

# Tips for working with young kids

**This section provides you with information relevant to coaching young children in the age range 4–6 years. Many of the ideas about coaching, organisation and class management found elsewhere within this booklet are relevant. This section provides a specific focus on the younger age group.**

## Objectives

The activity cards provide lots of ideas to get kids moving. The use of questions and the CHANGE IT acronym help children to think about the 'how' and 'why' of active participation. In your planning, step back from the physical aspects to ensure your session and program objectives cover the emotive and cognitive aspects of play.

## Planning

You will be coaching the 'whole child', not just teaching games or developing skills. Moving, thinking and feeling occur together and are inseparable. So plan activity for the whole child. Ideas under the headings *moving*, *thinking* and *feeling* are shown on pages 13–15. Remember that chronological age is not necessarily a determinant of readiness.

## Children moving

*Playing for Life* is about children moving, playing and developing positive attitudes to activity. Here are some tips to guide your coaching of young children.

### DO THEY HAVE THE BUILDING BLOCKS?

Check that the children are proficient in the fundamentals of travelling, manipulating bats, balls and other objects, and balancing. Activities shown in the table on page 17 will help here.

### TAG GAMES AND RELAYS

- > Quick changes ensure children are not 'tagged out' of the game.
- > Emphasise the fun, locomotor activity and thinking skills that are developed.
- > Use the CHANGE IT ideas to provide variety. Encourage children to make up rules.
- > Take on the role of tagger. The kids will love it! Almost tag the kids but just fall short – 'You kids are just too fast for me.'



- > Small groups will ensure children are not waiting around in relays. The smaller the better.

### HOW MUCH TECHNIQUE?

Mastering skills develops confidence. But at this age there is no need to rush the development of technique. Allow some independence – let children demonstrate what they can do even if at first they show some personal idiosyncrasies!

### KEEP THEM MOVING

Add an easy, safe activity after the main task to keep activity levels up, e.g. after a throwing task, the child joins with another to 'low 5 – high 5' or perform an individual skill with a separate ball.

## Children thinking

Checklist – games rules, communicating, following directions, body awareness, movement concepts, recognising things within the playing environment.

### 'TICKLE' THEIR IMAGINATIONS

- > Use targets with faces painted on them.
- > Use targets that make a noise when hit – e.g. plastic bottles containing bottle lids or marbles – or stacked targets that collapse when hit.
- > Use colourful balls and balloons. The extra large balloons are more durable.
- > Encourage children to call out things – this helps to reinforce an understanding of the rules.
- > Kids love to be tantalised with imagery. Appeal to their imaginations – defenders become a favourite TV character and so on. Let them make suggestions.
- > Children don't just run. They run like a *cheetah* or a *fast car* or...
- > **Guessing is good** – demonstrate something such as a locomotor activity and ask 'Can anyone guess what animal I am?' The answer doesn't matter as much as the fun they have guessing.
- > **Stork or sheep!** – with a game like *Stork tag* (Start out WC 05b), freeze the game and ask 'How many sheep do we have on one leg?' Children will be eager to dismiss the silly suggestion.

### HOW MANY SHEEP ON ONE LEG?



### GAME RULES

Game concepts such as 'defence', 'offence', 'finding space', and 'invasion' are challenging for children. Break down the key game concepts, e.g. with *Interceptor* (Get into it INV 01), you might say 'Peter is between Jess and Melanie and he will try and catch the ball.' After some play you might:

- > review the concept
- > guide Peter in front of the whole group to strategies that will increase his chance of intercepting
- > reinforce the more efficient instances of interception by allowing the children to show the game to others
- > reinforce the key game concept in the short *Finish up* session
- > build connections between the activities on different cards by drawing out the similarities
- > organise scoring so each effort is rewarded. For example, if the task is to throw a ball in a bin, use the following scoring: 4 points for bin in bucket/3 points for bin hit/1 point ball if goes past a line in front of the bin.

