such as Covid-19 mean that the RFU must review all of its regulations and make necessary changes.

Anyone who is involved in youth rugby has a responsibility to review [Regulation 15](#) at the start of the season and to make a note of any revisions that may influence the delivery of Age Grade rugby. Whilst the latest version of the Codes of Practice will reflect any approved revisions, it is good practice to review Regulation 15 as well.

## 5. Do I encourage players to experience a wide range of playing positions?



### GOOD PRACTICE

U13 is the start of a gradual increase in position-specific focus but children should also continue experiencing different positions. As children change size as they get older, be open minded about the positions they can play. There should be no positional focus up to U13.

## 6. Do I strive to foster a love of the game among the players?



### GOOD PRACTICE

As a coach know why you enjoy the game and what you get out of it. Place rugby's core values (Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship) at the heart of what you do. Take a player-led approach and follow the guidelines in Code of Practice 1.

## 7. Does your coaching help your players develop their CARDS skills?



### GOOD PRACTICE

Cards is an acronym for: **Creativity, Awareness, Resilience, Decision making** and **Self-organisation**.

They are the priority skills for helping develop the next generation of England Rugby players both on and off the pitch.

## CODE OF PRACTICE 1: DEVELOPING THE WHOLE PLAYER





# ADOPT A PLAYER-CENTRED APPROACH TO TRAINING & PLAYING

## CODE OF PRACTICE 2: ADOPT A PLAYER-CENTRED APPROACH TO TRAINING AND PLAYING

### > OUR INTENTION

Through the National Rugby Survey, children told us that the most enjoyable thing about rugby is playing with their friends, having fun and being part of a team. This sense of enjoyment should be reflected in every rugby activity.

Training sessions are planned to develop the skills of the groups of children playing rugby. Until U13, there is no positional focus for the individual player, instead regular exposure to a variety of playing positions. While learning takes place during matches, training and games (see 2.2) are the main developmental tools.

- ▶ Jack and Sally have different development needs. Learn why they respond so positively to the tailored approach their coaches adopt.



[ADOPT A PLAYER CENTRED APPROACH TO TRAINING AND PLAYING](#)

**i DID YOU KNOW?**

- > NHS Guidelines on physical activity advise that to maintain a reasonable level of health youngsters aged 5 to 18 need to engage in:
  - > At least 60 minutes of physical activity every day.
  - > Activities, such as rugby, to strengthen muscles and to develop strong bones on three days a week.
- > Age Grade players tell us they enjoy playing the most when they are with their friends (79%).

**2.1**

**TRAINING AND TRAINING ACTIVITIES**

As a coach you should consider the following:

**1.**

**Do I always think of the needs of the individual player rather than the expectations of the players as a group?**

**GOOD PRACTICE**

Work to be player-centred in the ways communicated in this Code of Practice.

**2.**

**Am I clear about the season's overall objectives for players in the age group? Or do I take a short-term approach from match to match?**

**GOOD PRACTICE**

Aim to know your objectives for each training session and ensure they are part of a training block that is c. 4-6 weeks. Greater development takes place when you avoid short-term thinking and planning.

**3.**

**Have I taken the appropriate coaching or refereeing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course to deliver the training and am I up to date with current training methods?**

**GOOD PRACTICE**

The expectation is that you are sufficiently qualified to deliver all elements of the game, especially those involving contact. If not, take a course.

4.

## Am I aware of and do I implement the Activate Injury Prevention Exercise Programme designed by the RFU in conjunction with the University of Bath?

This allows for an additional 15 minutes per day of rugby activity if the 15 minutes involve the delivery of Activate. For example, U16s may be engaged in 105 minutes of rugby of which 90 minutes consists of training/playing and 15 minutes of Activate.



GOOD PRACTICE

Coaches should attend the face to face training session and sign up to the supporting online resource. More information is on: [www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe](http://www.englandrugby.com/rugbysafe)

**Note:** Injuries fell by 72% when players completed these exercises at least three times a week and concussion injuries were reduced by 59%.

5.

## Have I considered the child's Rugby Playing Week (i.e. how much rugby activity across all settings they do in a week) so that I consider their training and playing demands within my own environment as well as other rugby settings?



GOOD PRACTICE

Think of the Rugby Playing Week in terms of training sessions that allow for rest days before and after intense activity (particularly contact sessions) or matches. Research from Leeds Beckett University using academy rugby union players, suggests that following contact or non-contact training, players are not fully recovered at 72 hours. Ensuring sufficient rest allows the child to recover and reduces the risk of injury.

6.

## Have I ensured that the parents/guardians and coaches/ teachers from other teams are aware of any injury or concussion the player has suffered?



