

Ball skills

► What is it?

Ball skills is a complex skill. This is because ball skills tasks involve using many different skills at the same time such as:

be able to stand still & balance, judge force of throw, judge speed & distance, bilateral integration (use of two hands together), be able to eye track moving objects, body awareness, the ability to time movement, and anticipate then respond to a moving object

► What are the implications?

Children with ball skills problems may have difficulties with:

- The ability to catch a ball/ object
- The ability to throw a ball/ object in a particular direction, or towards a target.
- The ability to roll a ball.
- The ability to use a bat and ball together.
- The ability to kick a ball in a particular direction, or to a goal/ target.
- The ability to stop (or receive) a ball that has been kicked to you.
- Impacts on child's ability to play activities and school-based activities in PE or in the playground with their peers.

► Why are ball skills needed?

Ball skills are a fun way to learn underlying skills that children will need to complete throughout their childhood and as adults.

Catching helps to develop:

- The use of two hands together – needed for using cutlery, tying shoelaces, fastening buttons.
- Understanding of speed and distance – needed for road safety, avoiding collisions with other children, playing games.
- Hand eye coordination – needed for handwriting, arts and crafts, fine motor activities.

Throwing helps to develop:

- Understanding of force and grading movement – needed in play and self-care activities.
- Understanding of direction and spatial skills – needed in play and daily tasks.

Kicking helps to develop:

- Ability to balance on one leg – needed when dressing, and in many play activities
- Judging force and direction.

► How to grade ball skill development

Ball skills games can be very frustrating because you either catch it or not and children are very aware of their difficulty and can become easily frustrated and demotivated. Activities need to be graded to reflect the child's developing skills and enable them to achieve success. Children learn best when participating in activities that are just the right challenge - not too easy or too difficult.



- Try practicing with slower moving objects such as balloons, blowing bubbles, scarves, beach balls, larger balls, small bean bags, foam balls etc.
- Start with activities where either the child or the ball is static such as throwing, catching, kicking a stationary ball on the spot). Then move to activities where both the child and ball are in motion e.g., dribbling a football.
- Start with big balls and heavy bean bags and work towards lighter smaller balls.
- Ensure you get child's attention first to let them know the ball is coming towards them.
- Ensure child is concentrating and following the objects with their eyes (many children close their eyes or turn head as an object moves towards them).
- If child really struggling stand behind them to give hand over hand assistance of the required hand position during the activity.
- When using target, start big and work towards smaller targets.
- Start by standing near the target or each other and then increase the distances involved.
- Start with the ball moving slowly then increase the speed that the ball travels at.

► Activity ideas

- Balloon keepy uppy – get child to hold hand flat with palm up towards ceiling see picture). Get them to gently pat balloon up (to eye level), get them watch the balloon, allow balloon to come down to child's waist level and then time movement for balloon to travel up again. Move on to other hand, then to alternate hands (pat left hand, then right hand, then left hand and so on). See if they can increase number of successful hits. Don't let them run around after it, try to encourage them to stand still. If palm flat to the ceiling, then balloon should travel upwards.



- Blowing bubbles – blow many bubbles into an open space. Ask the child to pop them by clapping their hands together on each bubble. Blow bubbles within easy reach of the child to reduce the need to chase after them. Record how many bubbles popped in a minute.

- Rolling ball – roll ball towards a goal, start with a big goal and reduce target size. See how many points they can score in a minute etc. Progress to skittle type games – start with large ball close and then increase distance and decrease size of ball.
- Target throwing – make some balls from rolled up socks or use bean bags. Throw them into a hoop/ bin/box. Vary target size and distance away from target. Start with underarm throwing, and progress onto a chest pass and overarm throwing.



- Throw and catch – get child to stand still and throw a bean bag or large ball up in the air (to eye level) and catch it. Once skill developed the height thrown can be increased, different types of balls can be tried, and try throwing/ catching with one hand. Start with throwing up in air and then progress onto throwing and catching with another person.
- Balloon volleyball – using a balloon to bat back and forth to each other. Try using a racquet to bat balloon back and forth to each other.
- Bounce and catch – bounce a large ball off the floor and catch with two hands. Encourage them to hold ball at waist height, bounce it once, and child needs to look at the ball to help with judging speed and return of bounce. Reduce the size of ball until child can catch a tennis ball. Build up to bouncing and catching with one hand.



- Bounce a ball to another person – when able to bounce and catch allow them to throw the ball, with a single bounce to another person. The ball is then returned back to child in the same way. Once this is achieved progress onto a smaller ball. Increase the distance between each other. Then throw and catch without bounce.
- Throwing and catching against the wall – practice with large soft ball and throw underarm back and forth, add a bounce, try it against a wall. Practice with two hands. As skills progress try reducing size of ball and using one hand.
- Hitting the ball (stationary) - start by hitting a stationary ball. A 'T' stand like a large golf tee will help eye/hand co-ordination. Start with child hitting the ball with their hand (using a soft/ foam ball) before introducing a bat or racquet. Progress to bat/ racquet with large surface area.
- Hitting the ball (moving/ travelling) – start by throwing ball from a short distance. When ball thrown to child, allow the ball to bounce before it is hit to help child with timing.



- Ball and racquet games e.g., swing-ball, tennis, badminton.
- Kicking - practice kicking with one leg then the other. Kick the ball into a wide goal and narrow these as your child progresses. A ball can be kicked with the front of foot which makes which allows the ball to travel further. The ball kicked on the side/ instep of the foot allows close control.
- Penalty kick – ask your child to put the football on a spot and then kick it into the goal from a stationary position. Start with a soft ball. Once mastered this make the goal smaller, progress to harder ball, and increase the distance to aim at.
- Dribbling – get your child to kick the ball very gently from one foot to the other. They should gently tap the ball with one foot so that the ball moves slowly to the other. The tap back to the first foot. Their feet should be shoulder width apart. Remind them to go slowly so they can control the ball without it running away from them.
- Obstacle dribbling – they can now dribble the ball around obstacle. Get them to dribble ball as above but this dribble round things.

