



Occupational Therapy Advice Ball Skills

The following activities are suggested to help your child to develop their ball skills. It is designed to help them learn about the grading, force, timing, and self-organisation needed *to get the ball to do what they want it to do.*

The first section is a suggested progression of throwing and catching skills. This is followed by games that can be used to practise some of these skills and some suggestions for bat and ball games and early football skills.

The key to the development of ball skills is to break down each activity and to start at a level where your child is achieving comfortably. **Slowly** increase the level of difficulty, altering one aspect of the activity at a time. Your child's abilities are then stretched but they do not lose confidence. Give lots and lots of praise and encouragement.

Help your child to learn by discussing their technique. Emphasise what has gone right in the successful attempts rather than dwell on what was wrong with the unsuccessful attempts.

Talk about:

- Hands and body being ready to receive the ball.
- How hard/soft the ball is thrown.
- How straight the throw is.
- When they have anticipated a catch well.
- When their timing is good.
- When their waiting is good.
- Good looking.

All activities can be upgraded by decreasing the size of the ball but start with a large, soft ball.

It can be helpful for the child to work with a sibling or a friend to make the experience more fun but not if they are likely to compare themselves negatively.

.....

Throwing and Catching – A Progression of Skills

Activities 1-9 are all performed with the child in a relatively stationary position, with just the ball moving. Activities 10 – 13 increase the complexity of organisational skills required as both the child and the ball will be moving.

With each activity, once it has been performed successfully a number of times, upgrade it as suggested (e.g., taking a step back, changing the timing or self-organisation required.) Return to the previous level if the upgrade has been too difficult. Do not let the child experience prolonged failure.

1. Sitting or kneeling on the floor, the child and a partner roll a large ball in a straight line between them. Gradually decrease the size of the ball and vary the direction and speed.
2. Using two hands, the child throws a ball in the air (to roughly 12 inches) and catches it. The ball only needs to leave the child's hands and then be re-caught. The aim of this is to allow the child to get used to the shape his hands need to make to receive the ball.
3. Stand roughly 3 feet from the child and throw the ball to him. Make each throw even in force and directly to his hands. *Discuss any adaptations the child needs to make e.g. having hands ready, standing still, not over anticipating, waiting for the ball.* With each 5 consecutive successful catches, ask the child to take one step back.
4. The child stands roughly 2 feet from a wall, throws the ball at the wall, and catches it. *Discuss any adaptations e.g., throwing more gently, throwing in a straight line, not leaning forward to attempt to catch.* With each 5 consecutive successful catches, ask the child to take one step back. Aim for the child to build up rhythm and flow to the activity. If the child loses the organisation necessary, ask him to take a step back in towards the wall.
5. The child throws the ball against the wall, allowing it to bounce before he catches it. Start close to the wall and with each 5 consecutive successful catches, the child takes one step back. This activity will require the child to re-organise the timing of his responses.
6. As for number 5 but introduce a clap before catching. Start back in close to the wall and with each 5 consecutive successful catches, the child takes one step back.
7. The child throws the ball up in the air roughly 1-2 feet. With each set of 5 consecutive successful catches, he throws the ball 6-12 inches higher. This will require the child to re-organise the direction of the throw (i.e., to organise it vertically rather than horizontally), to visually track the ball in a different direction and to re-organise the positioning of his hands for catching.

8. The child throws the ball in the air then lets it bounce before catching it.
9. The child throws the ball in the air, lets it bounce and claps before catching it. After 5 successful catches, increase the number of claps by 1.
10. The child walks round in a circle with a partner, throwing the ball back and forth to each other. Start with a small circle and slowly make the distance greater. Start with a slow pace and gradually increase to a running pace.
11. As for number 10 but bouncing the ball between each other.
12. Mark a spot on the ground for the child to walk towards. When he reaches the spot, throw the ball to them. The child then throws the ball to the wall and catches it. Slowly increase the speed at which the child walks/runs to the spot.
13. The child walks slowly opposite a wall, throwing the ball against it as he moves. Slowly the child can increase the pace at which he moves. This activity can also be upgraded to include a bounce before catching and then a bounce and a clap before catching.

.....

Ball Games

- The child creates a “target game” on the floor or on a wall and throws a bean bag at it. Points are scored according to where the bean bag lands/strikes.
- Fill 2 large plastic bottles with water, leaving the tops off. Place these a few feet apart. 2 people stand next to each other and facing a bottle. The bottle facing you belongs to you. The aim is to knock over your opponent’s bottle. If you do so then your opponent has to retrieve the ball before they can set their bottle upright again. The one to keep water in their own bottle for the longest is the winner.
- Piggy in the middle.
- The child creates an obstacle course and bounces a ball around it. Start with a large ball.

.....

Bat and Ball Games

- Start by batting a balloon between 2 people using hands only.
- Move on to a balloon and large paddle bat.

- Substitute the balloon with a ball (soft then hard).
 - Progress to using a smaller bat with a longer handle.
-

Football Skills

- Kick a ball against a wall, gradually increasing the distance the child stands from the wall. (Do not worry about stopping the ball on its return at this stage.)
 - Kick a ball to a target area e.g., a chalk-marked area of wall or between markers or wide goal posts. Gradually decrease the size of the target area.
 - Kick a ball to a stationary partner.
 - Receive the ball from a partner (kicked gently and straight to the child's feet initially.) Gradually increase the force and aim slightly to the left/right of the child.
 - Dribble ball in a straight line towards a target.
 - Dribble a ball around one cone and back to marked spot.
 - Dribble around 2 cones with a change of direction etc.
-

Finally, add in your own ideas and encourage your child to create his own games. This will make practise more fun for your child and for you.