



UNDER 7S & UNDER 8S · FIRST RUGBY

TAG RUGBY, EXPLAINED

A guide for U7 and U8 parents — what you are watching, how to help your child, and what the referee is calling.

CREATED 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

For most children, Under 7s is their first taste of match rugby, and it is **tag rugby**. Nobody is tackled. Instead every player wears a belt with two tags, and pulling one off stops the ball carrier. There is no kicking, no scrums and no lineouts — just running, dodging, passing backwards and chasing to make a tag. Under 8s plays the same game on a bigger pitch with more players and a few extra rules. This guide explains both in plain English, so you can enjoy it, help your child and follow the referee.

WHERE THE RULES IN THIS GUIDE COME FROM

Every rule here comes from **RFU Regulation 15 — Appendix 1, the Under 7s Rules of Play, and Appendix 2, the Under 8s Rules of Play**. Both RFU pages read “Effective from 1st August 2025”. RFU Regulation 15 for 2026/27 (effective 1 August 2026) says age grade rugby is played to the Rules of Play in its appendices, and they had not been reissued on the day this guide was created, so they are the current rules. If anything here ever disagrees with the RFU page, **the RFU page is right**. Where we give coaching advice rather than a rule, we say so.

THE GAME IN FOUR IDEAS

1 RUN AND SCORE

The aim is to score a **try** by grounding the ball on or behind the other team's goal line. The ball carrier runs and dodges — but may not push anyone away with a hand or the ball.

2 PASS BACKWARDS

The ball may only be passed **sideways or backwards**, through the air. It may not be passed forwards, or simply handed to a team mate.

3 TAG, DON'T TACKLE

A **tag** is pulling one or both tags off the ball carrier's belt. It is the only contact allowed between the teams. Once tagged, the ball carrier must pass within **3 seconds**.

4 FREE PASSES

The game starts and restarts with a **free pass**, and almost every mistake is put right with one: the other team gets the ball and passes it backwards to start again.

WHY TAG RUGBY IS BUILT THIS WAY

The RFU puts the emphasis in tag rugby on **running with the ball, dodging, running in support, passing, and running to tag the ball carrier**. Those are the skills every rugby player needs, and tag lets children learn them safely before contact is introduced at Under 9s.

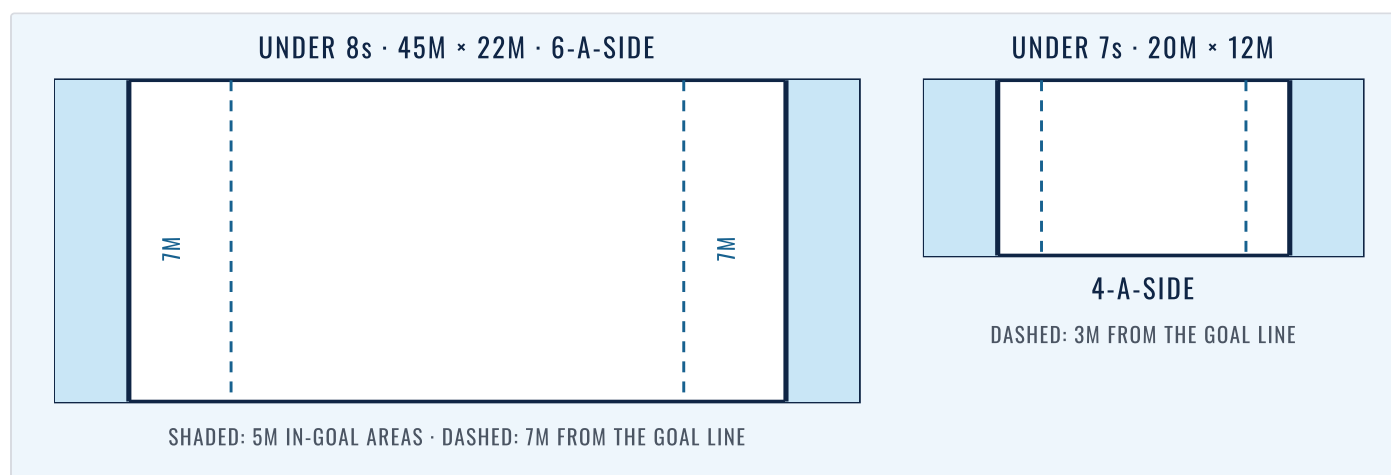


SAME GAME, NEXT STEP UP

U7 AND U8, SIDE BY SIDE

Most of the rules are the same in both age groups. The shaded rows are the ones that change when your child moves up from Under 7s to Under 8s.