GOOD PRACTICE

Where a player plays in multiple environments (i.e. club and school/college) and suffers any injury or concussion, the coach should ensure that the parents, and other appropriate coaches or teachers, are made aware.

This lessens the mistake of allowing the player to train or play when injured. It ensures a joined-up approach to their return to play.



GOOD PRACTICE

Do I have a good understanding of the guidelines for a head injury and a suspected concussion? Am I familiar with the Graduated Return to Play Programme (GRTP)? Do I complete the RFU's HEADCASE training module about concussion at the start of each season?

7.

## Am I aware that technical development is not best achieved by full contact practice?



GOOD PRACTICE

During full contact, players tend to resort or fall back on to their learned technique rather than concentrating on improving it. Where appropriate, full contact training, as with matches, should be used to fully test whether that development has taken place.

## 8. Always consider the duration, intensity (workload), physicality (contact level) of the session in relation to the child's physical development, their Rugby Playing Week and level of competition.

As a guideline, the recommended maximum duration of a training session in a day is:

U7 - U8	>	60 mins
U9 - U11	>	90 mins
U12 - U18	>	120 mins



GOOD PRACTICE

Important! This is the recommended maximum training time which is not the same as maximum game time as outlined in [Regulation 15](#).

Remember that if Activate is part of the training an additional 15 minutes is possible. Be aware that hot or cold weather will reduce the duration.

## 9. Consider applying a training to match ratio to manage the duration, intensity and amount of time spent playing.



GOOD PRACTICE

We would recommend on average, three training sessions to one match. This creates a training culture with the primary focus on player development.

## 10. Remember that under no circumstances are coaches allowed to train or play contact rugby with children, or to hold a tackle bag or shield.



GOOD PRACTICE

While adults and children may play non-contact rugby together, it is important to consider safeguarding or safety aspects before the session.



GOOD PRACTICE

Young players should be encouraged to use training support equipment safely and responsibly and always under supervision.



CODE OF PRACTICE 2:  
ADOPT A PLAYER-CENTRED APPROACH  
TO TRAINING AND PLAYING

## 2.2

## COMPETITIVE OPPORTUNITIES

As a coach you should consider the following:

## 1.

## Am I clear about the difference between a game and a match?



## GOOD PRACTICE

A game is a managed activity that allows the coach to devise and control situations that will best develop individual players. A match is a fixture between two clubs or teams where there is little opportunity to dictate or control the situations that arise.

Be mindful that matches have limited developmental potential because of the amount of time of ball in play and the limited involvement of some positions. Sometimes providing enjoyable training sessions and games can be more rewarding and productive than a match.



## ASK YOURSELF

1. Am I clear about the purpose of the competitive match that's scheduled or is a game more appropriate?
2. Will it give the children an enjoyable experience?
3. Does it offer the right developmental opportunities?
4. Do the opposition share the same player-centred focus as us?
5. What kind of opportunity can the opposition give to test and develop the players? What can I do to maximise this?

## 2.

## Always have pre-match conversations a few days before the match and focus on how to create the best experience for every player.

Coaches should anticipate any potential mismatch, the dominance of one player over all others and whether anyone is playing out of age grade. Consider the benefits of changing the rules if this is going to improve the developmental focus. Remember that if the try difference rises to more than six (at U7-U13) or the points difference is more than 50 points (U14-U18) the match must be brought to an end.

Always communicate any agreed changes to the referee, parents and spectators.

## 3.

## Always try to reward performance over outcome and be ready to adapt to changing circumstances.



## GOOD PRACTICE

Be flexible in your thinking and be open-minded to other playing alternatives:

- > A match outcome in which no scores are kept
- > Playing to a younger age group's rules
- > Giving additional points for positive play
- > Rewarding good team decision making
- > Recognising behaviour that reflects rugby's core values.



## DID YOU KNOW?

- > The top three most important things to Age Grade players are being part of a team, enjoyment and having fun. When asked, winning is the third least important.
- > It is clear from a wealth of evidence that the emphasis across all levels of children's sport, including talent pathways, needs to be on enjoyment and development, rather than performance and winning.

## 2.3

## PLAYING FREQUENCY

**There is a tendency for players who are perceived to be better, or who are more physically mature, to play more frequently and in more important matches than those who are considered less able.**

Those players who are often not selected and have less game time tell us that under-playing is one of the factors which make them leave the game. Under-playing also results in a lack of opportunity to develop skills and confidence in a game or match environment. It is our intention to put inclusivity, welfare and player development first.

Children who play in several environments tell us they are often forced to prioritise and play two full, intense games in a week. Research from Leeds Beckett University suggests it takes players 72 hours to recover from a match and that the most talented players play 2.5 games of rugby per week.