### MORE IDEAS TO PROMOTE THINKING

**Count down** – start an activity with a 'count down to blast off' with everyone calling out: '5-4-3-2-1 – blast off!'



**Say your name** – children in a circle call out their name in a clockwise direction. In a variation, children call their name and their partner's: 'I'm Peter, this is Hiroko. I'm Hiroko, this is Glenn...'

**Know your body** – an activity like *Hospital tag* (Start out WC 04c) might start with children calling out and touching their own body parts.



**Equipment** – your 'kit bag' of equipment contains many objects of different colour, shape, feel and hardness. Use these characteristics to promote thinking. If you want to use a soft ball, you might hold two balls up and ask, 'Which ball is the softer?'



### Body awareness – Low 5s – High 5s

(Start out WC 08b) can be used to emphasise movement concepts such as space, effort and relationships ('Can you "low 5" with a partner back-to-back using your feet?' This emphasises 'back-to-back'.).

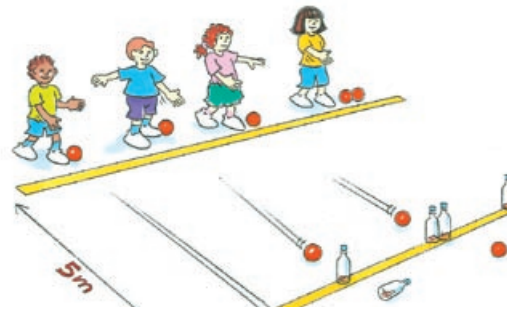


## Children and their feelings

**CHECKLIST** – independence, sharing, taking turns, cooperating, communicating with other children, having positive feelings about activity, motivation.

### SOCIAL SKILLS

Activities like *Koolchee* (Get into it TG 06), *Kolap* (Start out TG 04) and *Tunnel & laps* (Start out WC 07) require children to take turns, cooperate and share. Focus your coaching on these attributes. Praise children for their thoughtful and cooperative actions and words.



*Taking turns* at this age is a developing skill. Limit the amount of activity that requires taking turns and guide the process. Ensure line-ups are not too long. If a line-up is necessary, make it an activity in itself, e.g. 'While you are waiting, draw a house with your big toe.'

For this age group, allow some latitude when it comes to taking turns. Children will join in when they are ready and they will 'learn' from the sideline as they absorb the activity from a distance.

### INDEPENDENCE

Use CHANGE IT, ask lots of questions and allow children some freedom to make decisions. These strategies will help children become independent and motivated.

**Many ways – let them choose.** *Playing for Life* using CHANGE IT encourages you to allow children to choose between options, for example:

- > different ways to send a ball to a target (hit, kick, roll or throw)
- > different batting implements and balls depending on player abilities.

Be flexible in allowing children to choose new game rules. Provided the outcome is safe, allow for rules even if they are a bit odd.

### BLENDING IN

With high activity levels, kids still learning the fundamentals won't stand out because everyone is engaged.

### COMPETITION

Having fun and being with friends in a safe and familiar setting are the key motivators for young children. They may understand the significance of winning and losing. The main focus of competition will be on personal improvement rather than competing against others.

## Coaching

### DEMONSTRATIONS

- > Younger children may not be ready to act as 'player role models', so be ready to demonstrate yourself.
- > If you choose to use children, don't always use the most proficient child in the class.

### COMMUNICATING

Let each child know they are important.

- > Communicate with eye contact and friendly body language throughout the session.
- > For young children, your warmth and interest in them will be as important as the games you introduce. Try your friendly body language routine in the bathroom tonight!

