



UNDER 9S · THE FIRST SEASON OF CONTACT

THE TACKLE, EXPLAINED

A guide for U9 parents — what you are watching, how to help your child, and what the referee is calling.

CREATED 15 SEPTEMBER 2026

Under 9s is the season tags come off and the **tackle** arrives. It is the only kind of contact added this year: there are still **no rucks, no mauls, no scrums and no lineouts**, and still no kicking. Nobody fights for the ball on the ground. A tackled player simply passes to a team mate, and the game carries on. This guide explains what a tackle is, how it is made safely and what the referee is calling, so you can enjoy it, help your child and follow the whistle.

WHERE THE RULES IN THIS GUIDE COME FROM

Every rule here comes from **RFU Regulation 15, Appendix 3 — the Under 9s Rules of Play**, and the World Rugby Laws of the Game they build on. The RFU page reads *“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 current. We also use RugbyReferee.net's one-page U9 summary, marked *“Correct as at 1 August 2026”*, and say so wherever it adds something. If anything here disagrees with the RFU page, **the RFU page is right**. Coaching advice is labelled as advice.

WHAT CHANGES AT UNDER 9S

1 THE TACKLE

The ball carrier can now be **held and brought to ground**. The tackle must use the arms and be **below the base of the sternum** — the tummy or below. See page 2.

2 PASS WITHIN 3 SECONDS

Once the referee calls **“Tackle”**, the ball carrier has **3 seconds** to pass to a team mate — standing up or from the ground. No opponent may pull the ball from their hands.

3 A BIGGER GAME

Up to **7-a-side** on a pitch up to **60m × 30m**, plus 5m in-goal at each end, with halves of up to **15 minutes**. Still a size 3 ball.

4 STILL FREE PASSES

Games start and restart with a **free pass**, opponents **7 metres** back. Offences give a free pass, and touch gives one 5 metres in from the touchline.

WHY U9 RUGBY IS BUILT THIS WAY

The RFU's emphasis at U9 is on running with the ball, dodging, supporting and passing — and, for the defending team, on **tackling the ball carrier, stopping them going forward, and getting back into the game**. Leaving out rucks and mauls means children learn to tackle, and to be tackled, one step at a time.



THE ONE NEW SKILL THIS SEASON

WHAT IS A TACKLE?

Two things must both happen — the ball carrier is **held**, and **brought to ground**. At U9 the referee also calls “Tackle” when a held player stays on their feet, so it helps to know all three pictures below.

THE OFFICIAL DEFINITIONS

RFU Under 9s Rules of Play: “A ‘Tackle’ occurs when the ball carrier is held by one or more opponents and is brought to ground. A ball carrier who is not held is not a tackled player and a tackle has not taken place. The tackle must include the use of arms.”

World Rugby's Laws define a tackle as “the method of holding a ball-carrier and bringing that player to ground.” The **tackler** is the opponent who holds the tackled player and goes to ground with them.

1 HELD

Gripped by **one or more opponents**, using their **arms**.
World Rugby (Law 14.3): the tackler must keep holding the ball carrier until the ball carrier is on the ground.

2 BROUGHT TO GROUND

World Rugby (Law 14.2): “Being brought to ground means that the ball-carrier is lying, sitting or has at least one knee on the ground or on another player who is on the ground.”

WHAT THE REFEREE CALLS

“TACKLE — RELEASE”

Held and brought to ground. The ball carrier passes from the ground within 3 seconds. The tackler lets go, gets up as soon as possible and goes back onside.

“TACKLE”

Held but still on their feet. The referee allows about 3 seconds to see whether they are really held. After the call they may keep going forward, but **must pass within 3 seconds** and **cannot score**.

NO CALL

Not held — a slip, a trip or a dodge.
A ball carrier who is not held is not a tackled player, so play simply carries on.

THE HEIGHT RULE

THE TACKLER

- ✓ Grips and holds **below the base of the sternum** — the tummy or belly, and below
- ✓ Uses the **arms** — every tackle must include them
- ✗ Contact above the base of the sternum. The game is **stopped**, the player spoken to and reminded of the rule, and a free pass given

THE BALL CARRIER

- ✓ Runs and dodges to avoid tacklers
- ✗ Going into contact with their **shoulders below their hips**
- ✗ **Dipping down late and low**, or putting their head into the opponent's head space
- ✗ A hand-off or fend, with a hand or the ball



WORLD RUGBY · RUGBY READY AND TACKLE READY

TACKLING SAFELY

Key points from World Rugby's safety programme, **Rugby Ready** — coaching points, not rules.

