

Ball Skills

Rolling

Rolling is the first ball skill to target with your child.

- Sit on the floor facing your child and gently roll a soft ball to your child, saying “I roll it!”
- When the ball stops in front of your child, say “You roll it!” helping your child to push it back to you, if necessary.
- Continue to take turns rolling the ball back and forth, praising your child’s efforts with words like, “You did it! You rolled the ball!” or “Good rolling!”
- When your child masters this step, increase the difficulty by using balls of differing size, texture and firmness. You can also vary the distance between you and your child to change the level of difficulty.
- Include others in the game by having people sit in a circle and roll to the person across the circle or call out a person’s name before rolling to them.
- Your child can play the rolling game alone by rolling the ball to different objects or targets, i.e. under a chair, through a doorway, into a basket or bucket laying on the floor.

Tip: If the ball keeps rolling away, make a path or lane to guide the ball using cushions, broomsticks or blocks.

Throwing

Begin with two-handed throwing.

- Offer your child a soft ball he/she can hold with both hands at chest height. A soft ball will be easy for the child to grip or squash into their hands and won’t hurt if the child drops it or throws it with some force!
- From a few feet away, gently throw the ball toward the child, pushing it from your chest, saying “I throw it!” After it lands, tell your child “You throw it!”
- If your child needs help, get behind him/her to help your child pick up the ball, hold it near his/her chest and push it forward. You can help your child throw it toward a target or face him/her and take turns throwing it toward each other.

Tip: When learning to throw, don’t worry about catching as that skill comes later.



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Next target one-handed throwing.

- Use a soft ball that easily fits in your child's hand. To show your child how to throw, bring your hand up toward your ear, at shoulder-height with elbow bent. Gently throw the ball forward, straightening your elbow as you throw.
- Some children can copy this movement easily, and some children copy it better if you sit or kneel in front of them so they see you using the same arm (right or left) they will use.
- Tell your child, "You throw it!"
- Don't be surprised if your child's throwing motion doesn't look like yours! This is a skill that is a lot harder for some kids than others, so be patient and praise your child's attempts to throw!
- You can throw to each other, around/across a circle of people or toward a target like a basket, tub, bucket, hula hoop, etc.

Tip: Soft, toddler-sized balls (nerf, yarn or other soft materials) work well inside; child-sized playground balls, basketballs, baseballs and footballs are great for outside.

Catching

- Balloons that are slightly deflated are great for working on two-handed catching skills. Balloons move slowly allowing your child more time to anticipate and catch them successfully. Soft balloons and balls also won't hurt if your child doesn't respond quickly enough to catch.
- Other great options include, small beach balls and soft balls made of fabric, vinyl or squishy rubber.
- Facing your child, help him/her to hold his/her arms forward to prepare to catch. Gently throw the balloon or ball toward your child, saying "Catch it!" It may take several tries to catch the ball or balloon.

Tip: If learning to catch is difficult or frustrating, it may be helpful to have one person behind your child to help your child close his/her arms around the ball for a few catches. Keep things light and fun! Learning to catch can take time, so praise all your child's efforts!



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Kicking

Once your child can briefly stand on one foot (with or without an assistive device), he/she is ready to learn how to kick!

- Stand next to or a few feet from your child and model how to gently kick a ball.
- Place the ball in front of him/her and tell your child, “You kick it!”
- Your child may kick the ball immediately, miss the ball entirely, barely move it or fall over trying to kick! It’s ok to give your child support to keep him/her from falling or to move the ball a little closer or farther before kicking.
- Praise your child for effort, ball contact and ball movement!

Kicking toward a target is next.

- Once your child can make contact and move the ball, work on kicking toward a target.
- The target can be kicking to a person, a soccer goal, a bucket or barrel, a tree or other object.
- Sticks, blocks or other objects can be laid out to make a path for the ball if his/her aim needs a little help!

Tip: As accuracy improves, increase the distance to the target. Playing soccer or kick ball in the yard can help develop this skill. Kicking on different surfaces, like concrete, grass, dirt and sand will also increase strength.

Bats, Racquets and other Tools

As your child’s ball skills develop try adding bats, racquets, paddles, golf clubs, pool noodles and other toys to your child’s play time!

Tip: Watch out! Use care and allow your child plenty of space when your child begins to use bats, racquets and other toys to move the ball!

Remember to have fun!



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