



TACKLE CURRICULUM



SECTION 1

WHY/PURPOSE

The Tackle Curriculum has been developed to provide coaches with the knowledge and resources they need to teach tackling safely and effectively. It helps coaches enhance player safety, improve skill development, create a positive learning environment, and ensure consistent coaching practices in all coaching situations.

- » **Enhancing Player Safety:** Ensure that players learn safe and effective tackling techniques. Proper form and safety protocols are crucial in minimising the risk of injuries and creating a safer playing environment.
- » **Improving Skill Development:** Provide coaches with appropriate introductory tackle skills activities for junior players that build a solid foundation, followed by progressive variations that ensure they become proficient and confident as they grow as footballers.
- » **Standardising Coaching Practices:** Providing a consistent set of guidelines and techniques for coaches to follow ensures that all players, regardless of their team or coach, receive the same high-quality instruction.
- » **Promoting a Positive Learning Environment:** Implementing the Tackle Curriculum fosters a positive and supportive environment where players feel safe to learn and practice tackling. Such an environment is essential for young players' development and enjoyment of the game, as it encourages them to take risks, learn from mistakes, and grow as footballers.

SECTION 2

WHAT IS SKILLED TACKLING

Skilled tackling is about making smart decisions, timing, and adjusting your technique under pressure. A good tackler can read the ball carrier's movements and make tackles at just the right moment, all while following the rules of the game. It requires strength, mental toughness, and the ability to change your technique depending on the situation. Whether tackling from behind, facing an opponent head-on, or dealing with different spaces and types of opponents, a skilled tackler knows how to adapt and apply pressure effectively.



[Click here](#) to play the AFL's 2024 Safe Tackling examples video.

SECTION 3

COACHING THE FUNDAMENTALS OF TACKLING

Coaching the fundamentals of tackling from an early stage of a player's development is crucial for developing the ability to adapt under pressure and ensuring tackles are executed effectively and safely.

These fundamentals include:

- » Adopting a low and balanced body position
- » Driving with the legs
- » Securely wrapping the arms around the opponent's body
- » Firmly holding on to the opponent
- » Keeping the head in a safe position and eyes on the ball carrier

We need to ensure players understand how to avoid dangerous actions that could lead to serious injury. Whilst we prioritize safety, it is crucial to recognise that players will develop their own unique techniques to effectively execute tackles in various situations and depending on the size and shape of the opponent.

Given the importance of tackling safely, we should gradually increase the level of contact in training sessions, starting with controlled non-competitive situations, and allowing players sufficient time to practice their technique before engaging in full-contact scenarios. We can add variability by providing opportunities to practice tackling different opponents and executing tackles in various game situations.



SECTION 4

TACKLE TECHNIQUE

To begin teaching tackling technique, we are going to break tackling into two types:

INSIDE TACKLE

Where the tackler is close to the ball carrier.

- » Get lower than the opponent, stay low as you drive through the tackle.
- » Aim to make body-on-body-contact - chest on chest and shoulder on shoulder, across the front to pin down the opponent's arms, at the elbow joint.
- » Approach with your head tucked in to the side out of the way of contact, chin to back.



COACHING CUES - INSIDE TACKLE

- » GET LOW STAY LOW
- » BODY ON BODY
- » CHIN TO BACK



OUTSIDE TACKLE

Tackler has to run to close space.

- » On approach, decelerate by getting low early and using short quick steps. This will allow you to get your feet close, react and change direction in response to opposition movement, and avoid getting 'stepped'.
- » "Corral" or "channel" as this will dictate and limit the direction the ball carrier can go. Position yourself slightly on one side, and not to over-commit, forcing the opposition out towards the boundary, and then aim for their inside shoulder.
- » Once you have engaged the ball carrier, stick the tackle! Have body on body, pull and lock in, so there is no "daylight" between you and your opponent.



COACHING CUES - OUTSIDE TACKLE

- » PREPARATION FOOTWORK: Get low, short quick steps
- » CORRAL: Inside Shoulder
- » CHIN TO BACK: Hit & Stick, No daylight



TACKLE COACHING TIPS

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

- » Players having plenty of opportunities to make tackles & BE tackled.
- » Players trying different ways to tackle depending on the direction and speed of the ball carrier (use terminology of inside and outside tackles)
- » Players using tackling to dispossess the ball carrier.

WHAT TO ASK

- » What did you do that helped you make a good tackle?
- » How can you guess where the player with the ball is going to go so you can get close enough to tackle them?
- » How can you change the way you tackle if you're coming from a different side or direction?

