



# FACILITATION GUIDE

How soccer can be a safe and peaceful space,  
where we learn by playing, in community.



I trust myself  
I trust my teammates  
I trust my facilitators

I thank my opponent,  
because they make me better,  
and I return that gift  
by giving my all

Win, lose, or draw,  
I keep clear in my mind,  
and in my heart,  
that I play because I love to play



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# INFINITE SOCCER (FUT INFINITO)

Over the years of playing, coaching teams, and following professional soccer, we have nurtured a more integral understanding of soccer and sports in general, beyond its current perception: a space of separation, polarization, and prescribed development that prioritizes results over people.

When we see fans fighting in the stands, when parents insult the coach or the referee, when players attack each other, we see soccer as a space of division and polarization, where competition gets understood as war, and victory reigns at all costs, where "being first isn't the most important thing, it's the only thing..." Where kicking the opponent, a handball on the goal line (or to score one), and deceiving the referee get celebrated. Where I see the other as my enemy by default.

When coaches yell at four-year-old kids to do things they haven't been taught, or things they've been taught but still don't know how to do well, and feel the need to shout during the game to appear like good coaches, we see a script about how kids' development should look, and this script relies on rewards and punishments. We see that those who don't follow this script get marginalized; that only a few win, while others fall behind. We notice that players get perceived, recognized, and valued only as long as they follow orders and execute, as long as they score more goals than the other team, in a game where they don't participate in their own evolution, don't understand why they do what they do in the game, and don't develop the skills to play better as they wish, but instead become dependent on instructions to operate on the field.

There are exceptions to this reality, but these stories are dominant and we could go along with their inertia unless we take a stand. We don't intend to judge them as bad or say that soccer in its current form shouldn't exist; we simply don't want to collaborate with or reproduce those ways of being and doing. Soccer reflects culture; it mirrors how we live off the field and what we value off the field. And it receives a lot of attention and energy investment. It's one of the things that draws the most attention in the world, existing as a massive cultural phenomenon.

We don't value what gets treasured in current culture. We treasure love, truth, unity, joy, play, curiosity, community, compassion, excellence, and integrity. We enjoy playing soccer, and that's why we've learned ways to create a safe space where people can play in peace and evolve through play.

Other ways of understanding soccer started reaching us through the idea of finite and infinite games<sup>1</sup>. While the former get played as competitions with defined rules and a clear end, where there are winners and losers, infinite games propose a new way of seeing life, where there's no "me against others," but a larger game where the purpose lies in increasing the quality of play for everyone, and victory gets associated to the continuity of the game, not to its end.

Imagine soccer where competition transforms into collaboration, where the true victory doesn't belong only to a few at the end of the match, but to all who participate in the eternal flow of the game. A game where the passion for playing surpasses the obsession with winning, where boundaries expand, and the game itself becomes the true reward.



In Infinite Soccer (IS), we play with structures so that everyone can keep playing, play well, and play in peace. We value the process, and this allows creativity, collaboration, and solidarity to flourish. Continuous learning, adaptability, and connection with others matter more than momentary victories. The field becomes a canvas where every touch of the ball acts as a note in the symphony of the game, and every player becomes an artist contributing to this collective masterpiece, playing with the joy of the infinite.

Another source of inspiration for understanding Infinite Soccer comes from Fred O. Donaldson, who talks about how we can approach life and relationships as the Game of Winning (won) or the Game of Unity (one)<sup>2</sup>. The Game of Winning relies on a competitive and individualistic mindset where success gets measured by personal achievements, recognition, and surpassing others. In this game, one person's achievements get perceived as a threat to others, fostering an environment of comparison, rivalry, and, at times, isolation.

In the Game of Unity, success doesn't get defined by personal victories, but by collective well-being, cooperation, and the joy of shared experiences. It emphasizes understanding that individual fulfillment remains intimately linked to the

well-being of others. Relationships build on mutual respect, empathy, and genuine appreciation for each person's uniqueness, fostering a culture of inclusion. The focus doesn't lie solely on personal achievements but on the collective journey of growth, learning, and shared success.

Historically immersed in the paradigm of the Game of Winning, soccer creates intense competitive dynamics and fosters heightened rivalries at the expense of collaboration and camaraderie within the team. In Infinite Soccer, we want to experience soccer as a space that reflects the values of the Game of Unity. We shift the perception of success from individual achievements to collective well-being, recognizing that true greatness resides in the quality of relationships built, effective collaboration, and the positive impact on the soccer community and beyond.

Another bridge that has inspired Infinite Soccer takes us from reacting to creating. Reactivity represents the conditioned response, the habitual echo of past wounds and fears resonating within us. It's the tapestry woven with the threads of our attachments, desires, and aversions. When we react, we often dance to the rhythm of old patterns, responding to the world through the prism of past experiences instead of facing each moment with fresh eyes.

Creativity, on the other hand, acts as the song of the soul, the improvised dance of the present moment. It's the expression of the divine spark within us, free from the weight of yesterdays. Creativity springs from the well of our being, a manifestation of the infinite possibilities that arise when we surrender to the flow of life.

Reactivity stems from the mind's attempts to understand and control, fueled by the ego's desire for security and predictability. It tightens its grip on what it knows, resisting the unknown and unfamiliar. Creativity, however, flourishes in the fertile soil of surrender. It emerges when we release our attachments to outcomes, allowing the muse of inspiration to guide us.

Reactivity speaks the language of separation, dividing the world into 'me' and 'other.' It often arises from a sense of scarcity and the fear of losing what we value. Creativity, in contrast, expresses unity. It springs from recognizing that we all act as threads in the same cosmic tapestry, interwoven and connected in ways that transcend our individual stories.

Moving from reactivity to creativity represents a sacred journey, a pilgrimage to the depths of our own being. It requires the courage to face the shadows lurking in the corners of our consciousness, to sit with discomfort, and to embrace the vulnerability of the unknown. In this alchemical process, the lead of reactivity transforms into the gold of creativity, and we become artisans of our own liberation.

