

I. General Coaching Tips

1. Be Enthusiastic
2. Build Confidence
 - Help kids believe in themselves
 - Instead of being critical or creating pressure
3. Enthusiasm and confidence building more important than technical aspects of baseball
4. Emphasize Personal and Team Improvement Over Winning
5. Emphasize Fair Play and Sportsmanship
 - Avoid piling on runs
 - Avoid taking extra base or stealing excessively if far ahead (use discretion)
 - Don't argue or quibble with umpires (respect call even if incorrect)
6. Keep the Game Moving/Pacing
 - Be prepared with lineup
 - Hustle on/off field
 - Avoid excessive warmup
 - Catcher suited up prior to inning change
 - On-deck batter ready
7. Create a Practice Plan
 - Break kids into small groups
 - Rotate kids between stations
 - Use games and contests (e.g., relay, running bases, home run derby, pepper)
 - Avoid lengthy batting practice
 - Use short-sided scrimmages or 3 batters
8. Be Aware of Player Safety
9. Teach fundamentals but remember there are several different ways to hit, pitch and field
10. Make baseball fun

II. General Practice Tips

Baseball is a great game but sometimes can be slow and tedious, particularly when learning the fundamental skills or when coaches spend too much time talking instead of playing. Below are general suggestions and a practice template that may be modified. The coach should strive to have practices be both fun and efficient so the kids want to come back for more. **It is also better to err on the side of shorter rather than longer practices. One hour of structured, fast paced practice is sufficient for the Rookies division and an hour and a half is sufficient for both Minors and Intermediates.**

Tips

- Break kids into small groups
- Rotate kids between skill stations
- Use games and contests (e.g., relay, running bases, home run derby, pepper)
- Avoid lengthy batting practice with kids standing in the field
- Use short-sided scrimmages or three batters (see hitting section above)

Sample Practice Template – See Accompanying Skill Drills Which Can Be Plugged Into Template

- 1) Meeting to discuss last game or practice: what went well (praise) and things to work on plus light-hearted banter **(5 minutes)**
- 2) **Jog** foul pole to foul pole to warm up (repeat depending on age group) **(2-3 minutes)**
- 3) Stretch – head to toe, including arms **(5 minutes)**
- 4) Light warm up throw (can start with one knee drill, then stationary feet throwing drill). Concentrate on good throwing motion, four seam grip, receiving player providing target **(5 minutes)**
- 5) Split squad into 3-4 groups depending on number of kids and coaches and rotate from skill station to skill station **(10-12 minutes for each station) (See accompanying drills attached).**
E.g., 1) Hitting station with three substations: tee, soft toss (dry swings if not enough coaches), batting cage hitting
 - 2) Infield group
 - 3) Outfield group
- 6) Teaching of particular skill– e.g, baserunning, cutoffs/relay throws, bunt technique, pitching etc. **(5-10 minutes)**
- 7) Short-sided scrimmage/game (coach pitch if possible or batting machine for consistent strikes); 5-6 kids per team; go through batting order once or twice and then switch batting and fielding sides (parents can play in the outfield). Keep track of runs for competition. Alternatively, have hitting teams of three players each, remainder of team in the field; each batter bats 2-3 times and then switch batting team keeping track of runs. For both options, make the plays in the field to simulate a game and keep the game moving quickly. It helps to

start the batter with either a 2-2 or 1-1 count to encourage swinging and putting the ball in play. **(30 minutes)**

8) End practice with base running. This way the kids will get some fitness training but learn a skill at the same time. E.g., run to first base (running through the bag); run a double focusing on a good turn around first base; run a home run focusing on good turns around each base. Make a game out of it by timing the kids with a stop watch or splitting the team into two sides at home plate and second base and having a home run (runner runs all the way around the bases and ends where he began either at home or second) relay race. **(5 minutes)**

Drills (Note: Use the ones you like or modify)

I. Fundamentals of Catching and Throwing

- A. Coach throws to line of 4-5 players, alternating in single file or lined up across foul line
 - 1. Throw to chest
 - 2. Throw below waist
 - 3. Throw above head

- B. Same-Side Toss
 - Partners face each other about 10 feet apart. Each partner has a ball in their right hand. Partners toss the ball at the same time to their partner's left hand. Throws are continuous and alternate hands after 10 throws on each hand.