	UNDER 7S	UNDER 8S
PLAYERS	Up to 4-a-side	Up to 6-a-side
LARGEST PITCH	20m × 12m , plus 5m in-goal at each end	45m × 22m , plus 5m in-goal at each end
MATCH LENGTH	Up to 10 minutes each half	Up to 10 minutes each half
BALL	Size 3	Size 3
AT A FREE PASS	Opponents 3 metres back	Opponents 7 metres back
NEAR THE GOAL LINE	Free pass taken 3m out from the goal line	Free pass taken 7m out from the goal line
KNOCK-ON	Accidentally knocking the ball forwards is not an offence — play on	Knocking the ball forwards gives a free pass to the other team, unless they have the advantage
SCORING	Must stay on their feet. Diving to score is not allowed: no try, and a free pass to the defenders 3m out	Players may go to ground to score a try
TAGS PER ATTACK	No limit set	A team can be tagged 6 times ; the 7th tag gives the ball to the other team
KICKING, SCRUMS, LINEOUTS	None	None
TACKLING	None — tags only	None — tags only



The largest pitches allowed, drawn to the same scale. The referee and coaches may agree to make a pitch smaller if they agree it is safe, and neighbouring pitches should be at least 5 metres apart.



THE HEART OF THE GAME

THE TAG

Every player wears a tag belt, and a tag is how the defending team stops the ball carrier. It is the same at U7 and U8, apart from the 7th-tag rule at the bottom of this page.

THE BELT

- Two tags, fixed with Velcro, **one over each hip** — not at the front or back.
- Fastened securely, with any spare belt tucked away so it cannot be pulled.
- Worn **outside the shirt**, never covered up, and tags never wrapped round the belt.
- Tags must stand out: **not the same colour** as the player's shirt or shorts.
- A player without both tags on is penalised if they carry the ball or tag someone.

WHAT COUNTS AS A TAG

- ✓ Pulling **one or both tags** off the ball carrier's belt
- ✓ Only the **ball carrier** can be tagged
- ✗ Pushing a tagger away with a hand or the ball (a hand-off or fend)
- ✗ Guarding or covering the tags
- ✗ Pulling the ball out of the ball carrier's hands
- ✗ Shirt pulling, barging, running in front of the ball carrier, or forcing them into touch

AFTER A TAG

U7 & U8 · RULE 6

THE TAGGED BALL CARRIER

- ✓ **Pass within 3 seconds** to a team mate
- ✓ Stop as soon as possible — within about **3 strides**. They may pass while stopping
- ✓ Only **one step** is allowed to score a try after being tagged
- ✓ Tagged while standing in the other team's in-goal area? **Ground the ball straight away** to score
- ✓ Then go to the tagger, collect the tag and put it back on before joining in again

Too slow? More than 3 seconds or about 3 strides gives the other team a free pass where the tag happened.

U7 & U8 · RULE 6

THE TAGGER

- ✓ **Stop running**, hold the tag above their head and shout **"Tag"**
- ✓ The referee then calls **"Tag — pass"**
- ✓ If the ball carrier stops within 1 metre, step **at least 1 metre back** towards their own goal line to give room for the pass
- ✓ Once the ball has gone, **hand the tag back** before joining in again

Not allowed: playing on while holding a tag, or throwing it on the floor — both give a free pass.

UNDER 8S ONLY · THE 7TH TAG

To reward good defence and keep the ball moving, a team with the ball can be tagged **up to 6 times** before it must score. On the **7th tag** the referee stops play and gives the other team a free pass where the tag happened. If the 7th tag is one step from the goal line and the ball is grounded, there is **no try**: the other team gets a free pass 7 metres out. The coaches may agree a lower number for more challenge; if they cannot agree, it stays at the 7th tag.



