

Occupational Therapy Service for Children and Young People

Ball Skills – Information Sheet

What are Ball Skills?

- The ability to catch a ball/object.
- The ability to throw a ball/object in a particular direction, or towards a target.
- The ability to roll a ball.
- The ability to use a bat and ball together (or racquet and shuttlecock).
- The ability to kick a ball in a particular direction, or to a goal/target.
- The ability to stop (or receive) a ball that has been kicked to you.

Abilities needed for good ball skills (Underlying skills)

- The ability to use both sides of the body together
- The ability to stand still and balance.
- The ability to follow the path of a moving object with your eyes.
- The ability to judge speed and distance.
- The ability to grade force of movement.
- Good range of movement in hands and arms (catching) or legs (kicking).

If a child has difficulty with any of the above abilities, they will struggle with some or all aspects of ball skills.

Why are ball skills needed?

Children are often expected to have age appropriate ball skills in order to take part in play activities and school based activities.

Ball skills are a fun way to learn underlying skills that children will need to complete everyday tasks throughout their childhood and as adults.

Examples

Catching helps to develop:

- The use of two hands together - Needed for using cutlery, tying shoe laces, fastening buttons.
- Understanding of speed and distance - Needed for road safety, avoiding collisions with other children, playing games.
- Hand eye coordination. - Needed for handwriting, art and craft, fine motor activities (threading beads).

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Throwing helps to develop:

- Understanding of force and grading of movement - Needed in play and self care activities (e.g. washing and dressing).
- Understanding of direction and spatial skills - Needed in daily tasks (e.g. washing and dressing) and most play activities.

Kicking helps to develop:

- Ability to balance on one leg - Needed when dressing, and in many play activities.
- Judging force and direction.

Helping a child to develop better ball skills (Strategy for improvement)

Most children naturally challenge their own ability to complete tasks, including their ability to throw, catch and kick a ball.

A child who has found it difficult to learn ball skills may lose their confidence to keep trying, and may need extra help to ensure their skills development.

Remember:

- A rolled ball is easier to catch than a thrown ball, because it moves slowly.
- A large, soft ball is easier to catch than a smaller, harder ball.
- Objects that don't bounce are easier to throw and catch (e.g. a beanbag).
- A bounced ball is easier to catch than a ball that has been thrown directly.
- Catching a ball that you have thrown against a wall is more difficult, because the ball tends to travel faster.
- A balloon is easier to catch because it moves slowly.

When practising ball skills with a child, make the task easier or harder, by altering:

- The length of the throw; start at 3-4 feet apart and increase the distance.
- The height of the throw.
- Whether the object is to be caught straight on, or whether the child needs to move or reach to one side.
- The force of the throw.
- The speed of the object.
- The size of the object.

Ensure that the child is:

- Ready and anticipating the throw, or kick.
- Concentrating and following the object with their eyes (many children close their eyes as an object moves toward them).

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