- C. Regular Partner Catch
 - Play 21 game: 3 points if caught at chest; 2 points if caught without moving; 1 point if caught.

- D. Relay Race
 - Split into teams of 3-5 evenly spaced across outfield. All teams start at one end and throw to the next man, and then to the next man, and so on to the end of the line, and then back in the opposite direction. If ball dropped, must throw back to the prior fielder. First team to go up and down line (or 2 or 3 times) wins.

- E. Square Drill
 - Split into teams of 4. Players form a 4-person square at an appropriate distance for the age group. Throw the ball from corner to corner (not across). Players should focus on providing a target, catching with two hands, and moving their feet as necessary to catch and throw the ball.

- F. Two Ball Drill
 - Players chose a partner and stand 5-10 feet apart. No gloves. One partner holds two balls in one hand and underhands both balls on a slow arc towards the receiving partner. The receiving partner tries to catch one ball in the left hand and one in the right hand. This drill emphasizes the need to watch the ball carefully. The trick is to focus on one ball first, catch it and then focus on the second ball. Fun drill!

II. Hitting Drills

- A. **Dry swings** – Just swinging the bat without hitting a ball is good practice. Emphasize good fundamentals: bat in finger tips, hitting down on ball, nose on the ball.
- B. **Hitting of a tee** – This can be tedious but as with dry swings is very good practice. Alternate between hitting pitch in the middle of the plate, inside pitch and outside pitch. For players having trouble staying back, have the batter take a step back with his back foot before swinging at the ball. This will force the batter to transfer weight backwards before moving forward to hit the ball.
- C. **Soft toss** – Coach underhand balls on roughly a 45 degree angle and hitter hits the ball into the net. The toss can simulate pitches down the middle, inside and outside. For players having trouble staying back, the underhand toss may be thrown with a high arc to force the batter to wait before swinging.
- D. **Hitting off the tee on the field**
- E. **Batting Practice** -- Short rounds of batting practice either in cage or on the field (cage is much more efficient). Try to limit instruction and let the kids hit. Underhand (on a line) or overhand pitches from a short distance can be just as effective as throwing from full length and improves accuracy. Always use a screen to protect the pitcher.
- F. **Short-sided games** -- Split the team in half or groups of 3-4 with the remaining players in the field. Start with 2-2 count to encourage the kids to swing and have the batter run hits out with defensive players making the plays in the field to simulate a game.
- G. **Line Drive Home Run Derby** -- Set the batters up in the outfield at a challenging distance from the fence. Home runs count 5 points if they are line drives. High fly balls are outs, even if they go over the fence. Swings and misses, popups and foul balls are outs. Give each player 3 outs and see who scores the most points.

III. Infield Drills

- A. Players in a single file line and coach rolls balls to fielders: 1) In front; 2) to forehand; 3) to backhand; 4) Slow ball/barehand; 5) Short hop (middle; forehand; backhand); 6) Field ball between legs for fun (good way to end).
- B. Three Cone Drill: Cone 1 – Field the ball out in front; Cone 2 – crow hop to cone 2 (5 feet closer to first base on diagonal line) and throw to first; Cone 3 – follow throw towards first base after throw (another 5 feet closer to first on diagonal line).
- C. Underhand Flip – High Five Coach: Single file line; coach rolls slow roller; fielder fields and underhands throw to coach following throw forward and high fiving coach.
- D. Double Play Drills: Single file lines at second base and shortstop positions. Roll balls to either position and other position covers second base. Emphasize stoping slightly behind the bag to receive the throw (in order to adjust to bad throw) and providing target with hands out in front.
- E. First Base Covering Drills: All players can practice covering first base even if it is not their primary position. One at a time have players start in regular defensive position. Pretend the ball is hit to the coach at shortstop or second base and coach throws to first base as in game. The first baseman should get to the bag as fast as possible and set up to be a good target – square to the fielder and upright. The first baseman should put the heel of his throwing side foot on the center of the inside of the base. The first baseman should wait until he sees the flight of the ball before stretching forward to catch it – not getting to the bag early and stretching too early are very common mistakes by young players.