This suggests that a child who plays excessively may have an increased risk of injury and possible player burn-out. Those who stop playing often state overplaying as a reason for not continuing with rugby.

Best practice is for coaches to think carefully about whether they are under or over-playing a player and to be aware of the implications of doing so.

### DID YOU KNOW?

- > England Rugby players are only permitted to play 32 full matches in a season – 20% of Age Grade players reported playing more than 30
- > 20% of Age Grade players report being asked to choose between playing for a club and a school on the same day.



## GOOD PRACTICE

- > Organise activities so that all your players have an equal opportunity to play.
- > Plan an appropriate programme of development that takes into consideration the player's Rugby Playing Week.
- > If you have a child playing for both club and school/college, talk to their parents to understand the player's level of involvement and discuss development opportunities or potential issues before they arise.
- > Do all you can to develop partnerships with the local club or school in the interests of the player
- > Share with parents the requirements of the half game rule and assure them that players will get half the available game time.
- > Take into consideration that the physical demands of a sevens tournament can require a similar recovery period to that of a 15-a-side game.
- > Ensure that any competitive activity is arranged in accordance with the playing calendar and competitive menu ([www.englandrugby.com/agegraderugby](http://www.englandrugby.com/agegraderugby)). This ensures a balance of competition, addresses over and under playing and ensures that competition is in line with the wants and needs of players.



## ASK YOURSELF

Whilst it is not part of the regulations, the codes of practice encourage coaches to think carefully about playing frequency.

- > Have I made a conscious effort, with other coaches, to strike a balance between games, matches and training and factored in a rest period during the rugby playing week?
- > Do I rotate players so that all members of the squad have an equal chance to develop their skills as well as acquire an enthusiasm and confidence for the game?
- > Have I assessed whether it is suitable for the child to play more than two physically intense matches in a 72-hour period, based on their position, match-time and level of involvement? Have I considered whether this is a game or a match?
- > Am I aware of the [Half Game regulation](#) in which all players in a match day squad must play half a game? This addresses the potential issues of over and under playing and focuses attention on the individuals not the team.

# GROUPING OF PLAYERS

## CODE OF PRACTICE 3: GROUPING OF PLAYERS

### > OUR INTENTION

**Research consistently tells us that children enjoy playing rugby the most when playing with their friends.**

Coaches should ensure that all players are given an equal opportunity to play, train and develop with their peers in an open and transparent way. They should have access to the same resources and opportunities.

As players have different motivations this requires coaches to be open to offering alternative playing options. Some players are looking for full contact rugby whereas others want either a reduced or non-contact activity.

By grouping players appropriately, coaches should recognise the difference between individuals but continue to be player centred.

- ▶ **Discover the benefits of focussing on player potential rather than current ability and see how rewarding it is for everyone involved.**



**GROUPING OF PLAYERS**

## 3.1

## GROUPING OF PLAYERS

**There is a tendency for players who are perceived to be better, or who are more physically mature, to play more frequently and in more important matches than those who are considered less able.**

The RFU believes in the playing of mixed ability teams, especially at primary school ages. Players should be grouped by their confidence, competence in the contact elements of the game, and emotional capability.

The RFU does not support the playing of fixed A, B, C teams where the A Team receives increased playing and training opportunities, better resources and access to the best coaches. Where players are repeatedly separated, opportunities to develop and progress are limited.

In situations where coaches recognise differences between secondary age players (U12 – U19), differentiation in small-sided games is appropriate. This will have a positive impact if players feel they are being given inclusive and practical opportunities to participate.

### ✓ GOOD PRACTICE FOR ALL COACHES

1. When grouping players for training or matches, coaches should be able to answer:
  - > Why is the group organised in the way it is?
  - > What are the physical risks for the group?
  - > What are the competencies of the players?
  - > What are the developmental opportunities for each player?
2. Does each player have developmental goals?
3. Does your grouping consider the amount of opportunity the child has had to practise?
4. Do you consider a player's date of birth? Remember, there may be almost a year's difference in players born on 1st September to those on 31st August. How do you ensure the development of those players born later in a season?

### ✓ GOOD PRACTICE FOR HEAD COACHES AND CLUBS, SCHOOLS/COLLEGES

1. Ensure that your coaches work with a wide range of groups not just one group exclusively. They can then share resources, expertise and see the potential in other players who may mature later. This will mean that players receive an equal and shared experience with regards to resources, coaching, training and competitive opportunities.