We wrote this guide to accompany you if you resonate with what we value in IS and want to translate it into the daily life of your sports community, aiming to transcend outdated forms of sports and delve into the mysterious adventure of Playing in Peace and Evolving through Play, without prescriptions.

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<sup>1</sup> Carse, J. (1986). *Finite and Infinite Games*. Free Press.

<sup>2</sup> Donaldson, O.F. (2017). *Playing For Real: Replaying The Game of Life*. Donaldson.



# PHILOSOPHY OF THE MODEL

## Safe Space

To learn effectively and interact harmoniously, we need a space where we can think, feel, and express ourselves without fear of censorship or violence from our peers or the adults accompanying us. In the common context of soccer, we've normalized violence justified as contributing to soccer development, socializing children and young people, or being "part of the sport." For example, from coaches to players, we still see physical punishments, like running laps or doing push-ups if you lose a game or don't follow instructions. We also see verbal and psychological violence through insults, mockery, and ridicule.

Among peers, we also observe the normalization of attitudes and behaviors that reduce safety in the space. Hits, heavy jokes, inappropriate touching, nicknames, and other forms of interaction presented as common ways of socializing and "fun" (especially for the aggressors).

In Infinite Soccer, there's no room for violence of any kind. We seek and model other ways of interacting that promote people's well-being, so their personal and sports experience becomes uplifting rather than another traumatic experience that reduces their joy for the sport and their ability to express themselves, relate, and live their lives fully.

To articulate these safe spaces, beyond having someone dictate what's allowed and what's not, we invite participants to a series of initial agreements aimed at creating a context conducive to well-being and safety. We also have recurring practices (which we'll elaborate on later) so people can continue making decisions about how to keep the experience fun and enjoyable

for everyone. We equip IS facilitators with the right tools to know what to do when these agreements break and to compassionately accompany problematic behaviors, eventually transforming them if the person wishes to remain part of the community.

## Community

In Infinite Soccer, we see ourselves not as teams but as communities. The common unity that binds us translates into Playing in Peace and Evolving through Play. Before players, there are people, and we care for people more than processes and results. We want everyone participating in these spaces—players, families, coaches, and staff—to experience belonging to a place where they receive love and support simply for existing, without sacrificing their authenticity and expression.

Our work also extends to the parents of our players because, in Infinite Soccer, the most important thing lies in learning to coexist better, rather than becoming a good soccer player. We open spaces for parents to continue learning how to relate in kind, effective, and compassionate ways with themselves and their children. This proves crucial in our framework.

Similarly, what we learn in training and on the field during games, we want to extend beyond those confines and permeate the community space of the kids.



## Play Based Evolution

A deeply rooted belief within soccer culture suggests that people only learn and develop through rewards and punishments. While there's partial truth in this understanding—because pain and pleasure (present or future) move us—we rarely question the effects of these dynamics. When performing any activity to avoid punishment or anticipate a reward, a future event in both cases, our attention abandons the present moment and the enjoyment of the activity itself. This becomes problematic because if I do something primarily for a future reward, I'll increasingly need a bigger reward to motivate me to do it, known as extrinsic motivation. Rewards and punishments in soccer generate an external focus, where children seek approval or fear rejection instead of enjoying and learning for the pure pleasure of play. This extinguishes their intrinsic motivation, the spark that drives creativity, authentic effort, and the desire to improve on their own. When soccer relies on rigid external rules, curiosity and enjoyment dilute, turning something naturally exciting into a chore.

Is there a force as powerful as the desire to avoid pain or obtain a future reward that ignites people's motivation?

In Infinite Soccer, we've observed that such a force exists: the love and joy of playing. When we play, we engage positive emotions like joy and surprise, which act as "glue" for new knowledge. According to psychologist Peter Gray<sup>3</sup>, free play allows children (and adults) to experiment, explore, and solve problems in an environment free from fear of judgment, strengthening skills like creativity, decision-making, and collaboration. Additionally, from a neurological perspective, play stimulates the release of dopamine, a key chemical for motivation and memory formation.

By centering soccer evolution on play, we foster natural learning. Kids explore new strategies, experiment with movements, and discover solutions to problems in the moment, with less resistance to error. Instead of seeking a trophy (material or symbolic), their attention shifts to improving, collaborating, and enjoying the field. This not only facilitates the development of better soccer players but also more resilient, creative, and committed individuals to their own growth.

## Self-Direction

A crucial aspect of Infinite Soccer involves the people in our communities actively participating in their own evolution. This translates into players making their own decisions, on and off the field, to achieve the realities they desire. A player who understands the game and creates it through their decisions has an experience diametrically opposed to those who only execute based on external orders, regardless of the success of those executions. Similarly, a person, off the field, who understands their life and creates it through their own decisions has an experience diametrically opposed to those who only execute based on external orders, regardless of the success of those executions.

In the Laboratory format, IS adopts the Agile Cycle, a self-direction cycle created by Agile Learning Centers<sup>4</sup>, enabling the success of self-directed learners in their intentions through cycles of positive feedback. The Agile Cycle has four stages: Intention, Creation, Reflection, and Sharing. The kids choose what they want to do in each training session, what they want to improve, what they want to experiment with, how they want to have fun, etc. Facilitators support them, when needed, with feedback and also suggest games, exercises, and practices that can help them have the experience they desire and expose them to what they don't know. The kids carry out their intentions. Later, reflection spaces allow the kids to make sense of their experiences and envision their next steps. Finally, we share what we've learned in different formats and moments, usually in a friendly match.

We also know that context influences as much as the content of training sessions. Our community members also participate in deciding how it works best for us to operate, relate, and carry out our activities together. This practice closely links to popular and democratic education, where we collectively decide what we want to do and how we want to do it. To achieve this, we have some practices and tools, like the Change Up Meeting, which we'll explore later.