RESTARTS, POSITIONS AND LOOSE BALLS

FREE PASSES, OFFSIDE AND THE BALL

THE FREE PASS

WHEN	To start each half and after every try (from the centre, by the team that did not score); when the ball or ball carrier goes into touch (from the side, where it went out); when the ball is pulled from the ball carrier's hands; and for every other offence , from the referee's mark.
HOW	The passer starts with the ball in both hands . When the referee calls " Play ", they pass it backwards through the air to a team mate. For safety, nobody may run until the pass is made .
DEFENDERS	Must stand 3 metres back at U7 , or 7 metres back at U8 , and cannot move forward until the ball leaves the passer's hands.
NEAR THE LINE	A free pass is never taken right on the goal line. An offence, or the ball going into touch, over or close to the goal line gives a free pass 3 metres out at U7 , or 7 metres out at U8 — more space for both teams.
ADVANTAGE	Referees are asked to play advantage wherever possible to keep the game flowing. If the team that did nothing wrong is doing well anyway, play goes on.

OFFSIDE

In tag rugby, offside happens **only at the moment of a tag**. The offside line runs through the centre of the ball — and for the tagger it is **1 metre further back**. When a tag is made, the tagger's team mates must try to get back towards their own goal line until they are behind the ball.

FREE PASS

A player in an offside position **intercepts, blocks or slows down** the pass from the tagged player.

FAIR PLAY

A player who was **onside** runs forward and intercepts the pass before it reaches the player it was meant for.

WHEN THE BALL IS ON THE GROUND

- Children are encouraged to **stay on their feet**. Anyone may pick up a loose ball and run or pass — but nobody may **dive on the floor** to get it.
- A pass that goes sideways or backwards and hits the ground is **still in play**, and either team can pick it up. If it rolls into touch, the team that did not touch it last gets a free pass from the touchline.
- A forward pass gives a free pass to the other team, unless they have the advantage. **At U7**, an accidental knock forwards is not an offence. **At U8**, a knock forwards gives a free pass too.
- **U7**: a player who falls to the ground with the ball gives away a free pass.
- **U8**: the rules also set out what happens when the ball is dropped over a goal line — for example, a team that drops the ball over its own line and lets the other team touch it down concedes a try.



FOR VOLUNTEER REFEREES — AND CURIOUS PARENTS

REFEREEING TAG RUGBY

Tag games are often refereed by a coach or a parent. The RFU encourages the referee to **advise and guide the teams and players** as they go. This routine is practical advice; the rules it enforces are the RFU's.

- 1 BELTS FIRST.** Before kick-off, check every player has two tags, one on each hip, belt outside the shirt and spare strap tucked in.
- 2 START WITH A FREE PASS.** From the centre. Defenders 3m back (U7) or 7m back (U8). Call **"Play"**.
- 3 WATCH THE TAG.** When the tagger holds up the tag and shouts "Tag", call **"Tag — pass"** and count 3 seconds.
- 4 OFFSIDE.** The tagger 1 metre back; team mates back behind the ball. Only penalise if it stops or slows the pass.
- 5 TAGS BACK ON.** Neither the tagged player nor the tagger plays on until the tag is back on the belt.
- 6 COUNT TAGS AT U8.** Six tags allowed; on the 7th, a free pass to the other team.
- 7 AT THE LINE.** U7: no diving to score. If a player grounds the ball on their knees, give the try and remind everyone to stay on their feet.

CONTACT THAT SHOULD NOT HAPPEN

If the ball carrier or a would-be tagger **deliberately makes contact** with an opponent, the RFU says the game must be **stopped**, the player spoken to and reminded of the non-contact rules, and a free pass given.

MANAGING THE GAME

- Substitutions roll on and off, but only when the ball is dead and with the referee's say-so.
- Coaches stay off the pitch while the ball is in play.
- A penalty try is given if a try would probably have been scored but for an offence.

A FREE PASS IS AWARDED FOR

- A forward pass, or handing the ball to a team mate
- Holding on for more than 3 seconds or about 3 strides after a tag
- A hand-off or fend
- Any contact beyond pulling a tag
- Pulling the ball from the ball carrier's hands
- Offside that stops or slows the pass
- Playing on without a tag, or with an opponent's tag
- Diving on the floor for a loose ball
- Kicking of any kind, and foul play
- **U7:** diving to score · **U8:** a knock-on, or the 7th tag

WANT TO REFEREE PROPERLY?