- ▶ **Mr Bone has a wake-up call when his players tell him that they are more interested in developing their skills than only playing teams they can beat easily.**



WATCH THE VIDEO



**COMPETITIVE OPPORTUNITIES  
& PLAYING FREQUENCY**



# **AN INDIVIDUAL PLAYING UP AND DOWN**

## **CODE OF PRACTICE 4: AN INDIVIDUAL PLAYING UP AND DOWN**

### **> OUR INTENTION**

**At all times, we want rugby activities to be player-centred. Usually this means a child playing with friends or peers in their assigned age group. This is the default position.**

On the rare occasions where a child needs to play out of their age grade, it is viewed as an exception. It is only acceptable if the benefits of not playing with peers are agreed mutually and the appropriate Playing Out of Age Grade forms are completed prior to playing up or down a grade.

Full details and access to the appropriate online forms can be found at: [www.englandrugby.com/regulations](http://www.englandrugby.com/regulations)

Remember that Code of Practice 4 deals with one or two individuals playing out of Age Grade. It does not discuss the combining of two different age groups. This is covered in Code of Practice 5.

### **4.1**

## **INDIVIDUALS PLAYING UP OR DOWN**

**Keeping a player in the correct age group means they play where they enjoy playing rugby the most - with their friends.**

It means that they experience the stepping stones of skill development that are essential for progress and safety. Playing up should not be done only with the purpose of winning a match.

## 1.

**Although there are situations where a player, or a couple of players, may play up or down ask yourself if you have ruled out other activities that avoid the need to play out of the age group?**

- Are you able to differentiate and set groups different targets or goals for the activity depending on the players' needs (i.e. points for demonstrating a specific skill)?
- Can you change the rules of the game or match? Remember that the rules for the age group are the stated maximums. For example, U13 can play U9 rules if that encourages skill development.

## 2.

**If there are no other solutions, check whether playing up or down is permitted by Regulation 15.**

For female players, who play joint age banded rugby at U12, U14, U16 and U18, they are not permitted to play up or down out of these age groups.

In exceptional circumstances, as detailed in [Regulation 15](#), it is possible for U11 girls to play up but ONLY for the 2022/23 season.

➤ **MALE AND FEMALE PLAYERS**

Age Grade	Combining	Playing Up	Playing Down
U6s	U6 are NOT permitted to play matches, competitions, tournaments, or festivals with any older age grades.		
U7s	U7 and U8 can play and train together	Yes, with U8 only	U7 and U8 can play and train together
U8s			
U9s	With U10 See Regulation 15.2.2	No playing up permitted.	In limited circumstances. See Regulation 15.4
U10s	With U9 or U11 See Regulation 15.2.2		
U11s	With U10 or U12 See Regulation 15.2.2  Note: Female U11 and U12 players NOT permitted in a combined team.		

## MALE PLAYERS

Age Grade	Combining	Playing Up	Playing Down
U12s	With U11 or U13 See Regulation 15.2.2	Yes See Regulation 15.3.2	In limited circumstances. See Regulation 15.3.2
U13s	With U12 or U14 See Regulation 15.2.2		
U14s	With U13 or U14 Note: For 2022/23 season ONLY See Regulation 15.2.2		
U15s	With U14 or U16 Note: For 2022/23 season ONLY See Regulation 15.2.2		
U16s	With U15 or U17 ONLY Note: For 2022/23 season ONLY See Regulation 15.2.2	Yes See Regulation 15.3.2 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>playing up one age grade is permitted, including playing in the front row</li> <li>playing up two age grades is permitted but not including in the front row of contested scrums in 15 a-side rugby</li> </ul>	In limited circumstances. See Regulation 15.4
U17s	U17s are permitted to play with U18s.	U17s are permitted to play with U18s.	
U18s	U18s are permitted to play with U17s.	Yes See Regulation 15.6	
U19s	NO combining permitted.	Yes See Regulation 15.6	In limited circumstances. See Regulation 15.4

## FEMALE PLAYERS

Age Grade	Combining	Playing Up	Playing Down
U12s (Yr 7)	NO combining of Age banding permitted.  E.g., U12 age band may NOT combine with U14.	U11 players may play with U12 in limited circumstances.	In limited circumstances. See Regulation 15.4
U14s (Yr 9)		Player CANNOT play up to the next Age Band. E.g., U12 may NOT play U14 rugby.	
U16s (Yr 11)		Yes See Regulation 15.6	
U18s (Yr 13)	NO combining permitted.	Yes See Regulation 15.6	
U19s	NO combining permitted.	Yes See Regulation 15.6	

U6 players may train in non-competitive, non-contact rugby with players in the U7 or U8 age group but are not permitted to participate in any types of matches, competition, festival or tournaments in any age grade.

A player who is 17 may play adult rugby only if:

1. The club has completed the online form and received approval from their CB to permit this.
2. The club has completed the online player assessment and received permissions from their CB.