## Competition as an Act of Service

As you might suspect, Infinite Soccer isn't about soccer, at least not just soccer. Sports reflect the current values of our culture, and although they could potentially serve as an exercise in integrating and transcending the limits of human capacity, in practice, they've become another game of power over, not power with.

The word compete comes from the Latin *competere*, formed from the combination of two roots:

- *com-*, meaning "together" or "in common."
- *petere*, meaning "to seek," "to go towards," "to aspire," or "to strive for."

Originally, *competere* referred to "seeking together" or "striving for a common goal." Over time, its meaning distorted towards the idea of rivaling or measuring oneself against others to achieve a desired goal, especially in contexts of dispute or personal improvement.

It's common to hear phrases glorifying results, regardless of how victory gets achieved. "Winning isn't the most important thing; it's the only thing" by Vince Lombardi or "I didn't come to make friends; I came to win championships" by Mourinho. Carlos Bilardo, coach of Argentina's 1986 World Cup-winning team, told his players before the final: "We can win or lose the cup, but if you win the Fair Play award, I'll kill you." These phrases, of course, correspond to actions: FCB paying millions of euros to the vice-president of the referees' committee for benefits, Maradona scoring a handball goal that advanced him to a World Cup semifinal, Luis Suárez biting an opponent, Nery Pumpido cutting his own face claiming a projectile hit him from the stands to stop the game, countless dives faking non-existent fouls, etc. In short, winning at all costs.

Soccer, in its current practice, fosters an ethnocentric and tribal consciousness, where the story of "us" against "you" permeates all dimensions of the sports and extra-sports experience.

Infinite Soccer integrates and transcends that story, from its structure and practices, which we'll observe later. Here, rival doesn't mean enemy; we continue together even when in opposition. Giving my all to the game and doing my best helps you improve, and you giving your all to the game and doing your best helps me improve. Competition transforms into an act of service, where we all collaborate to evolve the sport.

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<sup>3</sup> Gray, P. (2013). *Free to learn*. Basic Books.

<sup>4</sup> [www.agilelearningcenters.org](http://www.agilelearningcenters.org)





# FACILITATION IN INFINITE SOCCER

Within this transition of games, it's crucial that those who hold the spaces of play and training also embody (become) the values we treasure. This means we must become what we wish to see in our community.

Agile Learning Centers, from which Infinite Soccer draws great inspiration, write in their Starter Kit about facilitation:

*"The decision not to call ourselves teachers is deliberate; although we sometimes give direct instructions, facilitation gets done with a group, not to it. The root of the word facilitator is «facilis,» which in Latin means «easy»; a facilitator acts as someone who provides discreet assistance, guidance, or supervision that makes it easier for students to self-direct their learning. Facilitating represents the daily practice of being reflective, adaptable, empathetic, and honest. It's helping children articulate the concepts and feelings they're already grappling with: an explanation of the water cycle because it's raining, or offering the word «overwhelmed» to a kid having a tough day and struggling with the urge to hit someone. Facilitating means playing with the tools of culture and the question «why?» Facilitating means playing tag in the hallway. Facilitating means developing the ability to distinguish between a cry of joy and a cry of distress from several rooms away; it's giving space to kids to tackle difficult tasks or hold emotional conversations with your support, while resisting the urge to intervene and do it for them. Facilitating gets messy. Facilitating represents structured reflection externalized and abrupt unstructured revelation... If all that seems like a lot, don't worry. The practice of facilitating is just that: a practice."*

## Facilitators and Authority

In Infinite Soccer, as in other Agile Learning spaces, we have a mantra: "Maximum support, minimum interference."

When hearing this, it's more common to associate interference with excessive presence, where the adult, consciously or unconsciously, ends up dictating and determining the experience of the children. However, interference can also occur through absence, where an adult, nominally responsible for guiding an experience, by not providing enough support, interferes.

This means two things: 1) No one knows what "maximum support, minimum interference" truly means, and it only gets discovered by listening and being present with the people and the conditions of the moment. 2) In Infinite Soccer, we don't fight the concept of authority, but we exclude default, unquestioned, and extractive authority. This means that when the circumstance warrants it, and based on the players' desires, circumstantial authority becomes welcome.

We cannot evolve beyond the linguistic container that holds our reality. The world exists as long as we name it. By healing the concept of authority, we can find a harmonious relationship with it, a relationship that invites embodying its original meaning: to increase, promote, and enhance evolution. And by doing so, we create a gradient to transition towards our freedom, as opposed to having a painful separation from the old paradigm.

Within our Infinite Soccer spaces, we seek for learners to know and live their complete autonomy and responsibility, understanding themselves as part of a collective. Individuals and the collective gain resilience when they develop skill in designing tools and processes that serve their intentions and context. Sometimes this means having external authority within the space, exerting influence over others due to their experience-based hierarchy.

For example, if someone wants to learn to defend better, control the ball, save penalties, etc., and decides they need a teacher to guide them, they'll create an interpersonal relationship of superiority-inferiority based on knowledge. External, rational, and non-inhibitory authority. In these cases,

teacher and student share the same intention. If the teacher helps the student progress, they'll feel satisfied; if the student doesn't progress, both will share a sense of incompleteness. When this experience ends, the learner returns to a context where they continue deciding what configuration best serves their evolution.

If, through our facilitation, authority gets incorporated from the conscious choice that this format of interpersonal hierarchy based on experience allows the best form and content for the learner's development, and not as a reaction to the notion of incapacity to create one's own order, regulation, or find inspiration to act, then we'll have taken a transcendent step towards true autonomy.