- > Keep it positive – lots more *dos* than *don'ts*.
- > Use 'warm and firm' rather than 'cold, authoritarian and firm'.
- > Check for understanding. For example, 'Kate, John and Asako make sure you turn at the marker and not the wall.' Then check for understanding, 'Is it OK to turn at the wall?'
- > Names are important. Guide activities where children call out each other's names with your assistance.
- > Provide praise for attempts. Praise publicly and correct in private.
- > Keep instructions simple and short. Mix words with action. For example, 'Pass like this while demonstrating.' Give 'just enough' information to get the activity started. Provide more information later.
- > 'Would you like to tell me about it?' or 'Show me what it does.' is preferable to 'What is it?'

### HAVE SOME FUN

Kids love to see the coach make a 'mistake'. Give them some ammunition, for example:

- > 'If you are tagged stand like a stork.' (Stand on two feet with arms outstretched). Ask, 'Is that how you would stand?'



- > **The unexpected** – children enjoy silly moments. For example in a passing activity you might pull out of your pocket an old sock rolled up and ask 'Who wants to throw my favourite old sock?' They might say, 'No way!'

**Talk with  
children, not  
at them.**

### MUSIC MAKES A DIFFERENCE

If you are playing indoors, providing a musical backdrop can be very motivating. It is also a good way to signal the start and finish to activities.



## Class management

### THE SESSION IN ACTION

- > Conduct activities in short bursts. Remember: 'Kill a game before it dies.'
- > Use pairs and small group activities frequently.
- > Let the action roll without too many interventions.
- > Passing in the order: girl – boy – girl – boy... is a game rule to ensure broad participation.

### ROUTINES

Routines provide an opportunity for you to create an enjoyable playing space and save time.

- > Develop signals or routines for forming into a group, starting and finishing an activity, and pausing an activity. These signals will be applicable to other situations such as putting equipment away or moving from one activity to another.
- > You can use music as a signal to start an activity and conclude it – for example, retrieve balls when the music stops.
- > Develop appropriate words to go with audible or visual signals, for example to start: 'Ready, go.'
- > Implement a routine to change activities – for example, you might say 'Change' and demonstrate with a helicopter arm swing.

### SETTING UP

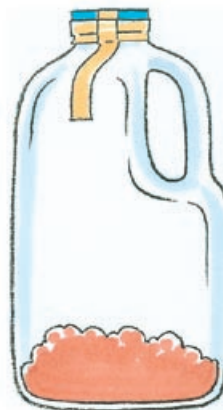
- > Do as much setting up as you can before the activity or session starts.
- > Set up targets close to a wall so the wall stops the ball's movement.
- > Encourage children to return equipment to a central place of container – make this a fun activity, such as walking with a ball between the legs.
- > If you involve children in setting up, make sure everyone is involved.



## Safety

These are additional tips to those starting on page 38.

- > Communicate clearly where the boundaries are.
- > Tape caps onto plastic milk bottles so they don't end up in children's mouths.



- > Continually remind children about and reinforce safety procedures.

## Playing for Life resources suitable for young children

Use the activities below to create session plans. Make some assessment of the children's ability to play with bats and balls and to travel and balance in various ways and choose activities accordingly.

