

Sample practice plan:

Start practice with a Team Circle

Welcome – Have kids sit in a group by the pitchers mound
Review last practice
Talk about what they will today
Use this time to recruit parent help

Warm-Up –

Skills & Drills Learn, develop, & practice

Water Break

Station 1 –Hitting off the tee

Station 2 –Fielding a ground ball

Station 3 –Throwing to a target

Base running – Time them around the bases. Next one goes when the player ahead of them touches first base.

End of Practice team Circle *Give players something beyond baseball.*

Group back at the pitchers mound. Review practice, ask what they liked most. Tell them their time and ask if they can beat it next week.

YMCA Core Value Talk –Caring.

- What does it mean to be caring?
- How can you show caring towards your teammates/opponents?

TIPS, TRICKS AND DRILLS FOR A SUCCESSFUL SEASON

Keeping their attention!

In youth baseball coaching, a primary challenge of coaching younger kids is simply to maintain their attention, focus, and get them to listen. These are two baseball coaching tips which work well to “condition” your players to pay attention and keep focused:

1. When one of the coaches has something to say to the team, the baseball coach yells “EYEBALLS”, to which the team responds by stopping what they’re doing, turning their heads toward the coach, and yelling “SNAP”.

2. To facilitate the players keeping focused out in the field during a baseball game (keeping a good ready position especially), one of the coaches will call out “WHO WANTS THE BALL?”, which is the players’ cue to respond “I DO” and assume the ready position. Introduce these two “drills” on the very first practice to establish them as rules. Practice them multiple times during that first practice to get the kids “conditioned” to responding, kids are always going to lose focus now and then because of their young age. But these two techniques have proven effective in recapturing players’ attention (for better listening and learning) and helping them to re-focus and stay ready for each play.

Hitting Station: set up a Tee for each player, hitting into a fence; make sure there is adequate separation between the players

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6U0F5Qxsl6w>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cad9V0LYM_s

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=27I_TYIXbyE

- Work on proper batting stance:
 - feet should be about shoulder width apart, with weight on inside balls of feet
 - feet should be square to home plate
 - knees should be bent to comfort level
 - grip on bat should be relaxed, in the fingers, not palm of hand
 - elbows should be bent, relaxed
 - shoulders square, eyes level, chin on or above front shoulder

- Work on proper Swing:

- begin swing with short, soft stride with front foot remaining closed
- throw hands toward the ball, bringing bat through the hitting zone to strike the top half of the ball
- "whip" the bat head, turning hips at the same time (turn on the ball of back foot - squash the bug)
- keep eyes and head on the ball until contact
- balance is important throughout the swing and finish

Throwing Station: players should preferably throw to an adult, but can throw to a target Tips to teach proper

technique: The W Catch: <https://youtu.be/RsD6zzOeBpw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBm9QHOzmOw>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0u4XS-vLexo>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jKXwXM1_es0

- start with player facing target, feet shoulder width apart, glove side foot ahead of throwing side foot
- pivot on ball of throwing side foot and step with glove side foot toward target (point little toe at target)
- "scarecrow" position - reach back with throwing hand, elbow bent, wrist straight up with ball away from body; elbow on glove side pointing toward the target
- start throwing motion by pulling glove side elbow down as throwing arm moves forward (elbow still bent)
- throwing arm does not extend fully until ball reaches release point in front of body, wrist "snaps" as ball is released
- proper follow-through includes throwing hand continuing down to outside of glove side knee, bending forward at waist, and throwing side foot stepping toward the target

****NOTE:** make sure players reach back correctly "scarecrow"; watch for "pushing" the ball and correct

Fielding Station: Ground Balls - work with players on infield dirt

Watch this video for ideas to teach proper ground ball fielding technique

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bM6ojc1u3Y>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jnw7G9GksWg>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W1FifcwDKE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pYa7B9ohgM>

- first, show players the proper position to field a ground ball: knees bent, weight forward on balls of feet, fingers of glove on ground at 45 degree angle, throwing hand ready to "trap" ball in glove
- second, show players how to "slide step" to get in front of ground ball, before getting into fielding position; let them practice "slide step" and "fielding position"
- third, roll ground balls to player, making sure they move in front of ball and field it correctly; do three to player and then rotate to next player; continue until time runs out

Team Lesson: Base running, home to 1st base

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmAmRLOQNCw>

- explain the order of the bases: 1st base, 2nd base, 3rd base, home plate
- have the players line up behind home plate, and one at a time, take a pretend swing and then run to 1st base
- make sure the players run all the way through the bag at first base, break down, and turn right

Eye on the spot

Teaching young players the need to keep their eye on the ball might not always be as effective as we as coaches would like. This drill focuses things on a much smaller area of the ball.

What you need (set up): Set up a tee that is about waist height for the player. Put a dime size dot on the backside of the ball, just above the halfway circumference of the ball. Always place the ball with the spot facing toward the backstop.