## Transforming Judgment into Curiosity

The Old Chinese Farmer:

*Once upon a time, an old Chinese farmer lived in a village. One day, his only horse, which he used to plow the fields, ran away. The neighbors came to console him and said:  
–What bad luck you have!*

*The farmer calmly replied:  
–Bad luck? Good luck? We'll see.*

*A few days later, the horse returned, but this time it brought a herd of wild horses. The neighbors, excited, exclaimed:  
–What good luck you have!*

*The farmer, again serene, replied:  
–Bad luck? Good luck? We'll see.*

*A few days later, the farmer's son tried to tame one of the wild horses and fell, breaking his leg. The neighbors, dismayed, said:  
–What bad luck you have!*

*The farmer, with the same calm, said:  
–Bad luck? Good luck? We'll see.*

*Shortly after, a group of soldiers arrived in the village recruiting young men for war. Seeing that the farmer's son had a broken leg, they left him alone. The neighbors said:  
–What good luck you have!*

*And the farmer, as always, replied:  
–Bad luck? Good luck? We'll see...*

Transforming judgment into curiosity means stopping believing that the world, other people "are" what I think they "are," and opening myself to them showing me "what they're being." The stories we tell ourselves internally about the world and people invite the world and people to inhabit those stories.

To discover and facilitate the unfolding of our players' potential, we need to suspend the stories of what we think they should "be" to listen to what potential wants to emerge from their nature as a person and athlete.

We invite you to think of it this way: imagine a conventional coach as a carpenter. Their job involves trying to mold each player according to a fixed idea, demanding that everyone fits into a rigid scheme, as if they were puzzle pieces. Now imagine a facilitator as a gardener, focusing on creating an environment where each player can develop their own strengths and talents, allowing the team to grow organically and uniquely. While the carpenter seeks control and immediate results, the gardener trusts in each player's potential and the collective process to achieve success.

Transforming judgment into curiosity means moving from "this is how it is" to "How is this? Why is this being this way? What do I think and how do I feel about it?"

## Looking with Generous Eyes

If the stories we tell ourselves about people invite them to inhabit those stories, if the facilitator thinks a player "is messy," "doesn't pay attention," "isn't a good forward," "doesn't run," we invite them to become what we think and reinforce that interpretation, creating a negative feedback loop.

A specific practice of transforming judgment into curiosity involves looking with generous eyes. This means instead of looking from prejudice, we look from potential. What's beautiful and good in this person or situation?

After asking this question, we don't need to answer immediately or force a response. Simply keep asking and let the answer emerge. This movement allows us to relate to the kids from a place of growth possibilities, not from the limitations of stories based on our own experiences and perspectives.

## Recognizing and Praising

An important practice in Infinite Soccer involves recognizing and praising. Our gaze, as facilitators, focuses on what already exists, to build from there, rather than looking at what's missing to solve the lack or problems. Although it may seem the same or very similar, this shift in perspective generates very different relationships and effects. For example, if there's an inexperienced child who, during training, makes recurring mistakes stopping the ball, instead of pointing out what obviously doesn't work, we can start by recognizing what's already there, for example, that even if they don't achieve the desired result, perhaps they position their body better each time, or that even if they haven't reached their goal, they keep trying. It matters a lot to name what's happening; praise and recognition, in this case, create a context conducive to development. This practice invites moving from a "problem-solving" paradigm to one of presence and appreciation. It's important not to praise things that aren't actually happening, as this could backfire.

Have you noticed that when we praise a player for something they do well, they usually want to do it more and better? Perhaps yes. However, you might also have noticed that some players tend to avoid doing things they don't do as well. This happens because making mistakes often leads to punishments, mockery, feelings of inferiority, comparison, etc. So, the person will want to do things for which they get rewarded, not those that represent a risk of failure. We can also see this resistance in exercises or experiences that players find uncomfortable; what comes easily and well, they tend to want to do, what doesn't, they avoid.

In IS, we praise processes, even if they don't yet produce the desired results. This appreciation for what's there leads people to want to try and find value in the doing, not just in what happens afterward.

There's always something to value in the present moment; we invite you to look for it.

## Helping to See

One of the desired effects of our facilitation involves creating contexts where people can make their own decisions and learn to make the best ones (whatever that means for that person).

Usually, in sports training spaces, the coach determines what needs doing, as well as how, when, and where, while the players execute the orders. We've already said that a facilitator has the responsibility to guide people in developing their abilities, and that often, players don't know what they don't know, and the facilitator's guidance becomes appropriate and necessary for realizing the players' intentions, but... how do we do this while fostering thinking, agency, and self-determination?

In IS, we believe that the more a person understands the game, the better they'll play and the more they'll enjoy it. Moving from an executive role to a creative one depends, in our case, on what we've called "helping to see."

Before detailing the process, it's worth mentioning that some people who join our communities genuinely don't care about improving; they just want to play. For this reason, we invite you to ask people who wants your feedback and who doesn't, and to ask this repeatedly during training, as the answer might change.

Now, "helping to see" basically involves moving from telling someone what to do and how to do it to asking them what they want to do, what options they have to do it, and which option works best in a given moment. Let's take a recent example: while writing this text, we recently celebrated our 2024 year-end with the Rancho Viejo Learning Community and decided to celebrate with a friendly match. Alex, a 9-year-old boy who plays as a forward, wanted to help his team score a goal. In several plays, he tried to pass the ball where the most people were concentrated, not noticing that his teammate Nahum stood alone on the other side of the field. I called him to chat and, after praising his attempts, asked if he'd noticed how many people were in the area where he directed his passes. He said no. I also asked if he'd noticed that Nahum wasn't marked, to which he also responded negatively. This dialogue led us to discuss what would happen if he lifted his head, received the ball differently, or passed to where fewer people were. At the end of the match, thanks to Alex, Nahum, and company, the blue team scored 4 goals.



This is how we help to see, so people don't depend on our gaze or instructions when making decisions, even as circumstances change. Learning to ask themselves, "What do I want and how can I achieve it best?" brings them closer to adapting and succeeding.