Further details including guidance and the club and player approval documents can be found on [www.englandrugby.com/regulations](http://www.englandrugby.com/regulations).

### 3. If there is no other solution, make sure an assessment is carried out by a Level 2 or equivalent coach.

This must be verified by another coach, both of whom should have the right level of experience and competence.

- Are you able to differentiate and set groups different targets or goals for the activity depending on the players' needs?
- Can you change the rules of the game or match? Remember that the rules for the age group are the stated maximums. For example, U13 can play U9 rules if that encourages skill development.
- Is the assessment player-centred so that it considers their physical, psychological and emotional development?

Please see [Appendix A](#): How to conduct a player assessment.

- Following an assessment, have you completed the online approval process for club and college players?
  - For Club players online approval and parental consent is needed.
  - For College players online approval and Head Teacher consent is required.
  - For School players approval from the Head Teacher is required.

**Note:** Standard online forms to complete and submit are available on: [www.englandrugby.com/regulations](http://www.englandrugby.com/regulations)

## CODE OF PRACTICE 4: AN INDIVIDUAL PLAYING UP AND DOWN



# COMBINING AGE GROUPS

## CODE OF PRACTICE 5: COMBINING AGE GROUPS

In this code, we continue to look at the regulation and process relating to combining age groups and to ensure any solution meets the needs of the players.

### > OUR INTENTION

**There are occasions when it is necessary to combine age grades to provide a playing or training opportunity.**

The mixing of age grade's focusses on the grouping of children to play together as a team as opposed to 'playing up or down', which is focussed on an individual only.

If the reason for combining age groups is clear, a combined age group is occasionally the right option. As with CoP 4, this is viewed as an exception and it is only acceptable if the benefits for both age groups are clear.

The combining of age groups as part of the return to rugby post Covid-19 is a example of this. Coaches should always review [Regulation 15](#) at the start season and note any changes.

- ▶ **Mr Wiseman and Miss Jackson get the best out to their players because they understand the regulations about combining age grades and place emphasis on enjoyment and development.**



**COMBINING AGE GROUPS & BEING PLAYER-LED**

## 5.1

## MIXED AGE GROUPS

**At times, you may feel there are practical reasons to combine age grades for training or contact sessions. This could be because:**

- > One group of players has been committed to a fixture without exploring playing opportunities for all squad members, thereby leaving some players behind.
- > One age group has lots of players who are unavailable due to injury or academic commitments.
- > A school, club or college has small numbers of a particular age group and needs additional players to make up the numbers.



### GOOD PRACTICE

Coaches should ensure that all squad members have an equal opportunity to play, with squad members playing at least half a game.

**Ask yourself if you have explored other options that avoid the need to combine teams?**

- > Can you change the rules of the game or match? Remember that the rules for the age group are the stated maximums. For example, U13 can play U9 rules if that encourages skill development.

**Before combining age grades, have you considered each player's physical, psychological and emotional development? Is it appropriate?**

**The following age grade combinations are permitted:**

- |              |             |
|--------------|-------------|
| > U9s & U10s | U14s & U15s |
| U10s & U11s  | U15s & U16s |
| U11s & U12s  | U16s & U17s |
| U13s & U14s  | U17s & U18s |

**Important!** U16 may not combine teams with U18.

- > Regulations permit U16 and U17 players to train and play up and permit seventeen year olds to play adult rugby if appropriate for the development of the child. The process and detail of this can be found in regulation 15 (15.3, 15.5 and 15.6).

**Mixed age rugby is permitted until U11 after which girls play Joint Age Band rugby. U11 female players may not play in a combined U11/U12 team with boys.**

**The following age grade groupings are permitted in the girls game.**

- |                |              |
|----------------|--------------|
| > U12 Age Band | U16 Age Band |
| U14 Age Band   | U18 Age Band |

- > In girl's rugby, it is not permitted to combine age bands i.e. U12 cannot play U14 rugby.

**Note:** Dual age banding is permitted in girls' rugby due the minimal difference in the physical capabilities of female players in these bands. This does not increase the risk of physical mismatches compared to teenage boys' rugby where the game is generally organised within a single year group.

**When working with combined age grades you should:**

- > Obtain written approval from the Constituent Body (CB) for the club or the school's principal. You do not need written approval from County Schools Union (CSU).
- > Check that not more than half of the players are from the older age grade.
- > Follow the rules for the younger age grade if you are playing matches competitively.
- > Talk to the opposition coach before the day of the game. Not on the day.

