**Summary:** A reference for youth soccer coaches regarding age-appropriate training of heading the ball. These guidelines represent a safe, progressive and research-informed approach based on player characteristics at various stages of development and based on the amount, intensity and type of heading typically demanded of players in matches within each age group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Training Frequency</th>
<th>Methodology</th>
<th>Emphases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>U6</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Not appropriate to attempt heading at this age before body awareness and visual tracking become more refined</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| U8  | No formal training | Fun and body awareness  
No teaching; Ensure safety for players who want to try heading a ball on their own |
| U10 | 1 activity, 0-3 times per season | Size 4 or softer ball, e.g. Nerf ball  
Head ball out of own hands/juggle and catch - Use the lightweight soccer ball | Comfort and basic technique  
✓ Mouth closed  
✓ Eyes open  
✓ Hairline contact  
✓ Heading at a goal |
| U12 | 1 activity, 0-1 times per week | Size 4 or softer/lighter ball, e.g. volleyball  
Underhand toss – use lightweight soccer ball  
Teammate (not coach) serves with feet  
• Chipping  
Incorporate into skill games  
• e.g. Soccer-tennis | Confidence and improved technique  
✓ Chin tucked in (neck contracted to fix head to the trunk)  
✓ Torso extension and flexion  
✓ Heading to pass/heading to clear  
✓ Introduce jumping; two-footed takeoff  
✓ Passive opponent |
| U14 | 1-2 activities, 0-2 times per week | Size 5 or smaller ball, e.g. size 4 or 3 ball  
Underhand toss/throw-ins – initially use the lightweight soccer ball  
Teammate (not coach) serves with feet  
• Chipping and crossing  
Incorporate into training games  
• e.g. Head-Catch | Refined technique and basic tactics  
✓ Arms slightly away from body to provide a barrier for own body/head in anticipation of contact from opponents  
✓ Footwork to head ball at highest point possible; one-footed takeoff  
✓ Attacking/defending headers  
✓ Active opponent |
| U16+ | 1-2 activities, 1-3 times per week | Teammate/coach serves with feet  
Incorporate into match situations  
• e.g. Set pieces | Performance under pressure and body contact  
Refined technique and advanced tactics  
✓ Footwork and body control for power and accuracy  
✓ Near/far post considerations  
✓ Heading to initiate counterattack/heading to clear  
✓ Flick headers; create separation from opponent to avoid head-to-head contact  
✓ Diving headers to score |