## Conflict, Emotions, Collaboration, Rewards, and Punishments

As Infinite Soccer facilitators, we want to model new ways of addressing conflicts when they arise, starting by understanding that conflicts, if integrated healthily, become a valuable force for evolution.

During our first summer camp, we had M. M's family warned us that this person "had behavioral issues." In some games, we saw how, in the face of conflict, M reacted by wanting to physically attack. During a match, something similar happened; the opposing team scored, and M experienced emotions that led him to want to hit the opponent. After stopping the unacceptable action, we focused on trying to understand what was happening with M. We knelt around him, meeting him at his level, and asked how he felt. He said he felt angry because the opponent had cheated. We asked how they'd cheated, and M couldn't answer. We kept talking, and M realized the opponent hadn't cheated, and that he actually felt sad because he perceived his team hadn't helped prevent the goal. This led to a conversation with his team about how to collaborate better. While saying no to violent reactions, it's very important to make space for people to feel and express their emotions. This way, we prevent the person from acting from their emotion and instead explore, name, and integrate it to act beyond it.

In the rest of this section, we share ways to address uncomfortable emotions when they arise (because they will); ways to address conflict and achieve cooperation without resorting to rewards and punishments, all taken from the book *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* by Adele Faber and Elaine Mazlish<sup>5</sup>.

Avoid:	Statements like these can provoke feelings like:
<b>Rejecting feelings:</b> "You're getting upset over nothing." "You don't really hate your friend."	"Don't tell me how I should feel!"
<b>Philosophizing:</b> "No one ever said life was fair." "Sometimes that's just how things happen."	"You'll never understand."
<b>Advice:</b> "You shouldn't let something like this get you down." "Just don't take it so seriously, don't worry."	"Don't tell me what to do."
<b>Questions:</b> "Why do you think she did something like that?" "What are you going to do about it?"	"Your questions are annoying."
<b>Defending the other person:</b> "Well, I can understand their point of view." "They had a good reason to feel that way after what you did."	"You're on everyone's side except mine!"
<b>Pity:</b> "Oh, poor you!" "You must feel so bad and ashamed, how terrible!"	"I'm a loser."
<b>Amateur psychoanalysis:</b> "You probably wanted this to happen on some level."	"This is the last time I tell you anything!"



<sup>5</sup> Faber, A. y Mazlish E. (2004). *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk*. Collins Living.

**Instead, we propose:**

Resource:	Examples:
Putting feelings into words	"It sounds like you're not interested in playing with dinosaurs." "It sounds like you feel left out."
Acknowledging the feeling with a word	"Hmmm." "Okay." "I see."
Accepting feelings while stopping unacceptable behaviors	"I can see how much you want to talk. Now it's time to write our intentions for training." "I see you're ready to run! But now we need to listen to the game instructions."
Accepting and weighing feelings and desires	"You sound angry." "I see, you wish you'd worn different shoes today."
Offering physical comfort	"Do you want a hug?"

Adults often want to know: "How can I get a child to do what I want them to do?" The typical answer would involve using punishments or rewards to manipulate the child into the desired behavior. However, another option exists. We can reframe the question to: "How can I help this child solve the problem?"

First, we might ask: Where do these behaviors we want to change come from? Often, as adults, we start from the idea that children are "good" and therefore should act consistently with their actions, but in reality, all people are born with the capacity to feel all emotions and no ability to manage them. The behavior we don't want, that we don't like, signals a lack of skill and creates an opportunity for learning.

What happens when we use punishments? People react to punishments in four basic ways. The first, "I feel bad about what I did, I'll behave from now on," is the desired reaction, but in reality, it's the least likely to occur.

It's more likely the child will feel: "You're mean, I'll show you!" or "Next time, I'll make sure you don't catch me!" or even, "I'm bad, I deserve to be punished." None of these reactions contribute to a healthy identity or relationship. They can lead to lying, a poor self-image, or a desire for revenge.

What happens when using a rewards system? People who get rewarded come to expect a reward every time, or they lose the incentive. Rewards don't teach children about ethics or cooperation. And finally, if the reward isn't attractive enough, the stakes must keep rising.

In all people, including children, there's satisfaction in feeling that we have a purpose within the society we're part of (family, soccer team, neighborhood friends). The impact of what we do in it makes us feel real and valid, reaffirming our confidence in ourselves. The system of punishments and rewards is one where adults seek to control behavior, and control and trust are opposite traits: we need to control because we don't trust, and if as adults we don't trust children, they develop an identity where their actions are dictated by a lack of self-confidence.

**To achieve children's cooperation:**

Avoid:	Examples:
Blaming	"Look what you did!" "How dare you kick that ball while I'm talking!"
Insulting	"You're a little mess!" "Stop whining like a baby!"
Threatening	"Do this, or else!" "If you don't do it, there'll be a big consequence!"
Giving orders	"Stop complaining!" "Stop leaving the material everywhere!"



## Steps for Effective Problem-Solving

**1 Listen and acknowledge the child's feelings and needs.**  
 "You were angry with Alex. He took the ball you were using without asking and ran off, and you hadn't finished playing with it."

**2 Avoid criticism.**  
 "Well, that's no excuse."  
 "That was a bad choice."

**3 Summarize the child's perspective.**  
 "The problem is that Alex keeps taking the ball you're using without asking."

**4 Briefly express your feelings or needs and remind them of what's considered valuable and necessary in our context to function.**  
 "I didn't like that you hit Tania. Here we value taking care of ourselves and others, and hitting isn't a way to care."

**5 Invite the child to collaborate in finding a solution.**  
 "Let's see if we can work together to solve this problem. What do you think we can do?"

