

SOFTBALL SKILLS

INTRODUCTION

This section was created to show coaches how to teach each skill correctly. The skills are broken down into small components, so that it is easier to teach and correct skills. All skills are taught in progressions so that the coach & children do not get overwhelmed in a lot of detail. The skills should be taught in progressions with emphasis on correct technique, not outcome.

CATCHING

GLOVE ORIENTATION DRILLS

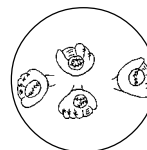
The teaching cues should be emphasized throughout the lessons in all catching drills so that the proper catching techniques become automatic.

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ ball above the waist — fingers up or thumbs together
- ▶ ball below the waist — fingers down or thumbs apart
- ▶ like moving glove around a CLOCK FACE to catch ball up, down, to sides, always with the palm facing the thrower
- ▶ keep glove hand BEHIND the ball
- ▶ have throwing hand ready to help out and be close by so player is ready to throw
- ▶ reach toward the ball and let glove give on contact with the ball (soft hands)
- ▶ give a target with glove to thrower

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Start with NO ball to practice moving glove around the clock face.
2. Each player has their own ball to do a self-toss into the air to develop a comfortable feeling for the glove and hand-eye co-ordination.
3. Coach or adult throws ball softly and directly at player so they only have to move their glove to catch.
4. Coach or adult throws the ball a bit to the left or right so player has to move feet slightly to catch.
5. When players throwing and catching skills have developed, they can play catch with each other. Until that point, they will spend a lot of time chasing the ball after they miss it.



THROWING

THROWING PROGRESSION

Feedback on mechanics should be given at every opportunity as long as it doesn't interfere too much with the **FUN** the players are having.

TEACHING CUES

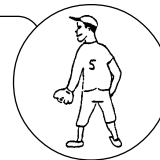
- ▶ grip ball across the seams with fingers (however many fingers to give best control).
- ▶ elbow as high as shoulder and at 90-degree angle on take back
- ▶ stride foot and glove point at target (left for right handers)
- ▶ hips open (to right for right handers) when arm is back and up and close to target as the arm comes over top
- ▶ glove hand comes down and back (like a piston) in opposition to the throwing arm as the throwing arm moves forward
- ▶ weight moves from back foot to stride foot as throwing action starts
- ▶ wrist should be underneath the ball as the arm comes forward to release the ball to produce a reverse spin on the ball
- ▶ on follow through, the body should continue rotating until the throwing shoulder is pointing at the target – throwing hand continues down to or past the opposite hip, palm down

TEACHING PROGRESSION

NO BALL

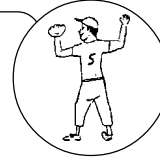
1

Put stride foot (glove side) into stride position with other foot angled slightly open to make it easier to open up the hips.



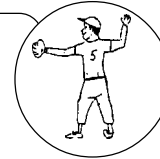
2

Have players stand in "scarecrow" position.



3

Point glove hand at target and open hips up to throwing side.

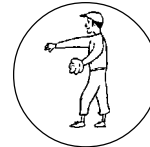


- 4 Practice arm and hip action (open and close the door with hips) with NO step (the stride foot is already in place).
- 5 Arm action is down, around, back and up and over. This is similar to a swimming action except the throwing arm leads with the elbow in order to get under the ball and throw directly over the top to produce an accurate over the top throw.

hips open; arm moves down and up



hips close-throwing arm over top-glove arm down

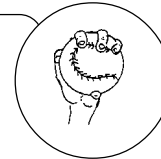


- 6 Complete the throwing action with no ball. Practice taking step as hips open, glove hand points to target and throwing arm moves down, around, back and up into throwing position.

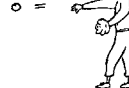
WITH BALL

1

Practice proper grip on the ball.



- 2 Still with stride foot forward (no moving step), practice hip and arm action by tossing a ball back and forth to a partner (or coach if skill level is very low).



