



***The FA's Best Practice Guidance note for:  
Adults playing alongside children whilst 'coaching' football***

**[The FA Handbook, Season 2016 -2017, Rules and Regulations of The Association.](#)**

The Standard Code of Rules for Youth Competitions, Qualification of players 8(C) (page 502) shows a table which details the recently revised age bandings and formats that children are permitted to play within. A two year age banding is in place for children and young people aged 6 through to 14 years old as of the 31<sup>st</sup> of August on the relevant playing season. There is a broader 3 year age banding for young people aged 15 and young people aged 16 plus can choose to continue within the youth structure playing U17/U18 competition or progress into 'Open Age' football.

**N.B.** for disability football age bands may be varied at the discretion of the Association.

The FA rules for children and young people under 16 prescribe a two – three year age banding in relation to playing a recognised match as this is in the best interests of child development within a football context. This provides parameters which allow children to develop alongside their peers who are of a similar physical development. Whilst it is acknowledged that there will be varying levels of development within any one age group this ruling prevents children being placed in potentially dangerous settings playing football with and against much larger children in matches.

The FA strongly advises against adults playing within youth football settings (Those where the child is under 16) for similar reasons to those as detailed above. The disproportionate skill level and physical size presents the potential opportunity for injury to the child/young person involved.

It is The FA's experience that adults playing games within youth football in either training settings or so named '*friendly matches*' (often historically referred to as '*lads v Dads*' games) can result in injury. It should be noted that the injury of a player in such circumstances has in the past resulted in legal action being taken by the injured party against the offending player/adult and may fall outside the limitations of the clubs insurance.

Whilst coaches may deem themselves to be 'aware' and skilful enough to avoid contact the risks of injury remain high. With the best of intentions; enthusiasm and effort on behalf of either party can and does result in physical contact. FA Learning coaching courses make it very clear that coaches are not to join in games when working with youth teams. Indeed such activity would be deemed in conflict with the Respect Code of Conduct for Coaches and leaves the coach open to potential claims against them.