**6 Write down all ideas without commenting.**  
 Let the child go first if possible.

**7 Decide together which ideas you like and which you don't.**  
 Create a plan that satisfies both.

**8 Shake hands or sign an agreement.**

**9 Review as necessary.**



Instead, try:	Example:
Describing what you observe	"I see balls outside the ball bin." "I see the teams haven't been made for the match yet."
Saying it with one word	"Balls!" "Intentions!"
Giving information	"If we sit on the balls, they can get dented."
Describing how you feel	"I feel uncomfortable when you sit on the balls." "When I see only me picking up balls, I feel sad."
Offering a choice	"You can put on your shoes or do the warm-up barefoot." "You can cross the street with me or wait for the next facilitator."
Writing a note or making a sign	"Warm-up time! Before playing, let's stretch." "Enjoy the training, remember to clean up at the end."
Pre-teaching (Note: Asking "Okay/understood?" and ensuring a verbal "Okay/understood" response is usually helpful)	"We're going to Team X's field, remember there we only walk in the parking lot, we run once we're on the field, okay/understood?"
Being playful	"Let's see how fast we can put away the balls. Ready... now!"
Having individual expectations for each person	One child might be able to help set up training materials; another might be able to help clean up alone.

## Alternatives to Punishments

### **Point out a way to help.**

(To a child who interrupts:)

"Could you put the post-its on the board?"

### **Express strong concern.**

"Dribbling and hitting the ball in the face can cause a lot of damage."

### **Express your wishes and needs.**

"When you want to use the ball I'm using, I'd like you to ask me first."

### **Teach them to repair the damage.**

"Here's an air pump; please let me know when the ball is inflated."

### **Give them a choice.**

"You can take the ball to the park to play, or you can play something else inside."

### **Take action.**

"I'm going to put away the cones."

### **Let the child experience the consequences of their behavior.**

"I understand you want to play with the cones. Last time I didn't like that you jumped on them roughly and they broke, so I prefer not to lend them to you today. Maybe we can try again next week."

# IS FORMATS

Before detailing the formats of the Infinite Soccer model, we want to highlight that although the model's values express themselves differently in each format, some things remain constant: respect and care for people over results, enjoyment and joy as the main drivers of the activity, the absence of external rewards and punishments, and, of course, Playing in Peace and Evolving through Play.

**Laboratory:** In the Laboratory format, we practice the self-direction model previously described, based on the Agile Cycle in its four stages: Intention, Creation, Reflection, and Sharing. The kids have space during each training session to generate their intentions based on what they want to experience and learn. No intention is too small or dismissed. Facilitators support them in designing, holding, or participating in activities that respond to those intentions and in holding space for reflection and sharing at the end of each session. Training sessions can take many forms and don't necessarily look like conventional training.

**Team:** In the Team format, the IS facilitator designs training dynamics with a focus on the technical, tactical, physical, and psycho-emotional evolution of the players. However, competition results matter less than the quality and integrity of our processes. We want our teams, before winning at all costs, to enjoy, discover, and develop in peace.



# SOME IS PRACTICES



## Daily Practices

### Free Play

Play Based Evolution   Self-Direction   Community

Free play offers a space where children explore autonomy, make decisions, and solve problems on their own. Every object or corner becomes a tool to imagine, invent, and experiment. Interactions in this type of play strengthen social skills like negotiation, conflict resolution, and collaboration, all within a spontaneous environment free from external pressures.

Emotions find an outlet during free play, allowing them to be processed and managed naturally. Frustrations transform into learnings, while confidence grows through discovering new abilities. Imagination, movement, and laughter drive not only fun but also well-being and adaptation to new challenges.

Both in the Laboratory and Team formats, we start with free play, as it allows kids to get to know each other, build bonds, create their own games, their own agreements, and fosters social cohesion. It allows the facilitator to observe what interests each child, where they lean, where their attention lies, and what they enjoy.

### Agreements

Safe Space   Community   Self-Direction

In a space where we don't rely on centralized authority to determine the experience of the people in it, we need other ways to generate coherence in our relationships and facilitate harmony.

In each training session, we take time to revisit our initial agreements, discuss what they mean in practice, and ask the kids if they agree with them.

## AGREEMENTS

- **I take care of myself, I take care of you, we take care of each other.**

We care for our bodies and our emotional space. We warm up to avoid injuries, avoid roughness in play that could harm us or our teammates. If someone falls or expresses pain, we ask if they're okay before continuing to play. We avoid nicknames, insults, and mockery. We respect people's feelings. We resolve conflicts through dialogue.

- **I take responsibility for my own experience: I give what I can and ask for what I need.**

If you don't want to participate in something, you don't have to. If something hurts, please say so. If you want to rest or drink water, you can. If you want a certain game to happen or need support with something, please ask. If you see someone needs something and you can help, please do.

- **Punctuality and presence.**

We do our best to arrive on time to share the full experience. Being present allows us to take better care of ourselves and participate fully.

- **I tell the truth.**

In Infinite Soccer, we play without a referee. If we commit a foul, we say so. If we think a teammate or opponent committed one, we say so. If there's no agreement on what happened, we discuss it, telling the truth and listening to what others saw. Sometimes listening to multiple perspectives brings clarity. Sometimes we still have different views, but we trust that each person tells the truth of what they saw, so we decide how to proceed, sometimes yielding, and sometimes others yield.

- **Fair play and playing in peace.**

I avoid committing fouls and creating conflicts. Since the most important thing isn't winning but being able to play and have fun together, I maintain an environment of respect and camaraderie.

- **I leave the place and materials better than I found them.**

We use materials and space in ways that don't unnecessarily wear them out (e.g., we don't stand on the ball because it deforms it). We all help put away materials. We leave the space (field or other) clean and tidy. If we generate waste, we take it with us.



## Warm-Up

Safe Space

Community

After free play and revisiting the agreements, both in the Laboratory and Team formats, we warm up together to prepare the body and avoid injuries. We use the warm-up to strengthen bonds between people, help them get to know each other better, and enjoy doing so together. For example, forming a circle where some people start running towards the center, then return and bump into a teammate in the circle, saying their name, favorite food, soccer team, something they're grateful for today, etc. We can run forward, backward, sideways, lifting knees, bringing heels to glutes, dribbling the ball, dribbling and changing direction, etc. Similarly, we can stretch in pairs. When two different teams warm up, they can pair up with someone from the other team.