- 3 Start with feet parallel, about shoulder width apart, and take a step at the target as hips are opening and arm is going back into throwing position. Throw the ball back and forth trying to produce correct mechanics.

FIELDING FLY BALLS

FLY BALL PROGRESSION

The teaching cues should be emphasized throughout the lessons in all catching drills so that the proper fielding of fly balls becomes automatic.

TEACHING CUES

- ready position: feet shoulder width apart, weight evenly distributed, knees slightly bent, hands slightly above waist



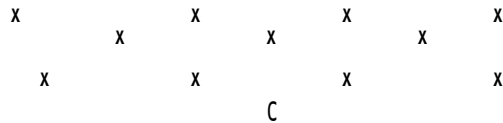
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- ▶ get under the ball quickly, then wait for it if there is time rather than moving at the last second
- ▶ try to catch ball above the head and out in front with fingers up, if possible, rather than down by the waist or knees with fingers down
- ▶ run with arms bent, not extended
- ▶ have throwing hand ready to help out and be close by so player is ready to throw
- ▶ reach toward the ball and let the glove give on contact with ball (soft hands). Pretend the ball is an uncooked egg you don't want to break when it hits your hands. Always use a crossover step when moving back to catch a ball. NEVER backpedal!

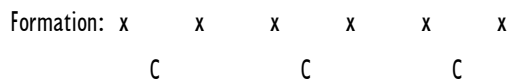
TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Start with NO ball to practice moving feet quickly to get underneath the ball. The coach can point in the direction the ball is going and players can pretend the ball is thrown. Move to get underneath and use proper "soft hand" motion to make pretend catch.

Formation:



2. Each player has their own ball to do a self toss into the air to practice fielding the ball above the head with soft hands and moving feet to get underneath. Start with NO GLOVE to get them using 2 hands comfortably and progress to using a glove.
3. Coach or adult throws ball up into the air with slight arc but directly to the player.



4. Coach or adult throws ball with increasingly higher arc, but still directly to player.
5. Coach or adult throws the ball a bit to left or right so player has to move feet to get underneath.
6. Coach or adult throws the ball high in air but a bit behind to the left or right of the player so they have to drop back with crossover step to get underneath.
7. When players throwing and catching skills have developed, they can throw the ball high in the air to each other. Until that point, they will spend a lot of time chasing the ball.

FIELDING GROUND BALLS

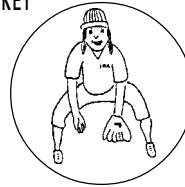
GROUND BALL PROGRESSION

The teaching cues should be emphasized throughout the lessons in all fielding drills so that the proper fielding of grounders becomes automatic.

TEACHING CUES

READY POSITION:

- ▶ butt low, weight on balls of feet, hands low and open, feet spread, elbows between but in front of knee (not locked in). Cue word: MONKEY



FIELDING THE BALL:

- ▶ get body in front of ball so there is no reach to either side of the body to get the glove on the ball
- ▶ stay low with knees bent to get glove on ball rather than just bending at the waist
- ▶ glove side foot is slightly ahead when picking up the ball to help keep body balanced as the glove and throwing hand reach in front of the body to field the ball
- ▶ hands are well out in front of body (NOT back between the legs), and just touching the ground
- ▶ make sure the glove is open with fingers down
- ▶ reach toward the ball and let the glove give on contact with the ball (soft hands). As you absorb the ball back into the body, you should bring it up into the throwing position.
- ▶ trap the ball in the glove with the throwing hand
- ▶ watch the ball all the way into the glove
- ▶ step toward the target with the stride foot to throw

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Demonstrate proper technique.
2. **STATIONARY BALL** — place a number of balls on the ground in various locations so that players have to move around the area practicing getting the ball in FRONT of the

