

Progression 4:

Goalkeeping

1. Fall on the ball

This seems so basic. Coach young goalkeepers to fall with their body between the ball and opponents when the ball is basically still or gently bouncing but nearly within reach of opponents. Don't reach down and pick it up. Fall on (next to) it! Picking it up results in many dropped balls and frustrating goals.

2. Hands and body behind the ball

In every possible instance, the goalkeeper must get two hands behind the flight of the ball – regardless of where around her body the ball is coming. Much of goalkeeper diving and movement is for the purpose of placing torso, hips or legs behind the flight of the ball as well. (There are countless goalkeeper instruction resources to teach how to execute these fundamental principles.)

3. Hips down first

Young players “dive” so it hurts ... so they stop diving. Starting with the goalkeeper on her knees, roll balls to each side, insisting that she get her hips to the ground before her shoulder – and never cushion herself with her hands or elbows! As their torso comes to earth, you may need to ask them to pretend their elbows are tied together, so hands are behind the ball and not cushioning their fall. For balls not requiring a fully-extended dive, the young body – starting from a low crouch – can come comfortably to earth as knees, hips, shoulders (with hands and eyes focused entirely on the ball).

4. Coming off your line

Once your youth goalie learns to come off his line and dive correctly at the feet of on-coming strikers he will have an enormous advantage over most young attackers. When do you “go?” “... as soon as the last defender is clearly beaten.” That's the concrete signal. Stay low, legs to the far post, modify a “baseball” slide, and come up a hero!

5. Simple distribution

Simplify the distribution choices available to your young goalkeeper: punts to the wide areas of midfield; throws to the flanks (wide); and rolled balls to a defender with no attackers nearby.

A word about restarts or set plays

In the youth game, goal kicks in your favor can create more danger than any attack by your opponent! If this is happening to you, require your goal kick takers to play the ball forward to the flanks, no matter how often the ball may be lost out of bounds.

Don't over-complicate free kicks or set piece restarts, and find the youngster capable of driving corner kicks hard into the penalty area. Your kick takers should understand their option to take a short corner and attack with a teammate down the goal line.

Keep it simple. Teach specific roles and responsibilities. Demonstrate how important each player is to the success of each restart.