

EXCLUSIVE

HOW TO GET YOUR **KIDS** — INTO — GOLF





BY LEON FAULKNER – a full PGA of Australia teaching professional and expert junior coach with more than 15 years experience. He is also the NSW Local Tour Director for U.S Kids Golf.

MAKE IT FUN & YOUR KIDS WILL LOVE GOLF

THE SINGLE most important factor required to develop a young hearts passion for golf is, FUN. There are many bridges a coach or parent can build that allow a young child to cross in order to cement a life-long interest before any technique building begins. Some of these include:

- Motivation
- Laughter
- Praise
- Encouragement
- Incentives
- Easier, more fun equipment

The angle of attack in this sometimes-difficult task is to allow your child to enjoy what the sport offers before teaching them the various techniques. One must remember, young minds cannot always compute that strange feelings = better form = better results. Furthermore, the natural form a young child demonstrates is often the very technique many of us coaches teach our older pupils. So in hindsight, under coaching can often lead to more success for a younger player.

Here are some the tips & tricks I've learned over many years of teaching children in a game-based style that help me guarantee my kids are screaming out to return to the range or the course wanting more and more golf. The BIG secret is.... the ones that need technique improvement; learn it without even being aware of it!



1. FULL SWING

BUCKET SMASH

Remember when you were young and smashing stuff was fun? Well, kids love hitting golf balls towards anything that breaks. Build a tower of cheap buckets; make it as large or small as you wish.

Play it in the back yard or on the practice fairway and encourage your player to smash down as many buckets as possible. Always play with them, they learn correct form just by watching, emphasise the practice swing before the shot. Keep the bucket distance measurable for your young player.

INSTRUCTION TIP

Make it a game rule that all players must stand with a solid stance (feet apart) and straight arms to win points for every bucket smashed down.



2. CHIPPING & PITCHING

CHIP N PITCH POINT'S CHALLENGE

This game teaches kids the difference between chipping and pitching.

Props required: small, medium and large hula hoops (ropes can also do the trick), witches hats to designate hitting area, safety cones and one large ladder.

Players are to score points in an allocated time period. Five points for every CHIP that stops inside a hula hoop and 5, 10 or 15 points for every PITCH that flies through the ladder.



INSTRUCTION TIP

In order for a player to score a point, each player must announce their shot before playing, i.e. CHIP or PITCH. Feet close together, ball position back for a CHIP. Feet slightly wider, ball position center for a PITCH. Award based on form and result.

A slightly different variation for this game can be played as a relay. Duplicate the set-up, two teams; players take two shots each, first team to reach 100 points wins.



3. SHORT GAME POINTS CHALLENGE

PARENT/CHILD SHOOTOUT

One of the best ways to encourage improved form in any shots is for you to play with them. Don't be worried if you're only learning, it will be comforting for your child to see that you too can hit shots that don't end up where you expected. This game can be used for putting, chipping, pitching or bunkers.

Props required: a club per player and two balls each (two different colours). Player one (you) plays the first shot. Player two (child) plays their shot from the same point. Player one repeats the shot for their second ball,



as does player two. One point is scored for the closest ball. If both balls finish closer than the opposing player's balls, two points are scored including a bonus point, totaling three points. One point is added for a chip-in, pitch-in or a holed putt. Each player is trying to avoid the chance of giving the other player the bonus point. Play first to 11 and winner chooses next position. ▶

INSTRUCTION TIP

Incorporate all shots, putting, chipping, and pitching into a single game. When performed in quick succession, your child will learn how the set-up and form varies between the shots. They're also learning how to tally up their score.



4. PUTTING

TUNNEL PUTTING

Kids love seeing the ball disappear and reappear. Head down to your local hardware store and buy various widths and lengths of PVC piping. You can easily create a mini golf set-up at home using coffee mugs as golf holes and other props to create bridges and various

obstacles. You'd be surprised how much useful golf props can be found at Bunnings!

U.S. Kids Golf Australia also offers a great product called MyMiniGolf. It's a full nine hole indoor set-up complete with loops and bridges that guarantee fun.

INSTRUCTION TIP

Teaching your child basic putting form is a great start. Keep it simple and start with just one tip, for example, both thumbs point down the grip or "tick-tock" like the clock.

Tunnel putting is fun and your child will learn the importance of the putter face angle. Teaching distance control can be as easy as a

piece of string across the hallway. Nearest to the string wins.

Always be prepared for your child to ignore what you tell them, if this happens, give them some incentive to listen to you. Always allow them to do it their way as well as yours. They'll soon learn which produces better results. ▶





5. SAND

FUN IN THE BUNKER

Bunker play is typically considered a more advanced shot. Some keep the kids out till they're more competent and some let them in. I believe there's merit in both. Given all the great times at the beach, nearly every child has a great association with sand. Bunker play can be used as an incentive if they achieve success in other shots. For example, chip 3 out of 5 balls into that

circle, then you can play off sand. Keeping in mind the learning process is non-productive if it's not FUN and kids have FUN in the sand, I'd advise you let them in and allow them to feel the difference between sand and grass.

Players are to score points in an allocated time period. Five points for every CHIP that stops inside a hula hoop and 5, 10 or 15 points for every PITCH that flies through the ladder.

INSTRUCTION TIP

Avoid telling them they must use sand wedge. Instead, ask them what club do they believe should be used. Even encourage them to try 9, 7 and 5 irons. This is one way a child will learn the role of loft on a clubhead. Show them how you "open" your blade for higher shots.

