

Season Plan for 3 to 5-Year-Olds

At this age, children need understanding and skills to enable them to play a game. Tactically, this means helping them to see the need to hit and run well, and also to field the ball to try to stop their opponents from scoring. We give an overview here that can be a weekly guide. It shows tactical components along with skill components, rules and traditions, and fitness and character development concepts, which will all be described in more detail in the practice plans.

Overview of the Season Plan

The Season Plan on the next page provides a weekly guide and addresses tactical and skill components, and other activities fully detailed in the Practice Plans document. The Season Plan has five components:

- **Purpose:** The purpose of the practice is your main focus.
- **Tactics and Skills:** Tactics are knowing what to do during the game (and when to do it), and they require an understanding of the problems faced by each team during the game and how those problems can be solved. Ways to maintain possession of the ball would be tactics. Skills are the physical skills traditionally taught, such as passing or shooting the ball or controlling the ball during play.
- **Rules and Traditions:** You will teach the rules of the sport to young children gradually, as part of playing games and learning skills. Traditions are those unwritten rules that players follow to be courteous and safe, such as raising your hand when you foul someone or playing cooperatively with the others on your team.
- **Fitness Concepts:** Even young children can understand some simple concepts about health and fitness, such as the idea that exercise strengthens your heart, so some of these are suggested as the focus for brief discussions during practice.
- **Character Development Concepts:** The four core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility—can all be related to many situations arising while playing basketball. For example, playing cooperatively with teammates shows that you care about them. Again, we'll suggest some specific ideas for briefly discussing character development values.

Note: The plan is for use with the 3 to 5 age group referenced in the YMCA's "Coaching Baseball and Softball" online course.

YMCA Rookies Baseball and Softball Season Plan

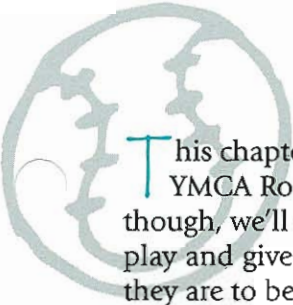
4- and 5-Year-Olds

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character-development concepts
1	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder in the infield.	Using a glove; fielding grounders; throwing accurately to first base.	Infield positions.	General fitness Participation in sport is good physical activity.	Four core values The four core values are introduced.
2	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base and a grounder in the infield.	Fielding grounders; batting; throwing accurately to first base; hitting and running to first base.	Balls and strikes; infield positions.	Cardiorespiratory fitness Your heart is a muscle.	Responsibility to others Players should stay under control.
3	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield; getting on base.	Hitting and running to first base; fielding grounders; and accurately throwing to first.	Running to first outside base path; overrunning first; foul balls; number of outs; drop bat before running to first.	Muscular strength and endurance Learn the muscles you use while participating in physical activity.	Honesty If you break a rule, raise your hand and tell your coach.
4	Defending space in the infield with no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield; getting on base.	Fielding fly balls and line drives; hitting and running to first.	Fly balls as related to the batter and runner; number of outs at which teams switch; stay in base path.	Safety equipment and rules Follow the rules.	Caring Take turns with teammates

Week	Purpose	Tactics and skills	Rules and traditions	Fitness concepts	Character-development concepts
5	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from first to second base with no outs, a runner on first base, and a grounder to the infield.	Covering second base on a force play; running from first base to second base.	No overrunning second base; stay in the base path; force play vs. tag plays.	Healthy habits Eat nutritious foods and get enough sleep.	Caring Support teammates when they make a mistake.
6	Cutting the lead runner and advancing from first base to second with no outs, a runner on first, and a grounder to the infield.	Covering second base on a force play; running from first to second base.	No overrunning second base; stay in the base path; running and scoring.	Flexibility Stretch muscles before any physical activity.	Responsibility It's important that everyone work hard and learn during practice.
7	Cutting the lead runner; advancing from second base to third with no outs; runners on first and second, and a grounder to the infield.	Covering third base on a force play; running from second to third base.	Difference between force play and a tag play; can't over-run third base; when to leave second base to advance to third; drop bat before running to first.	Muscle strength and endurance Strengthen the muscles you use in your sport.	Respect for opponents Be thankful to opponents.
8	Cutting the lead runner; advancing from third base to home plate with no outs, runners on first, second, and third, and a grounder to the infield.	Covering home plate on a force play; advancing from third base to home plate.	Scoring runs; when player can leave base; overrun home plate; running on outside of base path to first and from third to home; umpire signals for safe and out; force play rules.	Training and conditioning Being active outside of practice is important.	Responsibility Listen to the coach and share team duties.
9	Cutting the lead runner; various situations.	Making appropriate plays during a 6 v 6 game.	Game play procedure.	Muscle strength and endurance You use different muscles when you run different ways.	Respect for opponent Shake hands with opponents at the end of a game.
10	Giving players a chance to experience a longer game.	Reviewing skills and tactics.	Game play procedure.	Healthy habits List and discuss habits that should be part of daily routine.	Keeping perspective on the game Learn and have fun while playing.

