

A parent's guide to ball skills (3 of 3)

FIVE TIPS FOR DEVELOPING BALL SKILLS

1. Practice

Mastering the skills of throwing, catching, kicking and hitting balls takes time. Not surprisingly, then, **your child need times to practise**. Choose a time when your child is not tired and is interested in playing with you. Practise a few times and observe your child's enthusiasm. Try to stop while your child is still having fun, so next time you suggest playing with a ball they will be keen.



2. Praise and encouragement

For children to practise these skills over and over again, they need adults to make them feel they are doing well. **Remember to encourage your child** as well as give them tips. Avoid looking

disappointed if your child misses the ball repeatedly or you frequently have to retrieve it.

3. Be realistic

Some children stop enjoying playing games with balls because they don't experience sufficient success for them to remain motivated. When setting up games, you should think about how you can allow your child to be successful. **It may mean moving targets closer or allowing your child to take some extra turns.**

4. Alternative objects

One of the problems when it comes to catching for children is the speed of the oncoming ball. Children find it hard to process and react to the ball. It is worth trying out other less aerodynamic objects that will give your child more time to react - try putting a balloon in a cloth bag or using a teddy bear.

5. Mix and match

It is worth experimenting to see what games your child likes. Some children find it easier to hit a ball with a mini golf club than a traditional bat, for example.

COMMON QUESTIONS

Q. My husband is frustrated that our four-year-old son isn't interested in football. How should we handle this?

A. Many dads dream of playing football or rugby with their sons. Sometimes it is partly about their concerns for their son's masculinity while for others it is about their own unfulfilled dreams. Kicking balls can also help them to bond.

However, **if your son is not enjoying it there is a danger that it might affect their relationship** and may even lead to him being turned off football permanently. Talk to your husband about this while recognising that he is not unusual in his desire to play football with his son. Perhaps a break from football might be the way forward, with a few other father-son activities on offer instead?

Q. My three-year-old looks at me, not the ball, when I throw it to him. Is this normal?

A. Providing this is your only concern about your child's vision, I wouldn't worry too much. At first, many children tend to focus on the thrower rather than the ball itself. Most adults also have to tell children to put out their arms to receive the ball in these initial

stages. Keep trying - eventually, your child will work it out.

ACTIVITIES

Catching bubbles

One of the earliest catching activities that children can have some success with is bubbles - they move slowly so allow time for children to react. They help improve babies' eye-tracking skills, and provide an early introduction to catching for toddlers.

Welly throwing

Children often find throwing wellies and other unusual objects good fun. **It makes a change from balls, helps build arm strength,** and illustrates how different shapes move when thrown.

Newspaper golf

For an indoor game, try newspaper golf. This is easy to set up and can help children learn to aim and co-ordinate their movements. Make the stick by rolling up a newspaper and keeping the edges together with a little sticky tape. See if your child can hit a sponge ball along the floor. An upturned container can be used as the 'hole'.