IV. Outfield Drills

A. Routine Fly Ball

- The coach should throw (or a tennis racket and tennis ball can be used) the ball up in the air directly in front or at the player and the fielder should work on turning and catching the ball over his throwing shoulder with the glove-side foot forward.

B. Fly Ball to Either Side and Directly Overhead

- This drill is best done with the coach throwing the ball. The fielder should start in the ready position (feet shoulder width apart, weight slightly on the balls of the feet, hands dangling loosely in front) and coach throws the ball on a high arc 15-20 feet away from the fielder on roughly a 45-degree angle. The fielder should work on running fast to the spot where he expects to catch the ball instead of coasting or jogging. The drill should be done to both sides and then directly overhead with a drop step backwards – emphasize not back peddling. Another variation is to have the fielder run hard to either side facing away from the coach throwing the ball. The coach throws the ball ahead of the player on an arc and yells “now”, allowing the fielder to turn towards the coach, pick up the ball and run hard to the spot where he expects to catch it. The coach can award points 1-10 depending on the difficulty of the catch.

C. Head Down Drill

- The fielder starts lying down on his stomach facing the coach with his head down. The coach throws the ball directly overhead and yells go. The fielder jumps off the ground, finds the ball and catches it.

D. Rounding or Circling the Ball

- A common mistake by young outfielders is to run hard in a straight line towards balls hit to either side of the fielder. Particularly on hard hit balls, this often results in the ball shooting past the fielder to the fence. Instead, players should try to circle around the ball by taking a partial drop step first and keeping the ball in front of them instead of taking a direct line to the ball. This can be practiced by having the coach throw balls hard to either side of the fielder with the fielder taking a rounded path to the ball keeping it in front.

E. “Mine” Drill

- Organize the players into two lines about 30 feet apart. Throw the ball in between the two fielders, forcing one fielder to call the ball and catch it. This drill can also be done at the infield positions or with all nine fielders to work on calling popups and avoiding collisions.

F. Fence Drill

- Have the fielder stand about fifteen feet from the fence. Throw the ball over the fielder’s head in the vicinity of the fence. The fielder should turn, run to the fence, touch the fence with his throwing hand, find the ball in the air, and catch it. Hard drill but a lot of fun and kids like it.

V. Pitching Drills

1. One Knee Throws

Players partner up and stand across from each other in two straight lines about 15-20 feet apart. Each player drops down on his throwing hand knee with the opposite knee up and pointing towards the target given by the receiving player. The player then takes the ball out of his glove with a four-seam grip in a circular motion with his hand first on top and then behind the ball as the throw is made.

2. Stationary Throwing Drill

The pitcher faces the receiving partner standing with a wide base, both toes pointing towards the receiving player. The hands start together and the ball is held with the four seam grip. The pitcher turns his glove hand shoulder towards the target shifting his weight back and throws the ball without moving his feet, concentrating on the proper circular throwing motion and follow through.

3. Glass of Water Drill

The pitcher starts with his arm up, hand on top of the ball and both feet on the ground and turned sideways as in the stretch. The pitcher rotates, releases the ball, follows through with chin and chest to the target and thinking about not spilling a glass of water on his head.

4. Power Position Drill

The pitcher starts in the stretch position with the hands together at the chest holding the ball with the four seam grip. The hands break, weight shifts back, the knee is raised to the power position and the ball is thrown gently, with both feet on the ground at the finish. The pitcher should focus on a good hip turn and finish with the front foot pointed to the target.

5. Balance Point Drill

- a. The pitcher begins at the power position/balance point and throws to home plate.
- b. One Tap: The pitcher begins at the power position/balance point, then drops lead foot to ground, then raises back up to power position, then delivers pitch.
- c. Two taps: The pitcher begins at the power position/balance point, then drops lead foot to ground, then raises back up to power position, then drops lead foot to ground again, then raises back up to power position, then delivers pitch.