

Sliding for Beginners

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Softball coaches at younger divisions often have questions about how and when to teach players how to slide. How young is too young? How important is it to teach sliding to young players?

While there is some debate about whether or not there is a best or correct age to teach sliding, most reputable softball programs advocate for starting to teach sliding as early as U12. Many suggest that “as early as possible is best”, but all seem to agree that players should be comfortable sliding and be able to do it safely in the 13-14 age range.

By High School, sliding should be a natural part of regular baserunning, so it’s important that younger players start to learn and practice the skill well in advance, just like throwing, catching, or batting.

An ideal learning progression would look something like this.

U12	U15	High School+
Beginning	Developing	Mastering
Fundamentals, teach proper technique and prioritize safety. Learn basic slide type (<i>bent leg</i>).	Refine technique. Learn how to best use sliding while baserunning. Begin training for technique on advanced slide types (<i>hook and head-first</i>)	Learn and master all slide types, apply each naturally in game situations.

There are a couple of concerns when starting to teach how to slide. Like many ball skills, it’s very important for players to learn proper technique, both to have good results, and for player safety (avoiding injury). In addition, learning to slide can be somewhat intimidating. Players may feel as though they will be hurt by sliding, or uncomfortable with learning a skill that can feel unnatural to start with.

Avoidance of injury is a good reason to start sliding in the first place! When performed properly and in appropriate situations, sliding can reduce the chance of player collisions in tag situations, particularly at home plate.

Safety First!

It's important to cover safety when learning any new skill, but particularly one that is heavily physical in nature like sliding.

Always make sure that sliding practice happens in appropriate clothing and appropriate equipment.

- Players should always wear sliding pants or shorts
- Proper footwear (should be a given in practice)
- Wear helmets; you'd do it in a game so wear them in practice too, especially if practicing sliding into/under a tag.
- To start, use an unanchored base. Progress to normal bases later.
- Teach on an easy sliding surface first (grass) before progressing to the usual basepaths. Try raking up the surface of the basepath going into the base to loosen up the dirt or shale and reduce friction.
 - *HOT TIP: Try teaching beginners on an alternate low friction surface first. Large sheets of cardboard work well, or even a wet Slip'N'Slide! This makes learning easy and fun, while taking the intimidation factor out.*

The Basic Slide (or Bent Leg Slide)

There are many good resources online these days on how to perform or teach a bent-leg slide. Here are a couple:

- <https://www.wikihow.com/Slide-in-Softball>
- <https://www.teamsnap.com/community/skills-drills/softball/softball-base-running/151-sliding-technique>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iG2T7Bk5_kU



The idea is fairly simple. You usually want to start with the players just sitting in place and ensuring that they understand the proper form. The bent leg should be under the extended leg, creating a figure 4. Whichever leg is extended should feel natural to the player. They should keep their hands off the ground*, and lean their weight back off their legs slightly. (*see proper form to left*)

Once they have the feel of the sliding form, they can move to sliding at half speed, and then at full speed when comfortable.

In action, the bent leg slide might look like this.



**HOT TIP: If players have a tough time keep their hands off the ground, make them try sliding with cups of water in each hand, and try to slide without spilling! Also, try the “hand-holding” drill from the TeamSnap Video drill listed above.*

The Intimidation Factor

Lastly, it's important to acknowledge that some players can feel very apprehensive about starting to slide. They may feel like they will be hurt, or they have low confidence in their ability.

Either way, consistent practice with good form can address those concerns. Try using a low-friction sliding surface as suggested above as a starting point. Here is a suggestion for a game of Sliding Tag that can get the whole team involved at once, and ensures many repetitions of the skill in a high-fun and low-anxiety setting.

<https://fastpitchlane.softballsucces.com/2014/02/06/game-to-teach-softball-p-layers-how-to-slide/>

Wrapping Up

We'll leave more advanced sliding types, like hook slides and head-first slides, for another day. With this basic information, coaches should feel good about teaching sliding to players starting at about 10 years old. By the time they hit High School, they should be flying around the base paths, ready to slide properly at any moment!