Note: The plans in this Chapter are for use with the 3 to 5-year-old age group referenced in the YMCA's "Coaching Baseball and Softball" online course.

Practice Plans for 4- and 5- Year-Olds



This chapter contains 10 practice plans to use with your 4- and 5-year-old YMCA Rookies baseball or softball players. Before we get to those plans, though, we'll explain the modifications to the game that are used in Rookies play and give you a quick overview of what's in the practice plans and how they are to be used.

Game Modifications

At this age Rookies play games with fewer than a full nine-player team on the field, usually five players against five (5 v 5) or six against six (6 v 6), using no outfield positions. This speeds up the game and gives all the children more opportunities to be involved in play. Have no more than 15 players on a team.

Baseball or softball is inherently a slow game, but if you use the whole field, you can speed up the action at practices. Here's how: set up two, three, or four smaller fields in a cloverleaf (see figure 6.1). Set up the fields 10 feet apart to avoid injuries on overthrows. For this age level, bases should be 40 feet apart, and the pitcher's mound should be 40 feet from home plate. Bases should be breakaway bases that are not permanently attached to the spike or tube that anchors them to the ground. With such bases, when a player runs into the plate, it will "break away" from its anchor, rather than staying stationary and possibly injuring the player.

At the Rookies level, players play T-ball rather than baseball or softball. A regulation T-ball is used with a variety of widths and lengths of bats. Foam-covered plastic bats or Wiffle-ball bats are suitable.

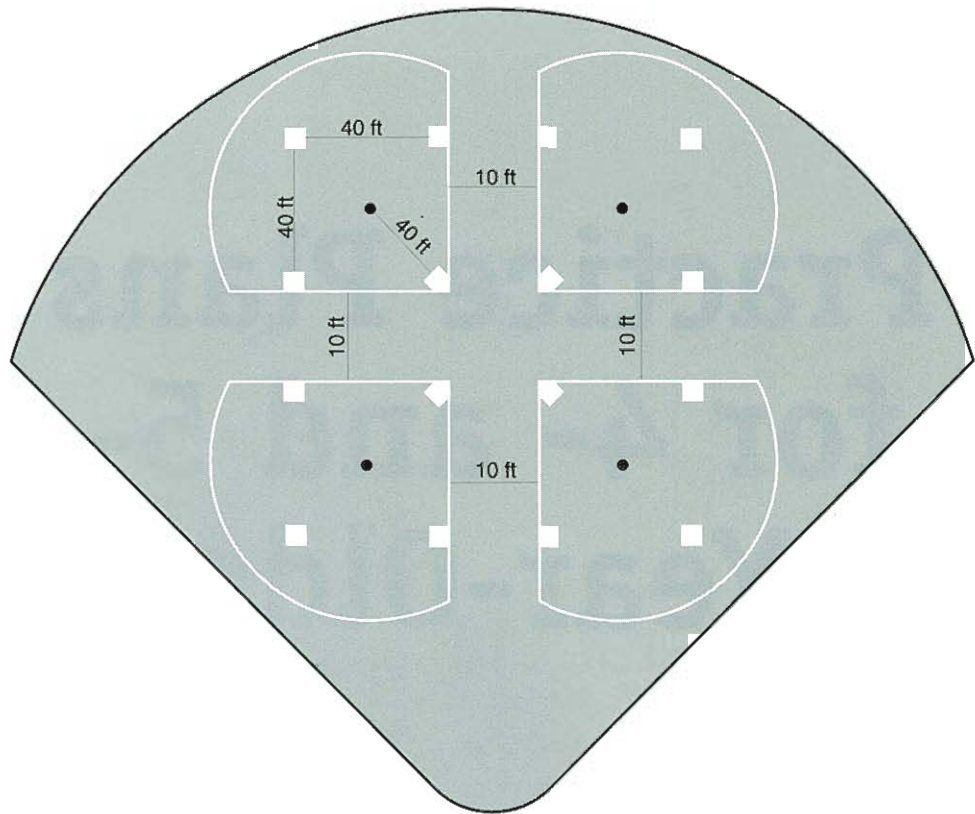


Figure 6.1 Set up for smaller fields.

T-ball has some rules that differ from baseball or softball:

- ⦿ Steals are not allowed, so no sliding to bases is taught at the Rookies level. Headfirst sliding, which is dangerous, is prohibited.
- ⦿ The ball is not pitched, but is hit off a tee. Therefore, no balls and strikes are called in T-ball.
- ⦿ An imaginary line called the *playing line* is drawn either between first and third bases or on a curve 40 feet out from home plate. No fielder may cross the playing line until the ball is hit.

See chapter 9 for more on T-ball rules.

For 4- and 5-year-olds, players will only play in the infield, not the outfield (see figure 6.2). When playing 4 v 4, place players at first, second, third, and shortstop. When playing 5 v 5, place players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher.

The player in the pitcher's position will not pitch, but will field. He or she must stay in place until the ball is hit. The player in the catcher's position must stand far enough behind home plate to not interfere with the batter.