THE TACKLER

- ✓ **"Eyes up"**, looking at the ball carrier, to keep the head in the correct position
- ✓ Track the ball carrier and get the feet close enough to make the tackle
- ✓ A body position that is **strong, stable and low**
- ✓ Head **behind or to one side** of the ball carrier — never in front
- ✓ Use the arms to **"wrap"** around the ball carrier
- ✓ Let go, and get back to their feet straight away

THE BALL CARRIER

- ✓ Carry the ball in **both hands**
- ✓ Protect it — tight to the chest, elbows in
- ✓ Land on the **buttocks, then the shoulder**
- ✓ Don't break the fall with a hand or the ball
- ✓ Turn towards their team and pass
- ✓ Get back to their feet as soon as possible

TACKLES THAT ARE NEVER ALLOWED

From Rugby Ready's list of dangerous tackles.

HIGH

Above the sternum. At U9 the line is even lower: the base of the sternum.

IN THE AIR

Tackling a player whose feet are off the ground.

SPEAR OR TIP

Lifting a player and dropping or driving them onto their upper body, neck or head.

LATE

Tackling a player after they have passed the ball.

EARLY

Tackling a player who does not have the ball.

CHARGING

Hitting the ball carrier without trying to grasp them with the hands and arms.

HOW COACHES BUILD THE TACKLE

World Rugby's **Tackle Ready** programme, written for *"all ages and stages"*, breaks every tackle into five stages:

- 1 TRACKING** — getting to the ball carrier quickly and accurately, closing down their space.
- 2 PREPARATION** — the right body position and footwork, and choosing the right tackle.
- 3 CONNECTION** — shoulder, arm wrap and grip, with good technique and self-control. Never the head.
- 4 ACCELERATION** — driving with the legs, studs in the grass.
- 5 FINISH** — bringing the ball carrier to ground under control. At U9: let go, get up, get onside.

THE RULES, PLAYER BY PLAYER

WHO DOES WHAT AT THE TACKLE

APPENDIX 3 · RULE 6

THE BALL CARRIER

DO

- ✓ On "Tackle", **pass to a team mate within 3 seconds** — standing or from the ground
- ✓ Keep going forward if still on their feet, while getting the pass away
- ✓ Not held yet, and no call? They may still score — or, if on the ground, place the ball over the line in one movement

DON'T

- ✗ Try to score once "Tackle" has been called
- ✗ Hand off or fend with a hand or the ball

Near the line: within a metre of the goal line, the referee waits the 3 seconds before calling "Tackle". Ground the ball in that time and it is a try.

APPENDIX 3 · RULE 6

THE TACKLER

DO

- ✓ Grip below the base of the sternum, using the arms
- ✓ On a "Tackle" call, keep hold to stop the ball carrier going forward — then **let go once the pass is made**
- ✓ If the tackle goes to ground, **release and get up** as soon as possible, and get onside

DON'T

- ✗ Grab or **rip the ball**
- ✗ **Block the pass**

More than one tackler is allowed, but they must let the ball carrier pass.

APPENDIX 3 · RULE 6

TEAM MATES OF THE BALL CARRIER

DO

- ✓ Run in support. Anyone passed the ball may run with it
- ✓ A supporting player **may rip the ball** from the ball carrier — but **must pass it straight away**
- ✓ May pick up the ball from a tackled player or the ground — and must pass straight away. That player cannot be tackled

DON'T

- ✗ Bind on, or drive the ball carrier forward with a shoulder
- ✗ Stand close either side of the ball carrier to stop the next tackle

APPENDIX 3 · RULES 6 AND 8

THE OTHER DEFENDERS

DO

- ✓ Get back **1 metre behind the hindmost foot of the hindmost player** at the tackle — or behind the goal line if closer
- ✓ Stay there **until the pass is made**

DON'T

- ✗ Stop the ball carrier from passing
- ✗ Make contact with players who do not have the ball

Offside only happens at the time of a tackle.

NAVY ATTACKING ►

OFFSIDE: GET BACK

ONSIDE

TACKLE

PASS BACK WITHIN 3 SECONDS

SKY'S OFFSIDE LINE: 1M BEHIND THE HINDMOST FOOT AT THE TACKLE

Seen from above. A defender in an offside position who intercepts, blocks or slows the pass gives away a free pass. A defender who was onside may run to intercept a floated pass before it arrives.



FOR VOLUNTEER REFEREES — AND CURIOUS PARENTS

REFEREEING THE TACKLE

Many U9 games are refereed by a coach or a parent volunteer. This routine works through a tackle in the order things happen. The routine is practical advice; the rules it enforces are the RFU's.