# **OUT OF SEASON ACTIVITY, RUGBY CAMPS AND TOURS**

## **CODE OF PRACTICE 6: OUT OF SEASON ACTIVITY, RUGBY CAMPS AND TOURS**

### **> OUR INTENTION**

**Research from periodisation experts promotes an 'off season' to recover and to experience other sports and activity.**

This code supports the research that age grade players should have a break from specific rugby activities between the end of the season in May and the start of the new season in September.

The RFU recognises that those who have been actively involved in playing rugby, at whatever level, benefit from a sustained break over the summer. Children can then experience different sports as part of their development and avoid the negative impact that continuous rugby activity may have on their long-term involvement with sporting activities. This is more likely to protect their long-term interest and enjoyment of rugby.

The RFU encourages coaches to be open to the fact that the summer provides opportunities to introduce the game to those who have had limited exposure to it but who may suddenly discover its appeal.

## 6.1

## OUT OF SEASON ACTIVITIES

At times, you may feel there are practical reasons to combine age grades for training or contact sessions. This could be because:

**1. Am I aware that the Age Grade Rugby season for games and competition is from the first Saturday in September until the first Monday in May?**

**2. Is all 'Out of Season Activity' (activity not within the season) in line with RFU regulation 15.6?**

To support the return to rugby post Covid-19 there is a Summer Activity Framework. This has replaced the current regulation. The RFU will make an announcement if this changes during summer 2023.

**3. Have I received approval from my CB or CSU to organise out of season matches or competition?**

Facts to be aware of and questions to ask yourself:

1. Am I aware that the evidence shows that players in this age group benefit from experiencing different sporting activities?
2. Have I read the RFU Out of Season Activity Guide? ([www.englandrugby.com/regulations](http://www.englandrugby.com/regulations))
3. Does this activity benefit new or inexperienced players? If not, why am I running it?
4. Have I considered other beneficial group activities that can be held at my club or school during the summer months as a way to develop fundamental movement skills that are transferable to rugby i.e. cricket, 5-a-side football, rounders or athletics?
5. Is all out of season activity in line with the RFU out-of-season activity list?
6. Have I taken into account that summer activities increase the demand on the time of our volunteers?
7. Am I aware that at U13 and below no outgoing tours are permitted but they are at U14 and above?

The following is permitted:

At U11 and below	At U12 and U13	At U14, U15 and U16	At U17 and 18
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Non-contact* training only.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Non-contact training only.</li> <li>&gt; Non-contact matches and competition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Non-contact training only.</li> <li>&gt; Non-contact matches and competition.</li> <li>&gt; XRugby7s contact matches, competition and preparation**. <a href="http://www.englandrugby.com/xrugby7s">www.englandrugby.com/xrugby7s</a></li> </ul> <p>No other contact activity is permitted.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>&gt; Non-contact training only.</li> <li>&gt; Non-contact matches and competition.</li> <li>&gt; XRugby7s contact matches, competition and preparation**. <a href="http://www.englandrugby.com/xrugby7s">www.englandrugby.com/xrugby7s</a></li> <li>&gt; 7-a-side contact matches and competition and preparation.</li> </ul> <p>No other contact activity is permitted.</p>

**Exceptions:**

- > In some age groups, Pathway and CB Rugby has moved to the May calendar and to off-season. This spreads the load for players and ensures they enjoy more of the core playing season with club and their school/college teammates.
- > At U14 and above players can play 15-a-side competition in May if it has been re-arranged due to adverse weather, or in August two weeks prior to the start of the season.
- > U15 and U17 CB Representative Rugby activity is permitted up to and including the last May Bank Holiday Monday or in August two weeks prior to the start of the season but ONLY if they fixture is a re-arrangement due to adverse weather.
- > Be mindful that during the summer months grass pitches are likely to be harder and so the risk of impact injury increases. Hotter weather means that players need more hydration, so always ensure that plenty of water is available.

**Note:**

\*Non-contact expressly means no tackling and no involvement in scrums, rucks or mauls.

\*\* Preparation means to ensure new players are ready and able to participate in matches and competition safely.



## 6.2

### RUGBY CAMPS CHECKLIST FOR COACHES & TEACHERS

1. Am I clear on the rationale for running a rugby / holiday camp? Is it player-centred and does it support player development rather than fitness training in preparation for the new season?
2. Have I ensured that the very young participants are not just attending for parental convenience and is the programme of activities suitable for the child?
3. Am I following the Code of Practice concerning the maximum training times per age group (Code 2) and mixed age grades (Code 5)?
4. Have I received endorsement from the Constituent Body (CB) or County Schools Union (CSU) in which my camp is located?
5. Is everyone notified about the Key Contact who has overall responsibility for the camp? Are their names and contact details visible before, during and after the camp?
6. Are all coaches qualified with a current enhanced RFU DBS and do I have at least one Level 2 coach to devise, supervise and lead the coaching programme?
7. Have I made sure that coaches are not working in isolation and with appropriate supervision in case of injury or something unanticipated?
8. Have I scheduled a range of activities in line with RFU's summer activities and Out of Season? Is there an appropriate balance of play and rest? Does the programme have player development at its centre?
9. Is there a welfare and safeguarding plan in place, with a safeguarding lead?
10. Have I completed a risk assessment for the camp and each of the venues that will be used?