Try to recruit at least one other adult to assist you during practices; you'll want the players to have a first-base and third-base coach to guide them during play. If you have more than one game going at a time, having additional

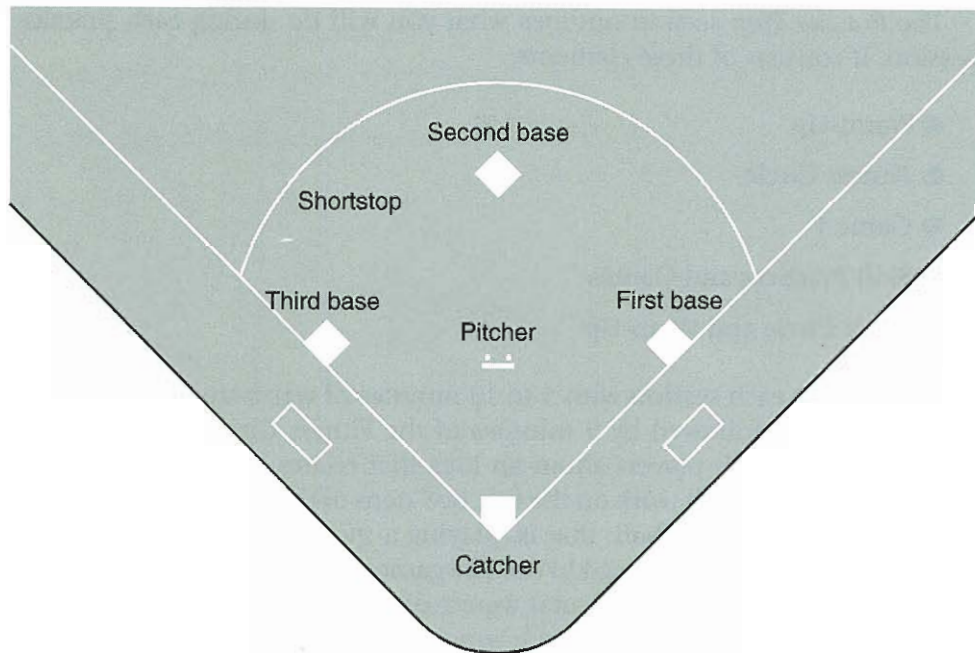


Figure 6.2 Baseball positions.

adults who can serve as base coaches allows you to observe games without also coaching at a base. Encourage parents to help you—the more assistants you have, the more attention each young child can get (though you should be sure not to assign parents to work with their own children).

Practice Plan Organization

Each plan contains the following sections:

- ⊙ Purpose
- ⊙ Equipment
- ⊙ Practice Plan
- ⊙ Coach's Point
- ⊙ Variations

Purpose focuses on what you want to teach your players during that practice; it is your main “theme” for that day. *Equipment* notes what you’ll need on hand for that practice. We’ll address the *Practice Plan* section in greater depth in just a moment. Items listed in *Coach's Point* are helpful reminders for you, points of emphasis for most effectively conducting the practice. And the *Variations* to games noted at the end of each plan provide you with modifications to keep skill practices and games fun and interesting and to help players of varying skill levels.

Coaching YMCA Rookies Baseball and Softball

The *Practice Plan* section outlines what you will do during each practice session. It consists of these elements:

- ⦿ Warm-Up
- ⦿ Fitness Circle
- ⦿ Game 1
- ⦿ Skill Practices and Games
- ⦿ Team Circle and Wrap-Up

You'll begin each session with 5 to 10 minutes of warm-up activities. This segment will be followed by 5 minutes of the Fitness Circle, during which you briefly talk with players about an idea that relates to health or fitness. Then, in Game 1, you'll work on the first two steps of the four-step process for teaching baseball or softball: that is, playing a modified game and helping players discover what they need to do. The game will be designed to focus the children's attention on a particular aspect of the game. Start the game, but when it's clear that the players are having trouble achieving the goal of the game, stop the game and ask questions and get answers similar to those shown in the plans. The questions and answers will help the players see what skills they need to "solve" tactical problems in the game.

The third part of the four-step process is teaching the skills identified in Game 1 through the skill practices. In each skill practice you'll use the IDEA approach, which means you do the following actions:

- I** Introduce the skill.
- D** Demonstrate the skill.
- E** Explain the skill.
- A** Attend to players practicing the skill.

Chapter 8 contains descriptions of all the skills, so a page reference will be given to guide you to the appropriate description there. The introduction, demonstration, and explanation should be very brief to fit young children's short attention spans. As the players practice, you attend to individual children, guiding them with Coaching Cues or further demonstration.

After the skill practices, you will finish the four-step process by having the children play another game. This lets them use the skills they just learned, and see how those skills fit into the context of a game.

The Practice Plan section concludes with a Team Circle, which focuses on character development. You take about 5 minutes to talk *with* your players about some aspect of the game that relates to one of the four core values—caring, honesty, respect, and responsibility. Following this, you wrap up the practice with a reminder of the next practice day and time and a preview of what will be taught in that next practice.