## Games

Play Based Evolution

Competition as an Act of Service

After the warm-up, we can facilitate some formal collaborative games, where playing serves as a means to develop certain skills or generate reflections, and where opposition involves helping the other person evolve by giving everything I got.



## Sharing Intentions, Requests, and Offerings

Self-Direction

In the Laboratory format, we take time for people to declare their intentions for the day or cycle. What they want to do, if they'd like to participate in certain games, if they want to develop specific skills and which ones. Intentions can lead to specific requests to the facilitator... Can we do exercises to improve receiving passes? The facilitator can also offer a game or practice, and the kids decide if participating aligns with their intentions. We organize people, time, and space for the chosen activities and carry them out.



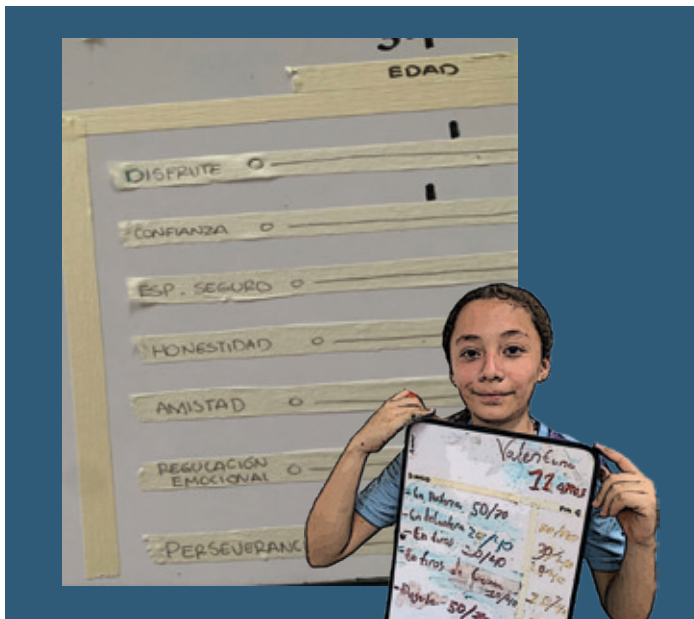
## Self-Assessment and Reflection on Current State

Self-Direction

Play Based Evolution

In the Laboratory format, the players indicate the areas they'd like to improve, for example, passing, finishing, physical endurance, etc. As facilitators, we can also help make visible other development areas they might not be aware of and integrate them into their intentions. Daily, weekly, and/or

monthly, we can invite reflection on the current state of certain skills and/or attitudes the kids appreciate in their IS experience. We also want to highlight other dimensions we value as part of the model, for example: enjoyment, confidence, safe space, honesty, friendship, emotional regulation, perseverance, etc., and we assess these too. At the start of a weekly cycle in a summer camp or a monthly cycle in evening training, we can create a chart with these parameters and mark where we are (the frequency isn't fixed; each community can decide what works best). At the end of each day, we can return to our chart and reflect on how we've progressed in each area.



## Green Cards

Safe Space

Community

Competition as an Act of Service

Self-Direction

As you already know, our matches take place without referees. Conflict prevention and integration happen through honesty and dialogue. This means no red or yellow cards either. However, during the match, we introduce a green card<sup>6</sup>, which serves to acknowledge something valuable that has happened—not only in terms of football skills, although that too, but anything aligned with our mission of Playing in Peace and Evolving Through Play.

Anyone can take out this card and show it to anyone else, regardless of whether they belong to the same team. Recognizing our opponents matters just as much, and we want to do it. Some examples of situations where the green card comes into play, based on FI's values: when someone tells the truth even if it doesn't benefit them in the game, when a player helps an opponent, when we take care of each other, when we have fun, and also when a beautiful football action takes place—such as a goal, a save, a feint, etc.

To make these cards accessible, we first explain their purpose, then those of us facilitating use them so that the players can see how they work, and finally, we place some around the field so they can be easily picked up and used whenever someone notices something valuable worth recognizing. You can also use them during the final reflection circles.

## The Friendly Match or Cascarita

Safe Space

Community

Competition as an Act of Service

Self-Direction

Play Based Evolution

Usually, at the end of each session, we have a match where the kids form teams, without a referee, to facilitate justice not being determined by external authority and to enhance conflict resolution through dialogue and honesty. At the end of the match, we form a circle and ask: What did we observe the opposing team doing well? And what did we observe our team doing well? This is a space where both the kids and coaches can practice praising what they observe happening with themselves, their teammates, and importantly, the opposing team. Here, we don't just recognize results but processes, attempts, and improvements.

## End-of-Day Reflection

Self-Direction

Community

Before leaving, we gather and reflect on our day's experience. Here, each facilitator can guide the reflection towards any aspect of the experience they find relevant or need to explore further, choosing questions as they see fit. For example, we can reflect on acquired skills and abilities, feelings experienced and expressed, how we cared for our teammates, levels of satisfaction or fun, how we faced challenges, our future dreams, etc. This reflection can happen with the whole group, in subgroups, pairs, or individually. We also use this time to communicate any announcements and conclude by saying: Training's over!

<sup>6</sup>Green Card created by Fútbol+ (<https://futbolmas.org/>)



## Practices with Other Frequencies

### Painting the Ball of Emotions

Self-Direction Safe Space

An important part of the model involves learning to manage our emotions, regulate them, and integrate them so they don't become a burden that reduces our ability to respond and relate harmoniously with ourselves and our environment. To do this, we need to know our emotions, how they feel, and where we feel them, as well as identify the most recurring ones over a certain period. For this, we've used a drawing of a ball to paint, where each color corresponds to an emotion (anger, sadness, fear, and joy), and people paint their emotions according to how much space they've occupied over a period. So far, we've done this weekly, but it can be done at any frequency.