## 6.3

### TOURS

Age Grade tours are for children and young people to enjoy first and foremost in a safe and appropriate environment for them. While it is acknowledged that tours are an excellent way to build team spirit, visit other areas and experience other cultures, Age Grade tours are not an excuse for adults to recreate what many perceive to be the traditions of touring as an adult.

#### Checklist for coaches & teachers:

1. **Have I read and completed the tour guidance and checklist**

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2. **Is the tour permitted within RFU Regulation (i.e. no outgoing U13 and below summer tours)?**

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3. **Am I aware of the Rules and Regulations of the Union I am visiting?**

---

4. **Have I communicated with the opposition coaches so that the match or game is organised in the best interest of the players?**

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5. **Am I aware of the regulations for touring set out in RFU Regulation 10 including the permission from the Constituent Body or CSU required to tour overseas (including Wales and Scotland)?**

# MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR COACHES AND REFEREES

## CODE OF PRACTICE 7: MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR COACHES AND REFEREES

### > OUR INTENTION

All players have their rugby journey supported by coaches and referees who are player-centred and skilled in the holistic development of young people.

The coaches and referees are competent and confident in key coaching processes, rugby specific knowledge and the application of RFU regulations. They put the welfare, as well as the wants and needs of young players, first.

- ▶ Two of Mr Bone's pupils try to find out if he knows the Minimum Standards for Coaches.



**MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR COACHES**

# 7.1

## LEVELS OF PRACTICE FOR COACHES AND REFEREES

### 1.

**Am I qualified and up to date in my coaching and refereeing skills? Have I made sure I meet the minimum required practice? Am I fit enough to referee a match?**

There are three levels of practice:

#### Required Practice

1. DBS (those in clubs or academies MUST have an RFU Enhanced DBS)

It is mandatory that every Age Grade coach meets the Required Practice.

#### Standard Practice (Coaches & Referees)

1. Is DBS approved
2. Has completed the HEADCASE Concussion Awareness Training Module ([www.englandrugby.com/headcase](http://www.englandrugby.com/headcase))
3. Is committed to following the Codes of Practice
4. Has completed England Rugby Coaching Award and/ or England Rugby Referee Award
5. Has completed the Introduction to [Safeguarding course](#).

The RFU recommends that contact rugby should only be introduced and refereed under the supervision of RFU coaches and referees who have achieved standard practice.

#### Best Practice (Coaches & Referees)

1. Has joined appropriate association:  
Coach - [England Rugby Coaching Association](#) (ERCA)  
Referee - [England Rugby Refereeing Association](#) (ERRA)
2. Qualified, Active and Engaging in annual CPD, including refereeing (if relevant)
3. Has completed the RFU Play It Safe safeguarding training, or comparable training for teachers in a school environment
4. Has completed a relevant first aid course

Best Practice is what most coaches and referees should aspire to.



#### GOOD PRACTICE

All those who work as a coach or referee should be qualified, up to date with current methods, confident in their knowledge of the rules and have completed safeguarding and first aid training. They can then best meet the needs of all players.



**CODE OF PRACTICE 7:  
MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR  
COACHES AND REFEREES**

## 7.2

### MINIMUM STANDARDS AT CLUBS AND SCHOOLS/COLLEGES

- 1.** How do I recruit my coaches? Have I considered the active recruitment of coaches and the matching of coaches to specific age groups based on factors such as personality, experience and team need?



#### GOOD PRACTICE

All those who work as a coach or referee should be qualified, up to date with current methods, confident in their knowledge of the rules and have completed safeguarding and first aid training. They can then best meet the needs of all players.

- 2.** Am I confident that all coaches under my supervision are sufficiently competent and meet the Required Practice?



#### GOOD PRACTICE

All clubs and schools must ensure that all coaches who work with young people are DBS checked. More information is at: [englandrugby.com/safeguarding](http://englandrugby.com/safeguarding).

- 3.** Do I ensure that each age group has access to the most appropriate coach? Are the skills and knowledge of the more experienced and qualified coaches shared?

**4.**

- Are there appropriate levels of staff available so that coaches are not working in isolation?

**5.**

- Is there appropriate first aid cover and equipment at all contact sessions and matches?