A note about Fitness and Team Circles—these times are meant to be true discussions, not lectures where you do all the talking and the kids do all the listening. Ask the questions provided and wait for your players to respond. Don't feed them the answers that we provide; these answers are only meant

to help you guide the discussion. The children's wording of answers doesn't have to match what we give here. Your role is as much to ask questions and get players to respond as it is to dole out information.

The plans in this chapter, combined with the information in the rest of this book, should give you everything you need to lead practices. Just remember to be patient and caring as you work on skills. Different children will progress at different rates, and it's more important that they learn the sport in a positive way than it is that they learn quickly.

Key to Diagrams

△ = Cone

~~~~→ = Rolling the ball

---→ = Throwing the ball

—→ = Running

○○○○ = Hitting the ball

R = Runner

□C = Coach

B = Batter

X = Player

1B = First-base player

2B = Second-base player

3B = Third-base player

SS = Shortstop

P = Pitcher

C = Catcher

LF = Left fielder

CF = Center fielder

RF = Right fielder



# Practice 1

## PURPOSE

To defend space by infield position, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objectives are for the players to learn the infield positions (first, second, third, and shortstop) and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Begin each practice with five to ten minutes of warm-up activities to get players loosened up and ready to go. Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

Following the warm-up, gather the players and briefly discuss the fitness concept for that practice.

### Key Idea: General fitness

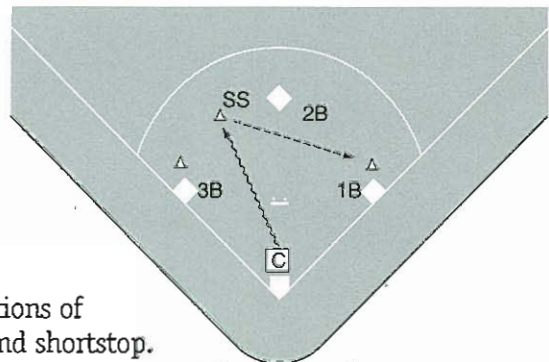
Gather children into a group. "Everyone jump 10 times. Our muscles help us jump. When you use your muscles a long time without getting too tired, it improves your *endurance*, which means you can run longer without getting tired. Now run really fast to second base and back." Wait for them to return. "Running strengthens your heart and lungs. Now touch your toes; try to keep your fingers down there while I count to 10. Stretching makes you flexible, like a rubber band. When we play baseball [softball], our bodies run, jump, and move. It makes our bodies stronger and improves our fitness, which means we can run and play longer and faster. Having good physical fitness is important for baseball [softball] and for being healthy. Every practice we'll talk about fitness in our Fitness Circles."

## Game 1 (10 minutes)

Following the Fitness circle, get the kids playing a game. Follow most games with a time of questions and answers—with YOU asking the questions and your PLAYERS providing the answers (about what the goal of the game was and what skills and tactics they needed to perform to succeed in the game). For many games, we provide diagrams or figures showing how the game is played. We also often provide "coach's points" for you to pass along to your players during the games.

### Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, and shortstop. Players will field grounders and throw accurately to first base.



# Practice 1

## Description

Group(s) of four players—for each field, set up an infield with four players (first, second, and third base players and a shortstop). Show the players each infield position (see page 35), and use cones to mark each infield position. Then you or an assistant coach should throw or roll grounders to each infield position. Each player fields the grounder and throws the ball to first. Have players rotate through the different positions counterclockwise (first, second, shortstop, third).

As a motivational technique, count the number of good catches and good throws for each rotation. Challenge the children to improve from one rotation to the next. Keep a record of their accomplishments for future reference and future challenges.

Coach: "What were you trying to do in that game?"

Players: "We were trying to catch the ball and throw it to first base."

Coach: "Was any group able to get four good catches and four good throws in a row?"

Players: "No."

Coach: "How do you think we could get better?"

Players: "We could get better if we practice more."

### COACH'S cues



### For Fielding

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover." (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

You'll follow Game 1 with a Skill Practice, during which you'll introduce, demonstrate, and explain a skill or tactic, and then attend to your players as they practice it. The question-and-answer session, in which your players tell YOU what skills and tactics they needed to be successful in the game, leads directly to the Skill Practice. We often provide coaching points with the Skill Practices; pass these points along to your players. We also provide "coach's cues"—phrases to help your players focus on the task at hand—during many Skill Practices and Games.

## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field a grounder with a glove (see pages 125-126).
2. Practice fielding a ball properly.

## Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 10 feet apart from each other. They then roll a ball back and forth between them. When the



# Practice 1

(cont'd)



partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

Use the Coach's Cues for fielding. Repeat them frequently.

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to throw a ball accurately (see pages 121-123).
2. Practice throwing a ball accurately.

### Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 15 feet apart from each other. One partner rolls the ball to the other partner five times in a row. The other partner fields the ball and throws the ball back to his or her partner. After one partner rolls the ball five times, players should switch so that the other partner rolls the ball. If both of the partners complete four of five good catches and accurate throws (within one step of the person's catching the ball), both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill. Encourage them to focus on using good throwing form.

### COACH'S cues



### For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Use the Coach's Cues for fielding to help with this practice, too.

# Practice 1

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Follow the same directions as Game 1.

### Team Circle (5 minutes)

Conclude practice by gathering your players and discussing a character development concept. These aren't lectures; you want your players' active participation in these discussions. Following the discussions, wrap up the practice with a few comments.

#### Key Idea: Four core values

Gather children into a circle. "This season we'll talk about four qualities of a good person and teammate. Number one is *caring*. Can you tell me ways you show caring to others? Helping someone up when they fall? Good! Number two is *honesty*. What ways do you show honesty? How about if you tell someone if you played with their game or toy? That's honesty. Number three is *respect*. Do you know what respect is? One thing that shows respect is listening to adults when they speak to you, like you're doing now. Number four is *responsibility*. One way to show you're responsible is to pick up after yourself. Don't wait for others to pick up for you." Ask them to share ways they show the four values in other areas of their lives. "Good teammates show these values to each other. We'll talk more about these four values during the season."

#### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the youngsters of the next practice's day and time, and give them a sneak preview of that practice—fielding grounders, throwing to first base, and hitting a ball off a tee.

### Variations

- Games may be played 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players.
- If several players are having difficulty, design a special drill with multiple trials. The drill should last no longer than 10 minutes; then move on to another game or drill or return to the game or drill that they were playing previously.



### COACH'S point

☞ The player on first base will need some help covering the base on the throw. Be sure to put one of your more proficient players on first base initially, but give all players a chance to play first base eventually.

☞ Frequently question the players about the proper infield positions. For example, you might say, "Jeffrey, go show us where the first-base player stands." "Kolicia, what position are you playing?" "Raymond, tell me what position Theresa is playing."

☞ If you have a player who is having difficulty, send him or her off with an assistant coach for some one-on-one attention for 5 to 10 minutes.

# Practice 2

## PURPOSE

To defend space by an infield position, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objective is for the players to learn the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher), to hit and run to first base, and to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base. They also should demonstrate proper batting technique when hitting a ball off a tee.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Cardiorespiratory fitness

Children gather into a group. "Everyone hold one hand up and make a fist. Squeeze your fist tightly, then let go. Keep tightening and letting go." Children continue for 10 counts. "Your heart is a special muscle that tightens and relaxes just like your fist is doing. Your heart is about the size of your fist. Let's put our fists over our chests. Every time it tightens, or beats, your heart pumps blood all over your body. When you run during baseball [softball], your heart beats faster. The beat slows down when you slow down. Let's run with high knees for 15 counts while we count together. Stop and feel your heart beat by putting your hand over your chest." Model for players. "Running strengthens your heart and lungs and improves your fitness."

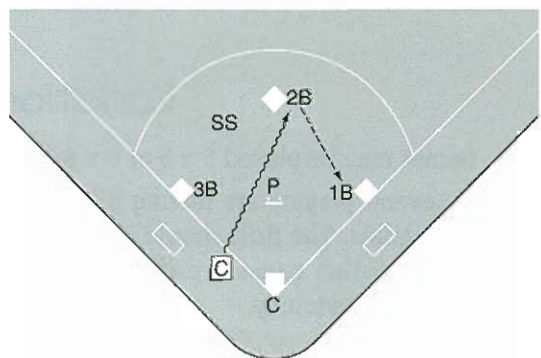
## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Players will field grounders and throw accurately to first base.

### Description

Group of six—for each field, set up an infield with six players (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher). You or an assistant coach should throw or roll grounders to each infield position. Each player fields the grounder and throws the ball to first. Count the number of good catches and good throws.