## Badges

Self-Direction

When there's a scarcity of incentives within a group, it can lead to power struggles among people to access them. In conventional soccer, recognition usually goes to the teams that win and the players who perform in valued ways, typically those who score the most goals or assist. While these parameters hold value, in our view, there are other forms of value not named, and therefore not recognized or integrated. In IS, we seek to value what we treasure, not just treasure what's already valued in conventional soccer.

To make these forms of value visible, we've created a series of badges representing the project's values, which we want to name so kids can access these incentives, integrating and transcending the common incentives already named.

Each community can create its own badges; we've developed some initial ones that might inspire you:

**Legend Mode (prime):** Describes the player's performance at their highest level, without comparing to others.

**Legend Loading (in progress):** Describes a player who knows they're on their way to their highest level.

**Good Vibes Master:** Describes a friendly person.

**New Friendships:** Having made new friends.

**Total Commitment:** Great effort, regardless of results.

**100% Honesty:** Not lying or exaggerating to gain an advantage.

**I Love Infinite Soccer**

**Playing in Peace (Fair Play)**

**My Rival Isn't My Enemy:** Awarded when competing harmoniously.

Every so often (perhaps monthly), players self-evaluate, awarding themselves the badges that correspond to their experience during that period. Facilitators also assign badges (from this group or others), publicly recognizing the person when awarding them.

## Change Up Meeting

Self-Direction

Safe Space

Community

UA Change up Meeting offers communities a structured way to make decisions together and improve their collective processes effectively. This meeting format fosters open communication and problem-solving, giving everyone a voice and the opportunity to participate actively.

The practice itself is a brief, focused group meeting, usually lasting no more than 30 minutes. It allows all participants to share observations about aspects of their process that could improve or change. A visual board collects these ideas, making problems and potential improvements visible to everyone. This setup fosters a clear, shared understanding of priorities.

**The board has four columns:** Observations, Proposed Actions, Practice, and Integrated.

**First Stage:** Participants share observations about aspects that could improve in the community's operations and interactions. Observations have the following characteristics:

**a)** They don't target a specific person or group; they don't aim to accuse or blame. We only accept observations that address the group as a whole. Interpersonal conflicts have another space for resolution.

**b)** Observations don't contain interpretations but observable facts. For example, an observation wouldn't say, "The players are very messy and irresponsible," but it could say, "After training, the balls remain outside the ball bin, and only the facilitator picks them up."

**c)** They're expressed clearly and concisely.

These observations get written and placed in the Observations column.

**Second Stage:** We choose the observations most relevant to the group at that moment. Facilitators can suggest certain observations that address crucial aspects for the community. To determine relevance, we ask the group and select the observations with the most energy and interest.

We recommend choosing no more than three per Change Up Meeting.

**Third Stage:** We take one of the chosen observations and name what we want to happen, the desired reality. This matters because we want to move from a problem-solving culture to one of creating the context we want. So, taking the earlier observation, the next step would involve naming what we want to happen with the balls, for example: "We want the materials organized, complete, and available to keep playing with them."

**Fourth Stage:** We ask the group what actions they propose to move towards that desired reality. This stage can become very divergent, especially with a highly participatory group. The facilitator invites the group to participate consciously.

**Fifth Stage:** We choose the actions we'll implement to move closer to what we want. The chosen actions get tested for a period; it's important to communicate this to the group so they know we'll see if it works by doing, not just talking. We invite you not to vote; sometimes voting leaves a large part of the group dissatisfied, for example, six people might vote for one thing and four for another, leaving almost half the group unhappy. Try weaving different proposals together, without taking too many to avoid complexity. Before deciding, ask the group if anyone opposes implementing the proposed actions. Don't ask who supports it, but if anyone opposes it; if no one opposes, add the proposed actions to the observation and place the cards in the Proposed Actions column. Set a trial period to see if the implementation works, and assign roles if necessary. For example, for the ball observation, we might choose, "There'll be a ball guardian player who'll count and ensure the balls get put away, while we all help." We might choose Edgar as the first guardian, agreeing to review the implementation in two weeks to see if it worked. If the group isn't ready to decide, don't force it and offer a different space outside the Change Up Meeting for dialogue.

**Sixth Stage:** If the proposed actions succeed, they move to the Practice column, meaning we'll continue them until they become part of our culture, then they'll move to the Integrated column. If the proposed actions don't succeed, the observation returns to the Observations column, and we repeat the process, learning that the implemented proposals didn't work. If the proposed actions partially succeed, before moving them to Practice, we can make adjustments to improve implementation, considering the community's voices.

**Seventh Stage:** Continuously remind the community of the proposed actions in trial, the community's practices, and the things we've integrated as new community habits.

# GRATITUDE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## FAREWELL

Thank you for making it this far. We appreciate the time and attention you've given to this guide.

Before you go, we want to remind you that Infinite Soccer, paradoxically, isn't (just) about soccer but about creating contexts where we can transcend outdated paradigms and forms that limit our expression and ability to coexist harmoniously, spaces where we can play in peace and evolve through play.

We invite you to navigate your Infinite Soccer practice with the flag of "better done than perfect" and try what resonates with you from this text, with integrity and without attachment to results. Remove, add, transform, with freedom. We trust that you and your learning community will find the forms that best suit you to live the principles of Infinite Soccer.

We appreciate and thank you for your work and are here to support you.

Good luck, and a big hug.



<https://futinfinito.org/>



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This guide comes as a gift, a reflection of our deep gratitude for all we have received. We thank those who have modeled ways of living and acting aligned with our values. Appreciation goes to those who have played, explored, and shaped forms and structures that sustain what we cherish. We honor the energy and dedication that have breathed life into Fut Infinito. If this work inspires you to offer a monetary or non-monetary gift in support of the project, please reach out to us.

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