HITTING

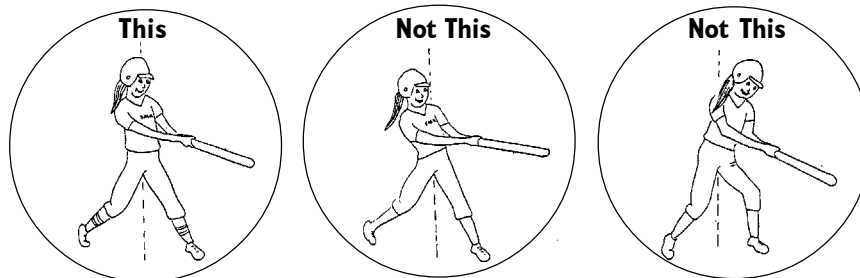
HITTING PROGRESSION

The teaching cues should be emphasized throughout the lessons in all hitting station drills so that proper stride and hip action becomes automatic.

TEACHING CUES

Although there are many aspects to being a successful hitter, at this age, it is important to develop only the key components.

- ▶ **Grip:** Hold the bat with the MIDDLE knuckles lined up to give maximum flexibility in the wrists. This grip puts the wrist of the top hand facing up and wrist of the bottom hand facing down on contact with the ball.
- ▶ **Stance:** Relaxed, with FRONT ARM BENT at approx. 90 degree angle with hands by back shoulder but slightly away from the body. Front shoulder slightly DOWN.
- ▶ **Stride:** SHORT (2 - 3 inches), foot CLOSED (front toe remains pointing at IB for right-handed batter, does NOT open up toward the pitcher).
- ▶ **Hip Rotation:** Hips start facing the plate and FINISH FACING THE PITCHER. If belly button was a flashlight, the flashlight would move from shining on IB (right handed batters) to shining on the pitcher as the swing was completed. A key observation for coach to make is to see if the BACK HEEL IS FACING THE SKY on the completion of the swing. Hip rotation should also be on a vertical axis with the shoulders staying back over the center of gravity, not lunging forward over the front foot.



HIP ROTATION IS A KEY COMPONENT TO THE SWING AND COACHES SHOULD MAKE EVERY EFFORT TO MAKE SURE PLAYERS ARE USING THEIR HIPS AND NOT JUST THEIR ARMS WHEN THEY SWING.

- ▶ **Arm Action:** Hands are taken to the ball first with the bat head following to make contact IN FRONT OF THE PLATE. Wrists snap on contact with the back wrist facing up as if hammering a nail into the wall facing sideways. Contact in front of the plate is of vital importance to a correct swing and can be assured and practiced without much teaching if the

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coach makes sure that the batting T is ALWAYS SET UP IN FRONT OF THE PLATE and not sitting on top of the plate. When practicing off a coach soft toss, it is also crucial that the ball be tossed IN FRONT OF THE PLATE and not back toward the stomach of the player trying to hit it.



- **Follow Through:** The wrists roll AFTER making contact with the ball. This can be assured by just telling the batter to finish with the bat IN THE CENTER OF THEIR BACK on the completion of the swing. This will also ensure that they are swinging THROUGH the ball and not getting in the habit of stopping their bat on contact.

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Every player has a bat, standing a safe distance from one another.
Remind players of 2 things they **MUST ALWAYS REMEMBER FOR SAFETY:**
 - I. **NEVER SWING A BAT WITHOUT CHECKING BEHIND TO SEE IF SOMEONE IS THERE.**
 - II. **NEVER WALK UP BEHIND SOMEONE HOLDING A BAT WITHOUT LETTING THEM KNOW YOU ARE THERE.**
2. Demonstrate correct swing with emphasis on short closed stride and hip rotation. Point to the players to watch for these 2 key elements so they get a correct picture of what they are to do.
3. NO BAT — (bat is set on ground beside them for this part) Practice taking short, closed stride and immediately “Slamming the door” with the hips as soon as the stride foot touches the ground.
4. Show and practice proper grip with MIDDLE knuckles lined up.
5. Complete swing: Practice taking complete swing by imagining there is a ball out in front of the plate. Have the players keep their eyes on the plate THROUGHOUT THE SWING. This will help them keep their head and eyes on the ball.

