

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

INTRODUCTION

It is very important for coaches to be aware of the developmental characteristics of children of different ages. Young children do not have the same capabilities as older children, consequently practices have to be modified for different age groups. Methods that work with older children may not be the best for younger children. Young children need to participate in activities and progressions where they experience success, not frustration. They enjoy learning new skills and playing lead-up games. Hundreds of repetitions are necessary to develop the skills to play a full game of Softball and these will be obtained through the games approach of the **PARMALAT LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**.

Program goals at younger age levels should include learning the basic skills of Softball and developing positive feelings towards the game, including the desire to improve skills and continue playing. The game of Softball involves many of the basic movement skills that are found in other sports — throwing, catching, running, striking. These are the building blocks that children will need to participate in many physical activities, hopefully for a lifetime. Thus, it is valuable for all children to develop proficiency in these basic skills no matter what sport they eventually specialize in.

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG CHILDREN

Short attention span:

- short practices
- variety of activities
- short explanations

Like a lot of action:

- maximum activity in small groups
- maximum use of equipment
- **ACTION** more important than perfection

Mature at different rates:

- practice at own skill level
- checklist to assess readiness so skills can be introduced at the appropriate time

Low ability to work in complex situations:

- introduce complex activities gradually
- keep competition simple with a low number of players

Low level of fine motor co-ordination:

- use of modified equipment (softer balls)
- parent helpers allow for individual work
- skill learning takes place in practice situations
- recognize proper skills are only used in competition once it is fully assimilated

Low ability to track objects, especially if moving in an arc:

- provide maximum repetitions for practice
- simple games in smaller areas
- use of softer, lighter balls which travel more slowly
- yellow balls if possible – they are easier to track

Egocentric:

- priority is **FUN** – playing simple drills/games
- need everybody wins, nobody loses situations
- simple games which require low level of teamwork

High desire to please coaches/parents:

- criticism or praise results in them being crushed or elated

Low ability to assess competence. Like chameleons, attitudes of coach/parents have tremendous effect on how player feels:

- if coach emphasizes or rewards effort, player will be satisfied

Low ability to think abstractly, think ahead, anticipate, cope with stress:

- play games with simple rules, low level competition

Limited ability to make decisions (even to protect self from injury):

- simple activities, requiring limited skills using modified equipment

READINESS MODEL

Every child who enters the sport of Softball has the right to choose to eventually strive for excellence or to participate recreationally. To ensure that players can make the best choice for them later in life, the Coach must provide the opportunities and experiences to form a solid base of the fundamental skills of the game of Softball. The comprehensive hierarchy of skills listed here should help coaches and administrators appreciate the complexity of the sport and the number of skills required to play it well. It should be clear that it is necessary to introduce the skills of Softball and competition with a gradual progression.

PREREQUISITE SKILLS

The following list of skills should be developed in Level I as well as through the childrens' school and home activities:

- basic body movement skills
- hand-eye co-ordination
- time awareness
- quickness
- body awareness
- ability to mimic skills
- spacial awareness (high-medium-low)
- group interaction
- listening skills
- quick response to directions
- aerobic fitness through play

SPECIFIC SPORT SKILLS

DEFENCE		PSYCHOLOGICAL	OFFENCE	
CATCHING	THROWING		HITTING	BASERUNNING
Flies Grounders	Basic Throwing	Social Skills	Contact Bunting	Running Sliding
Specific Positions	Specialty Throws	Physical Conditioning		
DEFENSIVE STRATEGIES		PHYSICAL	OFFENSIVE STRATEGIES	

HIERARCHY OF SKILLS

The skills included here are intended to be taught over a period of time from entry into Softball until Midget. Suggestions for the age level to be taught are included, but coaches will have to be flexible depending on the ability level of the players involved.

LTP	Parmalat Learn to Play	(under 10)
M	Mite	(under 10)
S	Squirt	(under 12)
PW	Pee Wee	(under 14)
B	Bantam	(under 16)
Mi	Midget	(under 19)

OFFENCE					
SKILL	LTP or MITE	SQUIRT	PEE WEE	BANTAM	MIDGET
Contact					
Select Bats		●			
Basic Swing	●	●			
- grip					
- stance					
- hip rotation					
- swing					
Correcting Faults	●	●	●	●	●
Tracking				●	
- vision					
- focus					
Concentration					
Adjustments				●	●
- timing					
- use counter					
- study pitcher					
Hitting Routines					●
- on deck					
- at bat					
- after bat					
Slumps					●
- causes					
- remedies					
Bunting					
Sacrifice		●			
- pivot					
- strategy					
Drag			●		
Push			●		
Squeeze				●	
Slap				●	●
Running Slap					●
Fake-slap bunt					●
Baserunning					
Getting out of the box	●	●			
Running through 1B	●	●			
Jamming	●	●			
Jam-Dive back	●	●			
Lead off from base		●			
Force Play		●			
Steals					
- 2B		●			
- 3B			●		
Tag up-draw throw			●		
1st & 3rd situation			●	●	
Delayed steal			●	●	
Getting out of Hot Box				●	●
Sliding					
Bent Leg		●			
Backdoor					
- bent leg			●		
- rounding base	●	●			
- head first			●		
Pop Up				●	●

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DEFENCE					
SKILL	LTP or MITE	SQUIRT	PEE WEE	BANTAM	MIDGET
THROWING					
Basic Overhead	●	●			
- preparatory phase					
- propulsion phase					
- release phase					
- follow through					
Accuracy	●	●			
Speed throwing			●		
- quickness out of the glove					
- throwing hard					
Snap Throw			●		
- ready position					
- dart throw standing					
- dart throw moving					
Underhand toss					
- stationary	●				
- moving		●			
CATCHING					
Fly balls	●	●			
- ready position					
- glove position					
- ball judgement					
- soft hands					
- foot movement					
-use 2 hands					
Grounders	●	●	●		
- ready position					
- stationary ball					
- foot movement					
- moving ball					
- shuffle step					
- cross-over step					
- soft hands					
TEAM STRATEGIES					
General					
- learn each position equally	●				
- priorities		●			
Specific Defense					
- bases loaded		●	●		
- steals of 2B			●		
- relays			●		
- double plays			●		
Bunt Defense				●	
- runner at 1B				●	
- runner at 2B				●	
- runner at 3B				●	
- runners at 1B and 2B				●	
Rundowns				●	
Defense - Ball to Outfield			●	●	
- single no runners					
- single with runners					
- extra bases - no runners					
- extra bases - runners					
Runners at 1st and 3rd					
- 1 option			●		
- other options				●	●
Squeeze play				●	
Steals of 3B				●	
Cutting run off at home				●	
Runner at 3B				●	
- options					●
Defend slappers					●