SECTION 5

AGE SPECIFIC TACKLE RULES

In alignment with the AFL 'Play Your Way' Junior Football Rules, the specific Junior rules within this module are based on research and best practice, enabling participants of junior football competitions to develop their skills while experiencing activities relevant to their age, progression, physical development, and maturation level.

NO TACKLING

UNDER 8'S

- No Tackling or holding of an opponent
- No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands
- No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player
- No shepherding

WRAP TACKLE INTRODUCED

UNDER 9'S

- Modified tackling
- Holding of an opponent
- No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands
- No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player
- No shepherding

WRAP TACKLE

UNDER 10'S

- Modified tackling
- Holding of an opponent
- No smothering, stealing the ball or knocking the ball from an opponent's hands
- No pushing (fending off), bumping or barging another player
- No shepherding

FULL TACKLING APPLIED

UNDER 11'S & ABOVE

- Stealing the ball
- Fending off, smothering, or barging
- Full tackling and bumping

SECTION 6

INTRODUCING TACKLING INTO YOUR TRAINING PROGRAM

Training should include gradually increasing the level of contact in training sessions, starting with controlled, non-competitive situations, and allowing players sufficient time to practice their technique before engaging in full-contact scenarios. When introducing tackle skill activities into your training program, follow skill acquisition principles such as:

- » **Setting the appropriate challenge point:** Ensure the introduction of tackle training is appropriate for the age and stage of development of your players.
- » **Incorporating training variability:** Provide opportunities for players to practice tackling in different ways - inside/outside tackles, tackling a taller/smaller opponent etc.
- » **Players get plenty of repetitions practicing tackle craft:** Just like kicking, marking or ground balls, players need repetitions practicing tackling to learn how to execute correctly.
- » **Simulating game situations in training:** Provide players with opportunities to practice their tackling craft at training in game like situations. The closer training represents the demands of the game will support the transfer of learning from training to game.



Specific challenges

It's important to help players with any specific challenges they face when learning how to tackle effectively and safely. One of the toughest parts of tackling is getting the timing right and knowing when to go for the tackle, especially when the game is fast and players are moving quickly. You can help players improve by creating activities that mimic game-like situations where things are congested, and the ball is moving at different speeds.

To make sure the activities match the players' skill level, start simple and increase the difficulty over time. For example, you can begin with a 3 vs 3 activity and then make it harder by adding more players, like moving to 5 vs 5. You can also change the activity by adjusting the size of the practice area (making the grid smaller or bigger), or by changing the goal of the activity, like focusing on keeping possession of the ball instead of scoring. Adding a time limit to move the ball from one end to the other can also speed up the game and make it more challenging.

EXAMPLE TRAINING SESSION STRUCTURE

	DURATION	FOCUS	
PRE-GAME	Up to 15min	Fun, Play & Exploration (No coaching!)	▶ Unstructured play is important for skill Acquisition, particularly with regards to developing creativity
QUARTER 1	10min	Energizer (Warm-Up)	▶ The aim is to have a fun warm-up with an emphasis on fundamental movements
QUARTER 2	10min	Fundamental Skills (High Repetition)	▶ The aim is to practice the fundamentals skills of football with lots of repetition
	10min	Decision Making Task	
QUARTER 3	15min	Team Task	▶ Opportunity to practice applying the fundamental skills to game situations when working as a team
QUARTER 4	10min	Game	▶ Opportunity to play the game, whilst rules are applied to emphasise specific skills

TOTAL DURATION  70 MINUTES

This training session structure is used within the Junior Coaching Curriculum and Youth Coaching Curriculum resources. If you need support to plan your own training sessions, [check out the YCC here](#).

Tackle craft activities can be incorporated into a single training activity or feature multiple times throughout every session. As you plan your training sessions, think about what you'd like to achieve from the session (what's your learning focus?) ensuring that it's fun and engaging and allows your players lots of chances to practice their tackling skills in different game situations.



SECTION 7

AGE-APPROPRIATE TACKLE ACTIVITIES

UNDER 8'S

Tackling is prohibited at U8 level

Evasion and Invasion games are suitable for young players and help them develop essential skills for learning how to tackle. These activities provide opportunities for players to experience and learn to chase or evade others, compete to gain possession of the ball and can replicate match scenarios.

Example activities (click to view):

- » [Ruckman's treasure](#)
- » [Tags and Tails](#)
- » [Simon Says](#)

UNDER 9'S

Wrap tackle is permitted

1 v 1 walk through and stationary tackle. Progression: 3m apart, 1 ball between 2, handball feed from Tackler to Ball Carrier and follow with wrap tackle.