Emphasize: Proper stride and hip rotation and finishing with the bat in middle of their back.

IF YOU CAN GET YOUR PLAYERS TO MASTER THESE 3 COMPONENTS OF THE SWING BY THE END OF THE YEAR, YOU WILL HAVE MADE A MAJOR CONTRIBUTION TO THEIR SUCCESS LATER ON.

REMINDER: ALWAYS PLACE THE HITTING T IN FRONT OF THE PLATE WHEN PRACTICING. ALWAYS SOFT TOSS IN FRONT OF THE PLATE. TRY TO GET PLAYERS TO SELF TOSS IN FRONT OF THE PLATE WHEN LEARNING TO FUNGO HIT. This process can be helped by ALWAYS USING A PLATE when practicing hitting.

BASERUNNING**RUNNING THROUGH 1B**

The teaching cues should be emphasized throughout the lessons in all baserunning drills so that proper techniques become automatic.

TEACHING CUES

Proper running techniques to develop speed:

- ▶ high knees in front
- ▶ foot to bum on back kick
- ▶ drive with arms in straight line (not swinging arms across body)
- ▶ arms are kept at 90-degree angle when they swing to the front
- ▶ lean forward when getting out of box to help drive body forward
- ▶ run full speed through 1B, turn right and return directly to 1B, with NO motion to go to 2B

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Start with no bat. Take a full swing at a pretend ball without a bat. Then run as fast as possible through 1B.
2. Use a bat, but NO BALL. Take a swing, drop the bat, then run. This will help players learn not to throw the bat after the swing.

ROUNDING THE BASE**TEACHING CUES**

- ▶ loop slightly outside the baseline on approach to base
- ▶ step on the INSIDE CORNER of the bag with whatever foot is in sequence at that point
- ▶ lean and turn as the base is touched to help get a sharper turn on the corner

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TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Walk the players through the proper rounding of the base first, so they learn to make the little loop outside the baseline.
2. Place marker just outside the baseline so players learn to go to the outside before approaching the base.



3. Remove the markers but place a coach just outside the baseline on the other side of the base so that players are forced to cut in front to emphasize cutting a sharp corner. This will also force them to loop first because they won't be able to cut the corner sharp enough unless they do.

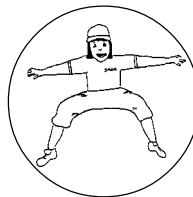


ROUND AND JAM

Round and jam should be used on hits which go through the infield. If the player can proceed to 2nd, they do so. If not, they must "jam" and get ready to get back to 1st when the throw comes into the infield or continue to 2nd if ball is missed when thrown back into the infield.

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ jam a body length away from the base
- ▶ keep body low and feet wide
- ▶ hands out, ready to go either direction



ROUND - JAM - DIVE BACK

Situation is the same as in a "Round and Jam". They have to know how to dive back to the base they just rounded in case the throw goes to that base to pick them off.

TEACHING CUES

All teaching cues from round and jam plus:

- ▶ dive back with body facing away from incoming throw usually from the infield



- ▶ reach with one hand (right hand if ball is coming from the infield) for the base to turn the body away from the ball
- ▶ turn face away from the direction of the incoming throw
- ▶ keep hips low and slide on front of thighs

LEAVING THE BASE

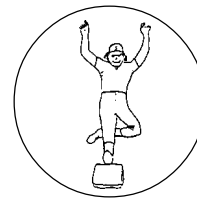
TEACHING CUES

- ▶ start in front of the base with one foot on the base and the other out in front as in a racing start
- ▶ push AGAINST the base
- ▶ keep body low to start and gradually rise to proper running position
- ▶ EXPLODE from the base

SLIDING

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ arms up over head
- ▶ chin tucked
- ▶ bent leg has side of foot on the ground and in crook of knee
- ▶ toe of extended leg pointed to the sky
- ▶ slide taken on buttocks, not side of hip and leg

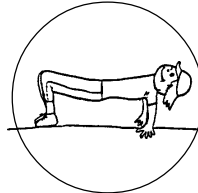


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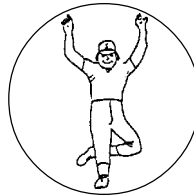
TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Get someone to demonstrate proper technique or at least get someone to lay down and show the final position.