England Rugby's entry course is **Ready 2 Referee**, and Devon RFU supports new referees locally. Both links are on the last page.



YOUR PART IN IT

HELPING YOUR CHILD

AT HOME

Coaching advice.

- **Play tag in the garden or park.** A pair of tags, or a sock tucked in each side of their waistband, is plenty. Take turns to chase and dodge.
- **Pass backwards.** Run side by side and pass the ball back and forth. Two hands on the ball, and aim for your partner's hands.
- **Head up.** Encourage your child to look where they are running, not down at the ball or the grass.
- **Talk about the game.** Ask what the referee called, and why.

ON THE TOUCHLINE

- **Praise the right things** — a good dodge, a quick pass after a tag, handing a tag back straight away.
- **Let the coaches coach.** Shouted instructions are hard for young children to follow mid-game.
- **Respect the referee.** It is very often a volunteer helping children learn.
- **Cheer effort** from both teams. Our values are the game's values: Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship.

EVERYONE PLAYS

RFU Regulation 15 has a **Half Game Rule**: every player selected in a match-day squad must play **at least half of the available playing time**. It applies to non-contact matches and festivals too, so your child will get their share of the game.

CONCUSSION

Tag rugby is non-contact, but children still collide and fall. The UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport sum it up in five words: **"If in doubt, sit them out."** Nobody should return to sport within 24 hours of a suspected concussion, and the guidelines advise calling **NHS 111** within those 24 hours.

England Rugby's free **HEADCASE** e-learning has a version written for parents of age grade players. It explains how to recognise concussion and what to do, and takes about half an hour.

READ MORE: PARENTS, WELFARE AND CONCUSSION

AGE GRADE RUGBY

[RFU — Age Grade Rugby overview](#)

englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/age-grade-rugby-overview

CONCUSSION

[RFU — HEADCASE concussion information](#)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase

UK GUIDANCE

[UK Concussion Guidelines for Grassroots Sport](#)

sportandrecreation.org.uk/campaigns-and-policy/concussion/concussion-guidelines-for-grassroots-sport

BEHAVIOUR

[RFU — Code of conduct](#)

englandrugby.com/play/parents-guardians/code-conduct

FREE COURSE

[RFU — HEADCASE e-learning](#)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/headcase-e-learning

OUR CLUB

[Tiverton RFC Junior Section](#)

tiverton-rfc-juniors.co.uk

Questions? Speak to your child's coach or your Parent Rep.



SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

FIND OUT MORE

The rules come from the RFU. Every link was checked on the day this guide was created — tap a title to open it. Links on welfare and concussion are on page 6.

THE RULES

U7 RULES

[RFU — Under 7s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 1\)](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-1-u7-rules-of-play

ALL AGE GRADES

[RFU — Regulation 15: Age Grade Rugby](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby

U8 RULES

[RFU — Under 8s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 2\)](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-2-u8-rules-of-play

AFTER U8

[RFU — Under 9s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 3\)](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-3-u9-rules-of-play

SKILLS AND SAFETY

CHASING TO TAG

[World Rugby — Tackle Ready: Tracking](#)

passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/tackle-ready/the-five-stages-of-tackle-ready/1-tracking

RUGBY WORDS

[World Rugby — Definitions \(try, touch, in-goal...\)](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/definitions

SAFE RUGBY

[World Rugby — Rugby Ready](#)

passport.world.rugby/injury-prevention-and-risk-management/rugby-ready

INJURY PREVENTION

[RFU — Activate injury prevention programme](#)

englandrugby.com/run/player-welfare/activate

REFEREEING

JUNIOR RUGBY

[RugbyReferee.net — Refereeing junior rugby](#)

rugbyreferee.net/refereeing-junior-rugby

REFEREE COURSE

[RFU — How to book a Ready 2 Referee course](#)

help.rfu.com/support/solutions/articles/103000161012

THIS SEASON

[RugbyReferee.net — England age grade regulations 2026-27](#)

rugbyreferee.net/refereeing-junior-rugby/england-rugby-age-grade-regulations-2026-27

LOCALLY

[Devon RFU — Become a rugby referee](#)

devonrfu.co.uk/become-a-rugby-referee