How this drill works: Often times younger players don't grasp the entire concept of keeping their 'eye on the ball.' Therefore, this drill has been designed to get them to keep their eye on a certain spot on the ball. Once they focus on a target smaller than the ball itself, they can swing at the spot using the fundamentals they have been taught to this point.

Results: Children see the ball as a target that needs to be hit. When they aim for a bigger target, they have a larger room for error. When they focus on a smaller target, they naturally assume a smaller margin for error. This helps them build confidence in hitting the ball, and also develops muscle memory when they are swinging.

Batting 1-2-3

The batter should take his/her stance. The coach then calls out “1...2...3”. Try not to rush through the 1, 2, 3. By not rushing the swing can be deliberate and slowed down so that the batter’s position at each point of the swing can be monitored. Player will take his/her stance with a ball on the tee.

1. Player will coil and hold.
2. Player will stride keeping weight back and pause.
3. Player will complete his/her swing.

Chicken Wing

Have the kids pretend they are a chicken. When they throw they should step straight to their target with their front foot. Their front arm (with the glove) should act as a “wing” on a chicken. Have them point their glove at the target and then tuck it into their arm-pit like a “wing” where their elbow is pointing at the target. They can then throw the ball accurately. The biggest thing kids do is try to throw it too hard, they often open up their shoulders and hips as they throw so that the ball goes flying and no one knows where it’s headed. If they think about the wing and pointing their elbow to the target, the ball will stay on line and go where they want it to. Suggest starting this drill off without a ball, have the kids go through the motion of it first and then give them a ball to play catch with a partner.

Shuffle Throws

Have the player with the ball place it on the ground in front of him/her. He/she will then simulate fielding a ground ball. Once he/she has fielded the ball he/she will take a couple shuffle steps toward the target getting his/her body in good throwing position as he/she does so. After a couple shuffle steps he/she will step and throw.

Make sure the player is getting his/her body lined up as he/she performs the shuffle steps. His/her lead shoulder and hip should be pointing towards the target. As he/she gets lined up his/her back foot should land perpendicular to the target.

Get it out – Fielding Drill

Too often, young players make the mistake of fielding ground balls with their mitt on the ground, directly below them, rather than extended out in front of them. This drill helps ensure proper extension. Lay a bat on the ground perpendicular to a line of players. The first player in line should be 6-8 feet from the bat in a ready position. Coach is 8-10 feet from the bat, opposite the players. Coach rolls ball toward the bat. Player must approach the ground ball and assume a good fielding position right at the bat, without his/her feet touching or going over it. In order to prevent the ball from rolling into the bat the player must have his/her glove extended, rather than hanging directly down below his/her body. Once player secures the ball he/she sprints forward and places the ball at the feet of the coach who is already rolling a ball to the next player. Continue until all players have had sufficient reps.

Alligator Arms

Using two hands to catch the ball is important for younger players to learn. If you use something like Alligator arms (kids like alligators), it will give them a better understanding of what is expected of them when they field a ball.

What you need: Gloves and balls

How this drill works: Prior to the drill starting, explain to the young ball players the idea of how an alligator jaw works. Then show them how catching the ball and fielding grounders works the same way. The ball is just like an alligator’s food, and they need to capture it with both hands. Have the children stand in a single file line in the fielding ready position. When you roll the ball, have them place their glove down in front of the ball, and explain to them that when the ball reaches their glove, the other hand should clamp down to secure the ball – just like alligator jaws – but only with their arms. You can do this with waist high throws and shoulder height throws as well.

Results: With this drill, the younger players will soon learn the importance of ‘feeding the alligator,’ so to speak. They will soon learn the concept of securing the ball in their glove with two hands. This is especially helpful for younger players learning to field grounders properly.

Ball to first

It is important for younger players to understand what happens when the ball is hit and it comes to them. Most will be focused on actually stopping the ball, but when they do secure it in their gloves, they need to know where to throw it.

What you need (set up) The kids should have their gloves on and you can send them out to second base. Have one player play first base to field the throws

How this drill works: You can either toss or lightly hit the ball to the players in line at second base. Explain to them that when they get the ball, one of the first places they are going to throw is first base. So, they practice their fielding skills, and then add one more step to it by throwing it to first base. Then the first baseman can throw it home. Players can then rotate: the fielder goes to first, the first baseman goes to home plate, and then the 'catcher' will go to the back of the fielding line. Once the players get the hang of it, you might be able to just keep hitting in succession as all the players go through the drill.

Note: So players understand where all of the bases are, you can run this drill from any position on the infield, and throw to any base. Keep the throw length reasonably short (shortstop to 2nd or 3rd, 1st to 2nd etc.) for the younger players.

Results: One of the toughest things to teach young players is to field the ball, and **then** throw it to the appropriate base. Repetition is extremely important in this drill for them to associate fielding the ball with throwing it to first base (or other bases).

How to run a Game/scrimmage <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HUjAcDVR8VQ>