I've found a lot of success teaching

children by asking them the question, rather than telling them the answer. When there's level communication, children also tend to listen.

Use the same tips as in other full swing shots, "solid (wide) stance", "arms straight for power". In the end, sand swings are regular swings. Avoid confusion and allow them to simply have FUN splashing sand. ♦



6. GROUP GAMES MAXIMISE ENJOYMENT

GROUP RELAY

Most kids love a relay race or format of learning that results in victory. When you have 2 or more kids, you can easily develop a relay course that includes as few or as many shots as you like.



INSTRUCTION TIP

Set up duplicate targets, for example small, medium and large hula hoops 5, 15, 25 meters apart or as you wish, according to the space you have. Each player will have his or her own separate hoops. The game is finished when the first player chips/pitches a ball inside each hoop.

You can also incorporate a theory component. For example, when a player completes all hoops, the next task is to list down five different shots played in golf, plus, five different components to a golf club.



7. EQUIPMENT

The clubs your child uses when first learning golf can catapult their interest for more golf, and, they can easily extinguish any hope of bringing them back. I've already mentioned the single most important factor when introducing your child to golf is, FUN. As equally important is the length, weight and hitting space of the club your child is using. If they cannot generate clubhead speed because it's too heavy, they'll have no chance of holding positions in their swing required to

elevate the ball with some level of consistency.

I can't stress enough the importance of taking time before purchasing your child's golf clubs. Seek the advice of a junior coach. Fitting kids for golf clubs is not like fitting them for clothes. For optimal swing development, a child should grow out of their clubs, not, into them. Yes, it will mean they'll go through a number of sets, however, golf is a game for life! Studies have shown that a large number of juniors develop their swings using faulty or incorrectly fitted equipment that lead to lifelong swing flaws.

INSTRUCTION TIP

Your child's driver length should be two-thirds of their overall height. That's the mid-point between belly button and sternum.

There are much more products on the market these days than ever before. U.S. Kids Golf has the most thorough club fitting system than any other on the market. They offer nine sizes and fit based on height, not, age. Their research revealed children grow on average of three inches every year. Therefore, for a young swing to continue developing and producing

solid golf, a child's clubs need to progress in length and weight as a child's height and strength increases.

The easier you can make golf for your learning child, the better.

The Yard club is designed by U.S. Kids Golf and offers a super-lightweight, oversized aluminum clubhead and molded training grip that promotes proper hand position. It comes standard with soft balls for the back yard and given the aluminum clubhead, it also allows use with real golf balls.



8. MAKE THEM FEEL SPECIAL AND LOOKING LIKE YOU WHEN GOING TO GOLF

Golf has wonderful tradition and teaches kids life skills. The opportunity to dress well sets golf apart from many other sports. Today's junior golfer doesn't just benefit from better equipment, kids golf apparel is growing and companies are finding a balance between the traditional attire and keeping kids looking and feeling COOL.



The dress-up before you leave for the practice range or the course helps keep your child motivated and interested. They also connect better with other junior golfers that share the same attire.

A child developing an interest in their appearance is a life-long attribute. I remove my cap whenever I walk into a building out of sheer habit from growing up in a golf club environment!

GARB is a junior golf apparel brand that's new to the Australian market. It's hit the nail right on the head achieving a great balance between club dress regulations and a wide range of stylish, comfortable and "cool" junior golf clothing.



9. USING MODERN OPPORTUNITIES

SIMULATOR GOLF

What child doesn't like a video screen? Simulator golf is increasing in demand in Australia and achieves success stories the word over. Mainly targeted for adults, it just so happens to be a great motivator for your child's golfing passion. They still learn all the shots played in golf, plus, simulator golf

provides you with an excellent opportunity to force them to WATCH your form as you progress through various shots.

Copying is a very effective way kids learn golfs techniques. I've noticed many times a younger sibling progresses faster as a result of watching their older brother or sister from a young age.



10. ENCOURAGING THEIR INTEREST

Bringing your child down to the range and teaching them how to grip and swing is the risky approach to encouraging their interest. Here's a few tips that's guaranteed to create FUN and enjoyment leading to interest:

- Riding in a golf cart
- Visit Putt Putt golf or a Par 3 facility
- Look for a U.S. Kids Golf - Family Course
- Develop an awards system to stimulate interest. For example, award a sticker for each time they listen & execute, regardless of the end result!
- Watch a movie, such as The Short Game
- Golf finda-words build their knowledge and are FUN when completed as a team

LEON'S BEST TIPS TO KEEP YOUR CHILD IN GOLF

- Keep it FUN
- Think long term
- Under-coach
- Help them learn about the sport, not always how to play it
- Be a team
- Be patient
- Provide the example you would like them to demonstrate
- Play the course
- Keep them a true student athlete participating in other sports and activities
- If you think they're ready, introduce them to FUN & friendly competition with other kids their own age and sex
- Finally, look for an instructor that promotes junior golf and allow them to be part of the team

LEON FAULKNER

is a full member of the PGA of Australia and has been consistently teaching children for more than 15 years.

Based at Pittwater Golf Centre, Leon is the NSW Local Tour Director for U.S. Kids Golf and runs tournaments for children 5-14yrs all over NSW.

Leon has received Honorable Mention accolades in 2013 and 2014 for the U.S. Kids Golf Top 50 Kids Teacher Award. This award attracts applications from more than 1000 junior coaches from all over the world every year. These accolades highlight Leon's commitment and dedication to teaching golf to children within the community.



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