

8U Basketball Practice Plan: 60 Minutes for Ages 7-8

7-8

Practice Plans

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It's the first practice of your 8U season. You've got 12 kids milling around the gym — ages 7 and 8, most carrying a basketball for the first time. You set up a layup line at the standard 10-foot rim and realize half your players can't reach the backboard. The other half are dribbling with two hands and sprinting in the wrong direction. Three minutes in, practice has dissolved into free recess.

The fix isn't a better drill. It's a better structure. An 8U basketball practice should be engineered around how 7-8 year olds actually learn: short bursts, movement first, and constant celebration of effort over outcome.

An 8U basketball practice plan runs 60 minutes, keeps every drill block short, and leads with a movement game before any skill drill. Use 8-foot rims and a size 4 or size 5 basketball. End with a small-sided game so every player gets to actually play. That framework alone puts you ahead of most 8U practices we've watched across dozens of gym floors.

For our full library of drills, plans, and coaching guides sorted by age and skill level, visit the basketball coaching hub.

Why the 10-Foot Rim Is Hurting Your 8U Players

This is the single biggest structural problem in 8U basketball. Recreational gyms default to 10-foot rims for all ages, and coaches run shooting and layup lines at full height without thinking twice. A 7-year-old heaving the ball upward just to reach the backboard is reinforcing the exact mechanics you'll spend the next three years trying to undo — the two-hand push, the slingshot release, the forward lean on the follow-through.

If your facility has adjustable rims, set them at 8 feet for 8U practices. If not, run all shooting work from 5 to 8 feet so form can actually drive the shot. Recent work from youth basketball development resources confirms what we've already seen on our own floors: mechanics break down completely when a young player is working too hard just to reach the basket. Fix the equipment before you try to fix the form.

The 60-Minute 8U Basketball Practice Plan

Every segment is timed. When the clock hits the mark, we move — even mid-rep. The transitions themselves are part of the lesson: they build the habit of switching focus quickly, which translates directly to game situations.

Segment 1 — Movement Warm-Up: Dribble Tag (8 min) Every player has a ball and dribbles freely in a defined half-court area. One player is "it" and must keep dribbling while tagging others. When tagged, do 5 stationary dribbles, then re-enter. Rotate the tagger every 90 seconds. Coaching cue: "Eyes up — see the whole court, not just your ball." This builds spatial awareness, reaction to movement, and ball comfort simultaneously. It is also loud and genuinely fun, which matters more at 8U than most coaches admit.

Segment 2 — Ball Handling: Stationary Dribble Circuit (8 min) Players spread out with one ball each. Round 1: right hand only, 60 seconds. Round 2: left hand only, 60 seconds. Round 3: alternating hands while walking slowly forward, 2 minutes. No cones, no patterns — just focused repetition with both hands. Coaching cue: "Push the ball down like you are stomping on a bug. Do not slap it." Repeat the cue every 30 seconds. For a full set of age-appropriate progressions to layer in as the season develops, pair this with our basketball drills for kids ages 6-8.

Segment 3 — Pizza Box Drill (7 min) Pair players 8 feet apart. Both hold their hands up in a square as the pass target. Chest

overhead passes at 8U — they build poor mechanics.

Segment 4 — Layup Footwork: No-Ball Approach (8 min) Before any player picks up a ball, teach the two-step footwork pattern alone. Right-hand layup: step right, step left, jump off the left foot. Left-hand: reverse it. Walk it slowly first, then jog. Coaching cue: "Step like Frankenstein — big slow steps, then jump HIGH, not forward." I ran this with a group of 7-year-olds at the start of last season and had them hitting the backboard within 20 minutes because we isolated the footwork from the dribble. Once the pattern is locked, add the ball: three dribbles, two-step, layup at the 8-foot rim.

Segment 5 — Shooting Form: Elbow In Drill (10 min) Players line up 5 to 7 feet from the basket — close enough that form drives the shot. One ball per player or share in pairs. Teach BEEF (Balance, Eyes, Elbow, Follow-through) but introduce only one cue per practice. Today: "Elbow in. Your elbow should point at the basket." Shoot, get your own rebound, go again. Do not loudly celebrate every make — it causes players to rush the release. Celebrate the form instead: "Great elbow on that one."

Segment 6 — Small-Sided Game: 3-on-3 Half Court (14 min) Split into teams of three. Half court only. No plays, no set offense — just let them play. Your only job is to freeze the action once or twice to re-teach one concept: spacing. Coaching cue: "See your teammates. Give them room to drive." Run two rotations so every player gets meaningful floor time. If you have extra players, rotate the waiting kid in after every scored basket. This is the most important 14 minutes of any 8U practice — players apply everything they just drilled in a real game situation.

Segment 7 — Team Huddle (5 min) Water break is built into this time. Name two players by name for something specific: "Marcus kept his eyes up during dribble tag the whole time" lands better than "everyone worked hard." End with a team cheer the players choose. At 8U, kids remember how practice felt more than any drill you ran. Make it feel good.

What NOT to Run at 8U

After years of 8U practices, we have learned as much from what to cut as from what to keep.

Full-court drills. Stamina and spatial awareness are not there yet. Keep everything half-court.

Zone defense. Players are still learning to guard one person. A zone creates confusion, bunching, and a practice environment with near-zero individual reps. Man-to-man, simple and direct.

Set plays. If you spend 10 minutes walking through a pick-and-roll with 7-year-olds, you burned 10 minutes you could have spent on 50 layup footwork reps. Skills before systems, always.

Free throw lines. Too far for 8U form to hold up. Let players shoot from wherever their mechanics stay intact and extend the distance over the season.

If you are new to coaching this age group, our guide on how to coach youth basketball for the first time covers the communication and relationship side of getting a first season right.

Building on This Plan as the Season Progresses

Weeks 1-2: Run the plan above as written. Every activity is new. Do not add complexity.

Weeks 3-4: Add one constraint to the 3-on-3 game — you must make one pass before you can shoot. Teaches patience and vision without running a set play.

Weeks 5-6: Move to 4-on-4. Introduce a simple two-option entry: the ball handler can pass left or right, and cutters react to where the ball goes. One decision at a time.

For another full session built for first-year players, see our youth basketball practice plan for beginners, which has its own progression model you can borrow from as your group grows.

One More Thing

I had a 7-year-old last season who was scared to miss. She would pull her shot at the last second rather than go through with the attempt. By week four — after three straight practices of "elbow in, follow all the way through no matter what" — she let one go. It caught the backboard clean off the 8-foot rim. The look on her face is the whole reason we coach this age.

At 8U, you are not building plays. You are building kids who love the game enough to come back next season. This plan gives you 60 minutes of structure to do exactly that.