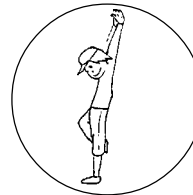
2. Players start on ground in the following position:



3. Next, they lift their hands and tuck leg (either leg is OK but left is preferred, for future advanced sliding, if they are comfortable that way). Do this a few times so they get the feeling of tucking their leg under and raising their hands.



4. Stand in a line: each player takes a walking step, and practices throwing hands in the air, throwing hip outward, tucking leg, and TUCKING CHIN (look at your toes). Remain in upright position. This is important to give them the feeling of tucking their chin so they don't snap their head back onto the ground when they start doing the slide on the ground.



arms overhead
chin tucked

leg tucked behind

5. Put player in between 2 adults who will be holding their hands. Walk forward. On "hit it", the player goes into a bent leg slide with the adults help. Progress to a slow jog doing the same thing.

6. When players are confident, let them go "solo".

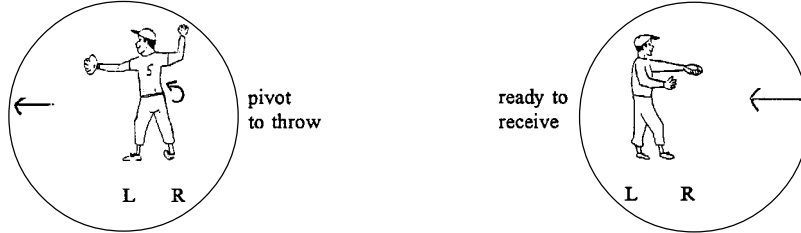
RELAY TURN

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ reminder of all proper throwing cues
- ▶ make the quickest turn when rotating which is to turn to the GLOVE side
- ▶ always give a glove target at shoulder height when receiving a throw

TEACHING PROGRESSION

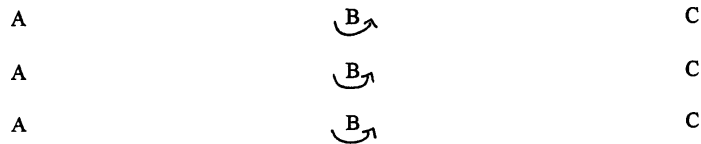
1. Demonstrate proper technique.



2. Practice movement with NO BALL, with players in a line pretending to receive a ball thrown by the Coach then turning to make throw behind them.



3. Make groups of 3 positioned as shown. A pretends to throw to B, who mimics a catch and makes a proper relay turn, then pretends to throw to C.



4. Rotate all 3 players through center position.
5. Use a ball in the drill. Start slowly at first, making sure center player is turning in correct direction for a quick throw.
6. If time permits and players are able, this can progress into a relay competition between teams of 3.

PITCHING PROGRESSION

CO-ORDINATION DRILL

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ relaxed arm, slight bend in elbow
- ▶ palm faces backward and snaps forward as arm passes leg

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- ▶ pretend to let go of ball as arm brushes past leg
- ▶ co-ordinate opening and closing of hips with dropping of arm
- ▶ front leg straightens as arm reaches contact point
- ▶ shoulders stay **BACK** over top of the hips

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Demonstrate proper technique.
2. Start with glove side foot in stride position (a long walking step directly ahead of the other foot). Pivot foot is directly behind stride foot but toed slightly outward. Put pitching arm back into pendulum position with palm facing backwards, in relaxed position (elbow **NOT** locked).