# Practice 2

Coach: "What were you trying to do in that game?"

Players: "We were trying to catch the ball and throw it to first base."

Coach: "Was any group able to get four good catches and four good throws in a row?"

Players: "No."

Coach: "How do you think we could get better?"

Players: "We could get better if we practice more."

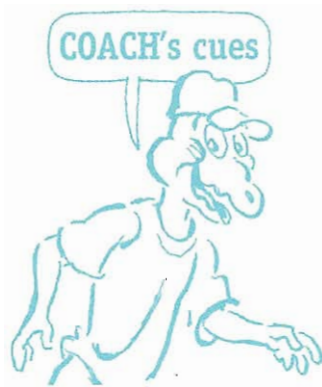


## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

### Description

Pairs—players choose partners and stand about 10 feet apart from each other. They then roll a ball back and forth. When the partners get 10 in a row without a miss, both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.

Then partners stand about 15 feet apart from each other. One partner rolls the ball to the other; the other fields the ball and throws it back to his or her partner. After one partner rolls the ball five times, the players should switch so the other partner gets to roll the ball. If both of the partners complete four of five good catches and accurate throws (within one step of the person's catching the ball), both should take one giant step back and repeat the drill.



### For Fielding

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover." (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

### For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."


## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to use proper technique when striking a ball off a tee with a bat (see "Hitting," pages 128-130).
2. Practice striking a ball off a tee with a bat.

### Description

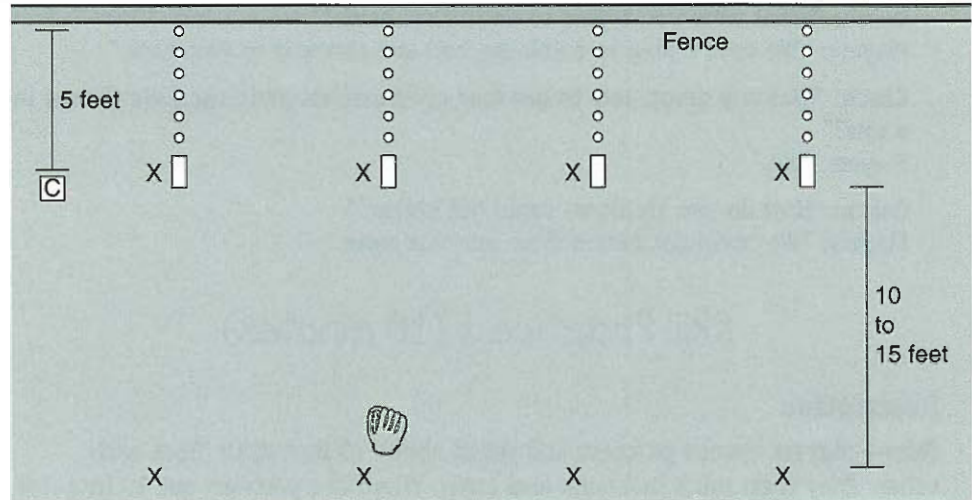
Set up three or four batting stations. Position them within five feet of a fence, with two players at each tee. With you or an assistant coach present, one player in each pair works on striking the ball off the tee, hitting it against the fence. The partner places the ball on the tee for the batter, then stands way back. (You or the assistant coach should



 Repetition is necessary for young players. For example, when you teach hitting, let each player practice for about 5 to 10 minutes, then work on fielding for 7 to 10 minutes. Set up four stations (two batting stations and two fielding stations), and rotate players every 5 to 7 (or 10) minutes.

# Practice 2

(cont'd)



put a glove on the ground 10 to 15 feet behind the tee and have the partners stand behind the glove.) Each player should hit five times in a row, then switch places with his or her partner. Continue for five minutes, then repeat. Discuss rules related to balls and strikes (see pages 137-138).

## COACH'S cues



"Get in the ready position."  
"Watch the ball on the batting tee."  
"Step and swing fast!"

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will learn the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Players will hit and run to first before the throw gets to the first-base player.

### Description

6 v 6—players hit off a tee and run to first base. A point is scored if they are safe at first. They can continue running bases, but the play will only be at first base. The runner can score a run if she or he crosses home plate.

# Practice 2

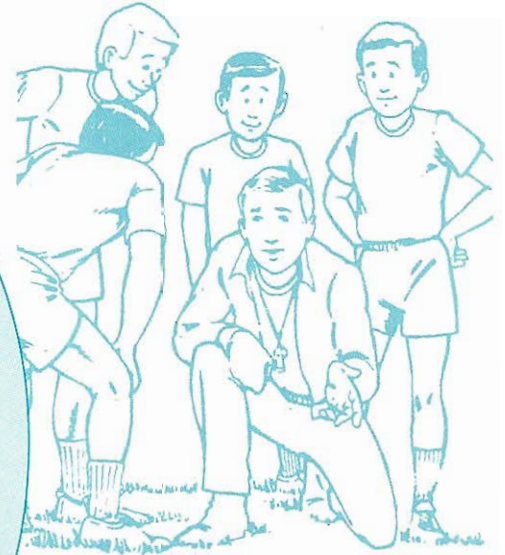
## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a group. "I want us all to pretend we're eggs. Eggs have shells that can break. What would happen if we bumped into each other as eggs? Right. We would crack and break. Let's move around the field being eggs. Don't bump each other or we'll break!" Continue for about one minute. "We were all careful not to bump each other so our 'shells' wouldn't break! That was great! You were in charge of or 'responsible' for your moving. When we're careful of each other, we're responsible for our space and other players' space. This shows responsibility during practice and games."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind them of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—hitting and running to first base, plus fielding grounders and throwing to first base.



## Variations

- Games may be played 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players on the team.
- During the final game, players can hit and not run. This makes the game less complex.
- Try this variation with advanced players: have four players form a square, with a person at each corner. The first player rolls the ball to the player to his or her left. That player catches the grounder and throws the ball to the next player, who then rolls the ball to the next player, and so on. After the ball goes around the square five times, the players change roles so that the players who rolled the ball throw, and vice versa. Continue for 7 to 10 minutes.



☞ Explain the rules as the game is played, but be quick, brief, and to the point. Don't be afraid to repeat something or to question players to see if they understand the rules or a particular situation.

☞ Frequently refer to the situation. For example, say to them, "There are no outs and no runners on base. Where should you throw the ball?"