#### GOOD PRACTICE

Clubs and schools should read and must follow care guidelines as detailed in RFU Regulation 9 (Player Safety).

**6.**

- Has an appropriate risk assessment been completed for the venue and activity?

**7.**

- Have the players and parents seen and understood the RFU animated concussion awareness video? [englandrugby.com/headcase](http://englandrugby.com/headcase)

# MAKING THE MOST OF THE CODES OF PRACTICE

## Thank you for taking the time to read the Age Grade Codes of Practice.

The success of Age Grade Rugby across schools, clubs and colleges in England depends on your support.

As part of making the most of the Codes of Practice we recommend that you:

- > Make a note of the questions you cannot answer confidently and find out what you need to do so that you can.
- > Aim to follow and apply the guidelines where they are given.
- > Regularly review [Regulation 15](#) and remember that the regulations must be understood and followed at all times.
- > Share the codes and your support with other coaches. The more coaches behind the codes, the more embedded Age Grade Rugby will become.
- > Visit [England Rugby Age Grade Rugby](#) and keep up to date with latest about Age Grade Rugby.

Increasing and maintaining player enjoyment among children is at the heart of the Codes of Practice. Achieve this in your work as a coach and your own level of enjoyment will increase too.

AGE GRADE RUGBY CODES OF PRACTICE

# ARE YOU IN?

#AgeGradeRugby

# USEFUL INFORMATION AND LINKS

## Adult Laws of the Game:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Age Grade Research and supporting documents:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Playing Calendar:

This document details when local and national club and school / college competitions may take place throughout a season. It is not a priority calendar and does not prevent playing of any friendly or school block fixtures.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Competitive Menu:

This menu ensures that format of competition matches is in the interests of inclusive participation for all Age Grade Players.

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Concussion modules for players, parents and coaches:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Goggles:

[DOWNLOAD DOCUMENT](#)

## Insurance:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Rules of Play:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Rugby Safe:

RugbySafe is RFU's overarching player safety and wellbeing programme to support clubs, schools/ colleges and participants at all levels of the game. Find out more including FAQs player clothing, first aid and player safety:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## Safeguarding:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

Further queries to

[SAFEGUARDING@RFU.COM](mailto:SAFEGUARDING@RFU.COM)

## Tours:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

Further queries to:

[TOURENQUIRIES@RFU.COM](mailto:TOURENQUIRIES@RFU.COM)

## Education:

[VISIT WEBSITE](#)

## > APPENDIX A

### When assessing a player as part of the online approval process to play out of age group, or a 17-year-old to play adult rugby, a coach should consider:

#### 1. Skill level and ability

Look for those who are the leading players in this age group and who would benefit from playing out of the age group.

#### ? ASK YOURSELF

- > Will they excel in their core rugby skills in contact, and will their main playing position be challenged positively in the next age group?
- > Is the player, whether playing up or adult, one of the more skilful players in their team and be able to perform in older team?
- > Are they outcompeting against other teams and players of similar age?
- > Are they able to manage all aspects of contact correctly?
- > What position will they play in the new team - is this their current position? If not, have they had training to play in this new position?
- > How long has the player been playing rugby?
- > Have they played representative rugby and at what level are they playing at their school/college?

#### 2. Physical development for their age

Look for those who are the leading players in this age group and who would benefit from playing out of the age group.

#### ? ASK YOURSELF

- > How does their height and weight compare to others in this team and to the team to which you're applying them to?
- > Is this player faster, stronger, and more powerful than their current teammates and performing above average in contact situations?
- > Have they started maturation?
- > Does their physique match the position they will be playing in the new age band?
- > Are there any skills needed at the age group above they haven't practised?

#### 3. Social & emotional development for their age

These players should be confident and emotionally mature enough to play with a different group. They will be good at making friends and be able to speak to adult coaches and volunteers. They should still want to move teams given that they will not be playing with their peers and that new playing challenges lie ahead.

#### ? ASK YOURSELF

- > Does the player know others within the new team?
- > Is the player resilient, confident, and able to fit in to different age group?
- > Do they have a level of maturity suitable to the team they are moving into?
- > Is the player comfortable leaving their peer group and players of the same age?
- > Are they able to demonstrate self-control when under pressure or a stressful situation?
- > What month were they born - what is the age gap between them and others?
- > Will they be able to cope with the challenges another age group brings, with new rules, new peer groups and a more challenging game?

AGE GRADE RUGBY CODES OF PRACTICE

ARE YOU IN?

#AgeGradeRugby

You've downloaded and read the Codes  
of Practice but **are you in?**

Visit [www.englandrugby.com](http://www.englandrugby.com), enter your club details and join all  
the other coaches in England who have said

“ I'M IN ”