- 1 WAS IT LEGAL?** Arms used, and contact below the base of the sternum. Above it: stop the game, speak to the player, remind them of the rule, free pass.
- 2 HELD?** Allow about 3 seconds to see. Held on their feet: call **"Tackle"**. Taken to ground: call **"Tackle — release"**.
- 3 COUNT 3 SECONDS.** The ball carrier must pass. No try once "Tackle" is called — but near the line, wait the 3 seconds before calling.
- 4 HANDS OFF THE BALL.** Tacklers cannot grab the ball or block the pass. Only a team mate may rip it, and must pass.
- 5 RELEASE.** Once the pass has gone — or at once if on the ground — the tackler lets go, gets up and goes onside.
- 6 OFFSIDE.** Defenders 1 metre behind the hindmost foot at the tackle until the pass. Penalise it if they stop or slow the pass.
- 7 RESTART.** Free pass, opponents 7 metres back. Call **"Play"**; nobody runs until the ball is passed.

THE SIX-TACKLE VARIATION

For confident, capable players, **both coaches and the referee may agree before the match** that a team gets **6 tackles** to score. On the **7th tackle**, the other team gets a free pass where it happened. If the 7th tackle is made one or more metres from the goal line and the ball is grounded, there is **no try**, and the other team gets a free pass 7 metres out. If they do not all agree, it does not apply.

MANAGING THE GAME

- Talk more than you whistle. Short, calm words prevent most offences.
- A diving player must get up with the ball, pass it, or let it go straight away — and the other team must let them.
- **RugbyReferee.net 2026-27:** no sin bin, and sides stay equal. A match ends if the score difference goes past six tries.

A FREE PASS IS AWARDED FOR

- Contact at or above the base of the sternum
- A forward pass or a knock-on
- A hand-off or fend, with a hand or the ball
- The ball pulled from the ball carrier's hands by an opponent
- Blocking the pass at the tackle
- Offside that stops or slows the pass
- Contact with a player who does not have the ball
- Kicking of any kind, and foul play
- The ball or ball carrier going into touch — 5 metres in from touch
- Not passing within 3 seconds of "Tackle"



YOUR PART IN IT

HELPING YOUR CHILD

AT HOME

Coaching advice — keep contact for training.

- **Leave tackling to the coaches.** RFU Regulation 15 says adults must not join in any contact training with age grade players — including holding tackle bags or demonstrating tackling.
- **Practise falling safely.** On soft grass, from kneeling: ball held tight in both hands, land on the bottom then the shoulder, never a hand out.
- **Pass quickly.** Count “one, two, three” together and get the pass away before three.
- **Talk about the game.** Ask what the referee called, and why.

ON THE TOUCHLINE

- **Praise the right things** — eyes up, a good wrap with the arms, a quick pass after “Tackle”.
- **Be patient.** Some children take to contact at once, and some take a season. Both are normal.
- **Let the coaches coach.** Shouted instructions are hard to follow mid-game.
- **Respect the referee,** and 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**, festivals included.

CONCUSSION

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

CONTACT & LOAD

[RFU — Age Grade contact training, match load and recovery](#)

englandrugby.com/run/coaching/coach-resources/contact-guidance

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



SOURCES AND FURTHER READING

FIND OUT MORE

The rules come from the RFU; the laws, definitions and safety programmes from World Rugby. 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

U9 RULES

[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

ON ONE PAGE

[RugbyReferee.net — U9 regulations, season 2026/27 \(PDF\)](#)

rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026-27-u9s-RRNet-RFU-Regulations.pdf

NEXT SEASON

[RFU — Under 10s Rules of Play \(Reg. 15, Appendix 4\)](#)

englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-15-age-grade-rugby/regulation-15-appendix-4-u10-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

EVERY AGE GRADE

[RugbyReferee.net — Age grade rules grid, 2026-27 \(PDF\)](#)

rugbyreferee.net/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/2026-27-RRNet-RFU-Age-grade-rugby-regulations-grid.pdf

THE LAWS OF THE TACKLE

EVERY LAW

[World Rugby — Laws of the Game 2026 \(PDF\)](#)

passport.world.rugby/media/jxnmptk/2026en-laws-of-the-game-compressed.pdf

DEFINITIONS

[World Rugby — Definitions \(tackle, tackler, held...\)](#)

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

THE TACKLE

[World Rugby — Law 14: Tackle](#)

passport.world.rugby/laws-of-the-game/laws-by-number/14-tackle

SAFE TECHNIQUE

TACKLING

[World Rugby — Rugby Ready: The tackle](#)

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

TACKLE PROGRAMME

[World Rugby — Tackle Ready](#)

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

FIVE STAGES

[World Rugby — The five stages of Tackle Ready](#)

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

LOCALLY

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

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

OUR CLUB

[Tiverton RFC Junior Section](#)

tiverton-rfc-juniors.co.uk