# Practice 3

## PURPOSE

To defend space by infield position and to get on base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objectives are for players to be able to hit and run to first base, as well as to field grounders and make an accurate throw to first base. They also will review the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher).

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

## Warm-Up (5 minutes)

Players play catch with you or an assistant coach.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Muscular strength and endurance

Gather children into a circle. "Everyone find your own space so that you don't bump your neighbor. You're going to run in your own spot for 30 seconds, then stop. Ready, go!" Time children and verbally let them know the time remaining; stop them at the end of the time. "What part of the body did we just use the most when we ran?" Encourage their responses. "When we play baseball [softball] which parts of the body do we use the most?" Wait for their responses. "Muscles in our body help us move our arms and legs. Playing baseball [softball] will help our arm and leg muscles get stronger and grow bigger."

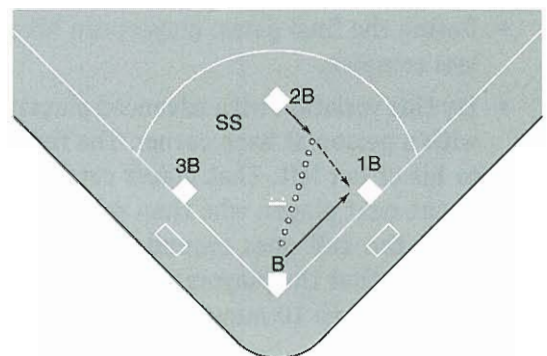
## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will hit and run to first before the throw gets to the first-base player.  
Players will field and throw the ball to first base before the runner gets there.  
Players will review the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher.

### Description

4 v 4 (you can add more players if needed, but use no more than 6 v 6) —the batter hits the ball off a tee and runs to first base; if safe, he or she scores a point. The runner can continue running bases and can score a run if she or he crosses home plate. The fielders attempt to field



# Practice 3

and throw the ball to first base before the runner gets there (a play will only be attempted at first base). The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it to the score of Game 2. Discuss rules related to foul balls and outs (see pages 137-138).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were batting?"

Players: "The goal was to hit and run to first before the throw."

Coach: "Why is it important to get to first base quickly?"

Players: "You run quickly so you can go to the next base and score runs."

Coach: "So, the more times we get on first, the more times we'll get to ...?"

Players: "Score runs!"



## Skill Practice 1 (5 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With you or an assistant coach, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to hit and run quickly to first base (see pages 130-131). Focus on the first step after the swing. Tell the children to run slightly outside the base line; this will help keep them from being hit by the throw to first and still usually allow them to approach the base without running into the infielder at first base. Also tell them to run (or overrun) all the way *through* first base and not to leap.
2. Have the players practice their hitting and running to first base quickly.

### Description

Individual—players do a mock swing and run to first base, three or four times each. Discuss the rules related to running to first base, such as running too far outside the line (see page 138).

### COACH'S cues



### For Hitting and Running to First Base

"Get in the ready position."

"Watch the ball on the batting tee."

"Step and swing fast."

"Step and drive to first base."

## Skill Practice 3 (10 minutes)

### Description

4 v 4—each member of the batting team hits and runs to first, three times (see the figure on page 46). The fielding team fields the ball and throws to first base. Teams rotate after each player on the batting team hits and runs three times. Discuss rules related to outs and foul balls as each situation arises (see pages 137-138).

### COACH'S cues



### For Fielding

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Put your glove on the ground."

"Catch and cover." (Cover the ball with the ungloved hand.)

### For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

Also use the Coach's Cues for hitting and running to first base.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of Game 2 with the score of Game 1.

# Practice 3

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Honesty

Gather children into a group near two bases about 10 feet apart. "Can you step out of the base paths when you are running the bases? What if it's an accident and nobody saw you? Those of you who think it's OK to step out of the base paths, stand by this base. Those who think it's not OK, stand by this one." Wait for children to choose. Then ask them why they chose the base they did. "Stepping out of the base paths, even if it's an accident, is against the rules. What should you do if it happens? Those of you who think you should just keep playing, stay at this base; those of you who think you should tell the coach, go stand by that base." Wait for everyone to finish choosing. "It's important to be honest. If you step out of the base paths while you're base running, even if nobody sees it, tell me."

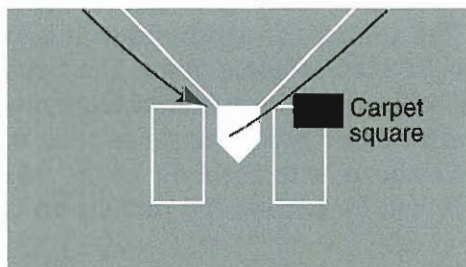
### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—fielding fly balls and line drives and hitting and running to first base.



