



Player Development at the Learning to Train Stage (9 to 12 years old)

This is the stage from late childhood until the onset of the growth spurt at adolescence. With near-adult sized brains, these are often called the “skill-hungry” years. This is one of the most important periods of motor development. Children are developmentally ready to acquire softball specific skills. Children learning to play softball are **NOT** miniature adults, and this means taking into account how 10-year olds learn new skills, how 12-year old bodies respond to different types of training, and what strategies and tactics kid’s developing brains are capable of understanding. Children at this stage aren’t generally capable of dealing with complicated tactics or strategy, but are very concerned with sport being “fair”.

General Sport Development

- Play 3 or 4 different sports to develop all-round athleticism
- Focus on keeping softball & physical activity FUN to develop players’ love of the game/physical activity & being part of a team
- Players need to be play not sit on the bench

Fundamental Movement Skills

High Priority

- Speed – Hand/Foot
- Flexibility

Medium Priority

- Endurance
- Explosive Power
- Speed – Whole Body

Low Priority

- Speed & Strength
- Endurance

Mental and Cognitive Development

- Think more independently & are developing good decision-making skills
- Increasing critical-thinking skills & ability to consider more than one perspective
- Can accomplish increasingly more complex tasks & projects

Emotional Development

- Can control their anger most of the time
- Have gained a strong sense of empathy
- Have overcome most childhood fears, but they often start having more anxiety from common stressful situations, such as school performance.

Ethical and Social Skills

- Recognize basic social norms and appropriate behaviour
- Have caring, solid friendships
- Family support is important to help build a strong sense of self

Coaching Tips

- Ensure environment promotes and supports fun and friendship, where everyone plays not sitting on the bench.
- Correct techniques and creating environments in which players get maximum repetitions of **SOFTBALL SPECIFIC** technical skills is key
- Introduce mental skills and strategies such as visualisation, anxiety control, and goal setting in a group setting so players can effectively deal with game time pressure to perform
- Introduction to formal **local** competition, with emphasis on fair play, and opportunities to try different events or positions
- Key stage for developing hand and foot speed, and for developing flexibility. Strength training should focus on body-weight exercises **ONLY**
- Introduce ancillary capacities: warm up/cool down, nutrition, hydration, and recovery
- Teach players to take responsibility for preparing equipment for training and competition
- Teach players the rules and ethics of softball and makes conscious decision not to cheat
- Teach players to appreciate diversity and accepts personal differences

Desired General Outcomes

Children:

- Focus is on the process of individual and team development rather than on the competitive outcome.
- Players play 3 to 4 positions to ensure overall skills development
- Daily participation in physical activity and/or organized sport, so children will start to have a clear idea about the sports they like.

Parents Understand:

- 70% of the time a child is participating in softball should be devoted to practice and only 30% of the time to competing in a game
- Children should continue to be active and engage in a minimum of 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day
- Focus of games should be to utilize the skills learned in practice in a competitive situation. The focus is **NOT** on winning the game