ABOUT THE START OUT ACTIVITIES	NAME	ACTIVITY
<b>Moving about, space awareness &amp; tag games</b>		
Running space and awareness. Use music as a backdrop.	<b>Form a group</b>	Start out WC 01a
More locomotions mixed with balancing, forming groups and using imagination. Add music.	<b>Look out for others</b>	Start out WC 03b
Energise with different locomotions.	<b>Here, there, nowhere</b>	Start out CP 02a
A tag game involving balancing.	<b>Stork tag</b>	Start out WC 05b
Combines weaving in and out of players to tag a partner.	<b>Partner tag</b>	Start out WC 08a
A tag game that involves groups.	<b>Loose carriage</b>	Start out WC 10c
A tag game that will appeal to the imagination.	<b>Hospital tag</b>	Start out WC 04c
<b>Cognitive-perceptual emphasis</b>		
Call out actions that require <i>left/right</i> discrimination.	<b>Two halves</b>	Start out WC 02a
Combines keeping a ball in the air while calling letters of the alphabet.	<b>Kai [cooperative variation]</b>	Start out CP 05
<b>Energisers</b>		
An energiser that combines moving about 'high-fiving' in various positions.	<b>Low 5s – High 5s</b>	Start out WC 08b
Imagine running on the spot with lots of creative variations. Fun and fast moving with appeal to the imagination. Music adds an extra dimension.	<b>Fun on the spot</b>	Start out WC 10a
Frantic throwing that's lots of fun.	<b>Throw, throw, throw</b>	Start out WC 04a
Players run around flipping objects. Space awareness is important but don't take scoring too seriously!	<b>Flip it</b>	Start out WC 09b
<b>Ball handling/manipulation</b>		
Simple passing with exploration and inventiveness required.	<b>Back to back pass</b>	Start out CP 08
Players run around a circle receiving a ball from a feeder.	<b>Run the circle</b>	Start out CP 03
Manipulating a ball and passing with a physical challenge. You will need a wall.	<b>Take a seat!</b>	Start out CP 04b
Rolling a ball to a partner. Add a time challenge and gates.	<b>Triangle roll</b>	Start out CP 06a
Throw – catch. Can be done with rolling.	<b>Long throw</b>	Start out CP 06b
<b>Cooperative play</b>		
Moving with a blindfold assisted by others. Opportunities for communication and fun.	<b>Blind run</b>	Start out CP 02c

### Activities by *game sense* categories

INVASION GAMES	STRIKING & FIELDING GAMES	NET AND COURT GAMES	TARGET GAMES
<p>Start out INV 04 <b>Boundary pass</b> Passing skills</p>	<p>Start out SF 02 <b>Bucket and hoop</b> – ball is tossed to make it easier. A ball is tossed to a hoop or bucket.</p>	<p>Start out NC 02a <b>Keep the ball up</b> Groups of children keep a ball in the air.</p>	<p>Start out TG 03 <b>Snakes alive</b> Position a ball by rolling it.</p>
<p>Start out INV 05 <b>On-court off-court rapid pass</b> Passing skills and interception</p>	<p>Start out SF 01b <b>Target throw &amp; run</b> – ensure easy targets Balls are thrown at a target followed by running to a base.</p>	<p>Start out NC 01 <b>2 square bounce</b> A simple court game that involves throwing a ball into an opponent's court.</p>	<p>Start out CP 07a <b>Hit the square</b> Bounce passing in pairs.</p>
<p>Start out INV 02 <b>Names</b> Players in a circle pass a ball. A centre player tries to intercept.</p>	<p>Start out WC 07 <b>Tunnel &amp; laps</b> A ball is hit into the field and both strikers and fielders complete an activity.</p>	<p>Start out NC 04 <b>Rally around</b> A circuit with passing and hitting. Modify to suit player abilities – no bats.</p>	<p>Start out TG 04 <b>Kolap</b> A bean bag or similar is thrown to a target.</p>
<p>Get into it INV 01 <b>Interceptor</b> Two players pass a ball. A third tries to intercept the ball.</p>	<p>Get into it SF 02 <b>Engage all</b> (use a tee) A ball is hit from a tee. All fielders are engaged in an 'every one touches' activity.</p>	<p>Get into it NC 01 <b>Blanket ball</b> Volleyball using a blanket.</p>	<p>Get into it TG 08 <b>Bombard</b> Make a big ball move by throwing tennis balls.</p>
<p>Start out INV 03 <b>Pairs passing</b> Passing in pairs</p>	<p>Get into it SF 08 <b>Over the pit</b> A ball is hit from a feed over a no-go area.</p>	<p>Get into it NC 02 <b>Sitting volleyball</b> The name says it all!</p>	<p>Get into it TG 06 <b>Koolchee</b> (cooperative variation on side 2). Knock the skittles down.</p>