3. Let arm fall in relaxed manner so that the arm brushes past the side of the leg on the way past.

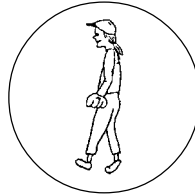


palm facing back

4. Once a relaxed drop of the arm is consistent, concentrate on opening up the hips (belly button faces right for right-handers) when the arm is up and back, and closing the hips (belly button faces catcher) when the arm passes the side of leg.
5. Once the co-ordination is consistent, make sure the front leg (stride leg) straightens as the arm falls downward. Also make sure shoulders are kept back over the hips so the young pitcher doesn't get in the habit of bending at the waist on the release.



hips open



hips close

- ▶ both arms drop
- ▶ may come up on back toe to help push hips closed
- ▶ shoulders over hips

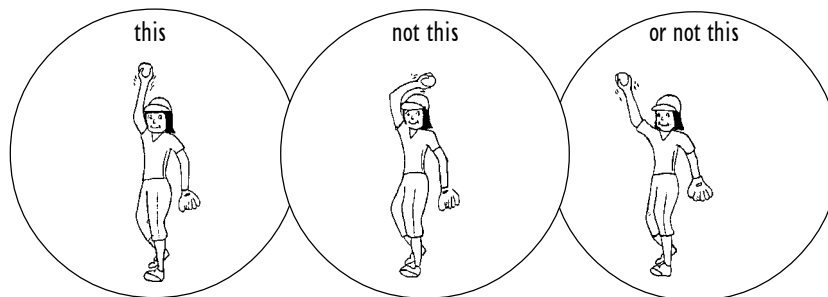
ARM CIRCLES AND HIP THRUSTS

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ arm starts straightforward and moves past the ear on its way around
- ▶ arm circles go straight out in front and straight down behind
- ▶ glove hand moves forward with throwing arm until throwing arm starts the move backward
- ▶ glove hand moves downward at the same time as the throwing arm starts to move downward (they move in coordination with each other)
- ▶ arm circles are fast and large as possible, but **RELAXED**
- ▶ arm circles are co-ordinated with the opening and closing of the hips. Hips open when arm is at top of circle and close as it comes downward past the leg
- ▶ arm (somewhere between elbow and wrist) **MUST** brush past the side of the leg
- ▶ arm follows past the release point (at side of leg) in **RELAXED** action toward the target

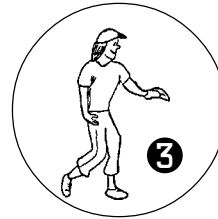
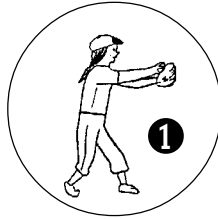
TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Stand with glove side leg in stride position as in **CO-ORDINATION DRILL** from Lesson 1.
2. Make **large-relaxed arm circles** straight out in front and down behind, making sure to watch for elbow being loose (but not bent over head) and for arm staying **close to the ear**.

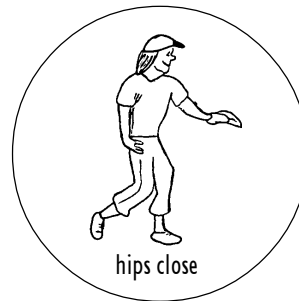
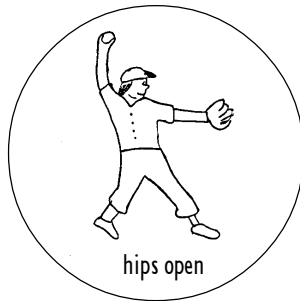


3. Once arm circles are correct, focus on using the glove hand in co-ordination with the arm circle. Both move out together and down together.

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4. Once the arm circle and glove hand are co-ordinated, focus on opening and closing the hips in co-ordination with the arm circle. Open hips at top of arm circle and close at bottom as arm passes the hip.



GRIP

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ grip with 3 fingers across seams (same as for the overhand throw)
- ▶ grip as loosely as possible but still maintain control of the ball
- ▶ grip in fingers (not palm) if hand is large enough

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Demonstrate grip.
2. Make sure all players get the proper grip on the ball.
3. Practice getting grip on the ball in glove without looking.