- » Variations - Left, Right, Front, Back. Tackler feeds the ball from different starting positions to practice tackling on both sides of their body & from in front or behind.
- » Increase Challenge point: The ball can be fed as a ground ball or in the air - replicate what could happen in a game.
- » Evasion and Invasion games are age-appropriate and develop functional skills that are required for establishing tackling skills for U9 players.
- » Evasion and Invasion games provide opportunities for players to experience and learn to chase or evade others, compete to gain possession of the ball and can replicate match scenarios.

Example activities:

- » [Ruckman's treasure](#)
- » [Tags and Tails](#)

With U9 being the first-year level permitting a modified tackle, it's important to introduce body contact activities into training to prepare your players.

Example activities that introduce body contact:

- » [Super Hug](#)
- » [Simon Says](#) - progression from U8s is to include a wrap tackle if the opposing player gains possession of the ball first. Try and maintain the tackle for 3 seconds.

UNDER 10'S

When players are proficient at performing a stationary wrap tackle or wrap tackle at walk through pace, increase the speed of their approach. To make it more challenging, have the tackler start the activity from different positions. Additionally, the ball can be fed as a ground ball or in the air. This adds change of direction, speed, and replicates what could happen in a game. During the activity, emphasize performing a wrap tackle while staying on their feet.

Coaching tip: While U10s is the second-year level permitting a modified tackle, it's important to reinforce basic body contact activities into training to prepare your new and existing players.

Wrap Tackle

» 1 v 1 walk through and stationary tackle. Progression: 3m apart, 1 ball between 2, Handball feed from Tackler to Ball Carrier and follow with wrap tackle.

Variations - Left, Right, Front, Back. Tackler feeds the ball from different starting positions to practice tackling on both sides of their body & from in front or behind.

Increase Challenge Point: The ball can be fed as a Ground Ball or in the air - replicate what could happen in a game.

- » Farmer & Sheep (also known as Tackle Gates)
- » Quick Release

Evasion and Invasion games are age-appropriate and develop functional skills that are required for establishing tackling skills for U10 players. Evasion and Invasion games provide opportunities for players to experience and learn to chase or evade others, compete to gain possession of the ball and can replicate match scenarios.

Example activities:

- » [Tags and Tails](#)
- » [Super Hug](#)
- » [Simon Says](#) - progression from U9s is to include a wrap tackle if the opposing player gains possession of the ball first. Player who wins possessions is to try and drive their legs to their target cone (1m behind tackler) while the Tackler is apply a wrap tackle. Both must aim to keep their feet.



UNDER 11'S +

U11 and above age groups are permitted to engage in full tackling in games.

It's imperative players are given the opportunity to practice the tackling fundamentals at training like any other skill such as kicking, groundballs, marking and handballing. As players establish a strong foundation of tackling skills, progressively increase the intensity and challenge point of the activities that reflects the demands of the game at the level they play.



Tackle Pairs

1 v 1 in pairs, 4m apart. Tackler feeds a ground ball to Ball Carrier, Ball Carrier gathers, Tackler comes forward to lay tackle.

- » Variation: Vary starting positions! Feed the ball from Left, Right, Front and Back.
- » Variation 2: 2 v 1, Tackler 4m away. Tackler feeds a ground ball to Ball Carrier, Ball Carrier gathers and Hand Balls to Teammate while being tackled.

Tackle Grid

2 v 1 in grids 4m x 4m. 2 teammates are to maintain possession of the ball against one opponent within a small grid. Opponent is to try and tackle, corral and pressure to cause a turnover.

- » Variation: Handball grids - vary the numbers (3v2, 4v2, 5v3) and the size of the grids. Incorporate a Ground Ball Gather after each Handball Receive to allow the attacking players to practice ground ball technique under pressure and the defensive players the opportunity to apply defensive pressure and tackle skills against players picking up the ball.

Tackle Gates (also referred to as Farmer & Sheep)

5m x 5m square. 2 teams. One attacking & one defending. On coaches call, they feed the ball to an attacker who tries to run with the ball through the opposing 'gate' while the defender aims to corral and tackle them before their opponent gets there.

- » Variation: To increase the challenge point, incorporate 2 v 2 into the activity. The attacking players may choose to handball to each other to get through their gates, while the defenders have to work together to stop them.

Circle drill

8-10 players in a 10-15m circle. Ball starts in the middle. Each player is given a number. Activity begins with coach calling two numbers, the first player called is to gather the ground ball and handball to the coach, while the second player is the tackler, trying to defend.

- » Variation: To increase the challenge point, the coach can feed the ball into the middle so the ball is moving rather than stationary. Additionally, the coach can feed the ball to any position if they wish to make it harder/easier for the players competing.

SCAN THE QR CODE OR [CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE RANGE OF TACKLE ACTIVITIES](#)



For any questions regarding coaching tackling, please contact us at coaching@afl.com.au