STATIC PITCHING

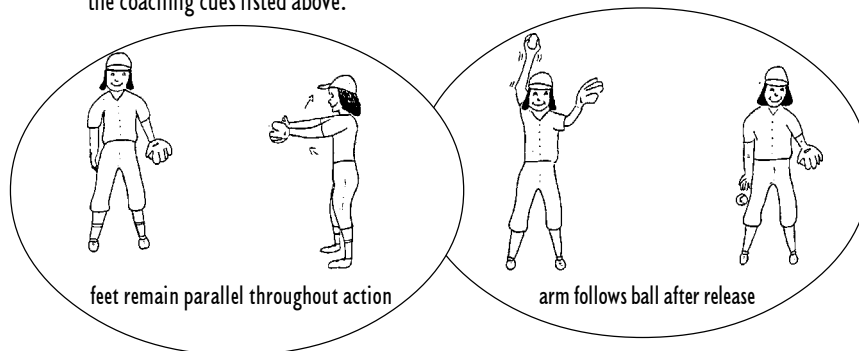
TEACHING CUES

- ▶ complete large RELAXED arm circles. Make sure arm is close to ear
- ▶ release ball at side of leg

- ▶ arm brushes past side of leg on release. Should work toward hearing a “whooshing” sound
- ▶ use glove hand in co-ordination with throwing arm
- ▶ follow through to target with the throwing arm after the release
- ▶ **KEEP SHOULDERS BACK OVER TOP HIPS ON RELEASE**
- ▶ hips should face target on release. Correct immediately any tendency to throw the throwing side hip backward on release
- ▶ legs are straight on release (FINISH TALL)
- ▶ WHIP or FLING the ball - do not aim the ball

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Stand with feet PARALLEL, shoulder width apart. Feet REMAIN STILL throughout this drill. Isolate the whipping action of the arm to find the release spot at the side of the leg. Learn to keep shoulder back on the release.
2. Practice the arm and whipping action with NO BALL.
3. Practice whipping the ball to coach a short distance away. Make sure to give feedback on the coaching cues listed above.



HIP PITCHING

TEACHING CUES

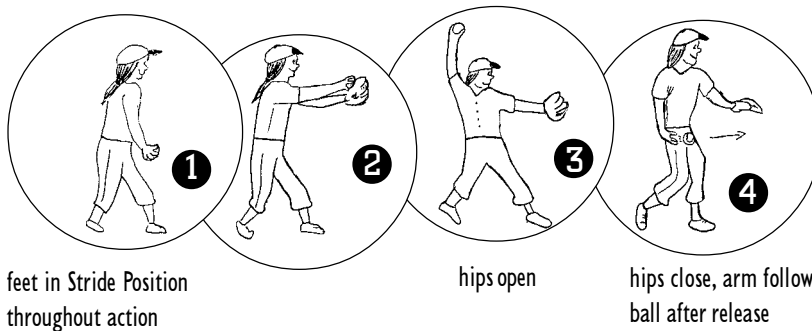
- ▶ feet must be in stride position (same as in co-ordination drill). Feet MUST be directly in front of one another. Toes angled slightly to pitching arm side
- ▶ complete large RELAXED arm circles. Make sure arm is close to ear
- ▶ release ball at side of leg
- ▶ arm brushes past side of leg on release. Should work toward hearing a “whooshing” sound

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- ▶ use glove hand in co-ordination with throwing arm
- ▶ follow through to target with the throwing arm after the release
- ▶ **KEEP SHOULDERS BACK OVER TOP HIPS ON RELEASE**
- ▶ hips open when arm is at top of circle and close as it comes down to brush past the side of the leg
- ▶ hips should face target on release. Correct immediately any tendency to throw the throwing side hip backward on release
- ▶ come up on back toe as hips come forward and ball is released. This will allow the hips to close all the way
- ▶ front leg is straight on release (**FINISH TALL**)
- ▶ **WHIP** or **FLING** the ball. Do not aim the ball

TEACHING CUES

1. Stand with feet in **STRIDE POSITION**. Front foot **REMAINS STILL** throughout this drill. It is to isolate the whipping action of the arm, to find the release spot at the side of the leg, and to learn to keep shoulders back on the release. The back foot will come up on the toe as the hips move forward to allow the ball to be released at the side of the leg.
2. Practice the arm whipping action and hips opening and closing with **NO BALL**.
3. Practice whipping the ball to a coach a short distance away. Make sure to give feedback on the coaching cues listed above.



STRIDE ACTION

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ stand on pitcher's plate with pivot foot (right for right handers) slightly ahead of the left (left toe is across from right heel) and about shoulder width apart

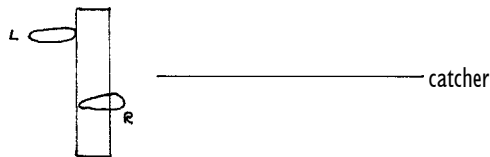
- ▶ turn pivot toe slightly outward just prior to push off to enable hips to open easier
- ▶ push forward off pivot foot
- ▶ stride STRAIGHT at catcher with left foot in an extended walking step
- ▶ stride should be EXPLOSIVE
- ▶ springing off pivot foot will help explosion
- ▶ back foot (right for righties) should drag on the outside of the big toe

TEACHING PROGRESSION

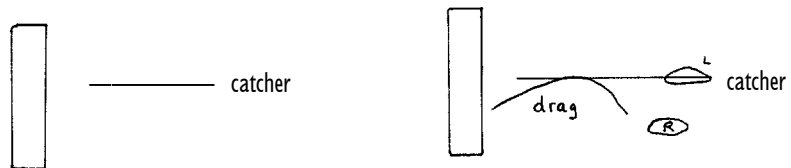
1. Draw a pitching plate for each player in the dirt.
2. Draw a line in the dirt perpendicular to the pitching plate toward the catcher.



3. Teach proper footwork on pitching plate and have player practice getting on plate with feet in correct position.



4. Practice stepping out EXPLOSIVELY and dragging back foot.



COMPLETE PITCH ACTION - NO BALL

TEACHING CUES

- ▶ stand on pitching plate WITH HANDS APART. PRETEND THERE'S A BALL IN YOUR GLOVE
- ▶ stand on pitcher's plate with pivot foot (right for right handers) slightly ahead of the left (left toe is across from right heel) and about shoulder width apart

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- ▶ turn pivot toe slightly outward just prior to push off to enable hips to open easier
- ▶ push forward off pivot foot
- ▶ stride STRAIGHT at catcher with left foot in an extended walking step
- ▶ stride should be EXPLOSIVE
- ▶ springing off pivot foot will help explosion
- ▶ back foot (right for righties) should drag on the outside of the big toe
- ▶ as push starts with pivot foot and stride foot starts forward, BOTH hands move forward so that glove hand can be used in co-ordination with pitching side
- ▶ all cues from hip pitching apply here as well
- ▶ follow through with leg is to get the pivot foot, after dragging, to finish up beside (slightly farther than shoulder width apart) the stride foot

TEACHING PROGRESSION

1. Review stride with no arm action as in stride from previous lesson using pitching plate and line drawn in the dirt.
2. Incorporate arm action with stride action (NO BALL).
3. Do a “Mechanics Check” on each of the key components as players are practicing this complete pitching action. Players can only concentrate on ONE thing at a time so ask them to FOCUS on one key point at a time and provide FEEDBACK on only one thing at a time.

Checkpoints: ▶ arm circles - relaxed, large, close to head

- ▶ use of glove arm
- ▶ stride straight at target
- ▶ front leg straight on release
- ▶ shoulders back over top hips, not bent at waist.
- ▶ release point off side of leg
- ▶ hips closed to catcher on release
- ▶ follow through with arm following ball after release
- ▶ follow through with pivot foot up beside stride foot

COMPLETE PITCH ACTION – WITH BALL

All cues and teaching progression are the same as with no ball, except that now, a ball is used.