## Variations

- Games may be played 5 v 5 or 6 v 6, depending on the number of players and the number of assistant coaches.
- Encourage better players to "charge the ball," which means to run toward the ball and catch it as soon as possible.



COACH'S  
point



☞ Continue to use "cues" to help players remember key points of skill performance.

☞ Throwing the bat may be a problem for some players. Put a carpet square behind the batter's box and tell players to drop the bat on the carpet square as they follow through, then run to first base (see figure to the left).

# Practice 4

## PURPOSE

To defend space near infield positions and to get on base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, no runners on base, and a grounder to the infield. The objective is for players to be able to field fly balls and line drives, and to hit and run to first base. They also will review the infield positions (first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher).

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

## Warm-Up (5 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner.
2. Players jog around the bases once.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Safety and rules

Gather children into a circle. "What are the easiest ways to get hurt while playing baseball [softball]?" Wait for answers (getting hit with the ball or bat, hurting your leg when sliding, slipping and falling when chasing a ball). "What's the best way to keep from getting hurt? How do we prevent these accidents from happening?" Point out that while no sport is injury free, their risks of being hurt are much reduced when they follow the rules, use proper equipment, and care about each other.

## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

The players will hit and run to first, getting there before the fielder's throw gets to the first-base player. The players will field and throw the ball, getting it to first base before the runner reaches there. The players will review the basic positions of infielders: first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher.

### Description

4 v 4 (you can add more players, but only up to 6 v 6)—the batter hits and runs to first base; if safe, he or she scores a point (see the figure on page 46). The runner can continue running bases and can score a run if she or he crosses home plate. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to first base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it to the score of the final game. Introduce rules about a fly ball for batters and runners on base (see page 138).

# Practice 4

Coach: "What was the goal of that game, if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "The goal was to catch the ball and throw to first, ahead of the runner."

Coach: "What should you do if the ball is hit in the air?"

Players: "You should catch it."

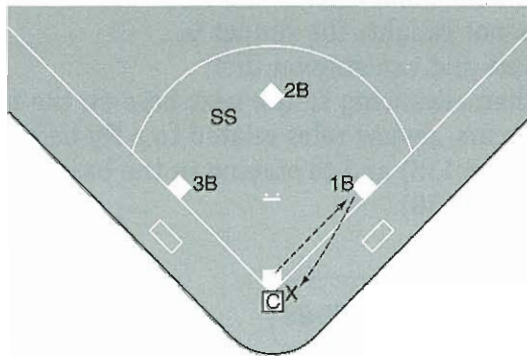
Coach: "Show me how you use your glove to catch a ball in the air."

Players: [They should show you the fingers of their gloves pointing up.]



## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to field a fly ball or line drive and how to make an accurate throw (see pages 127 and 121-123).
2. Practice fielding a fly ball or line drive and making an accurate throw.



### Description

Three or four players per coach—you or an assistant coach should throw fly balls or line drives to players, who are in positions in the infield. The players field the ball, then throw it in (to the player standing next to the coach). Encourage players to "call" the ball. Discuss terminology, such as *fly ball*, *line drive*, and *grounder* (see pages 116-117). Discuss the rule(s) about fly balls, and also how many outs a team gets before they switch with the team in the field (see page 138).

### COACH'S cues



### For Fielding Fly Balls

"Get in the ready position."

"Move your feet to the ball."

"Watch it come in."

"Catch the ball in front of your forehead.  
Use two hands, extend your arms."

### For Fielding Line Drives

"Ball above the waist; fingers point up."

"Ball below the waist; fingers point down."

### For Throwing

"Bring the ball WAY back."

"Step with the opposite foot."

"Follow through to the target."

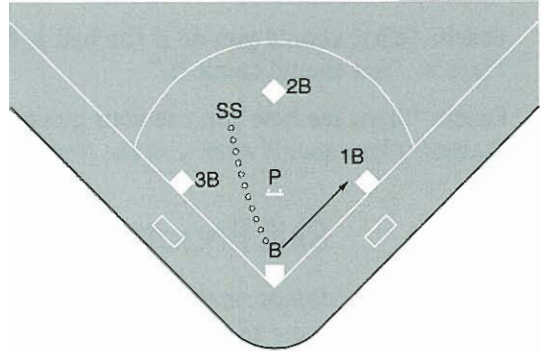
# Practice 4

(cont'd)

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

### Description

5 v 5—the fielding team has five infielders (first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher). Have the batting team hit the ball from a tee and run to first base. If the ball is caught, the runner is out. If the ball is not caught, the runner is safe and can stay on first, then advancing to the next base on the next hit. When this situation occurs, review rules related to a fly ball when batting or running bases (page 138) and to staying in the base paths when a tag play could occur (page 138).



### COACH'S cues



### For Hitting and Running

"Get in the ready position."

"Watch the ball on the batting tee."

"Step and swing fast."

"Step and drive to first base."

Also use Coach's Cues for fielding and throwing.

## Skill Practice 3 (5 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of the second game with the score of the first game.

# Practice 4

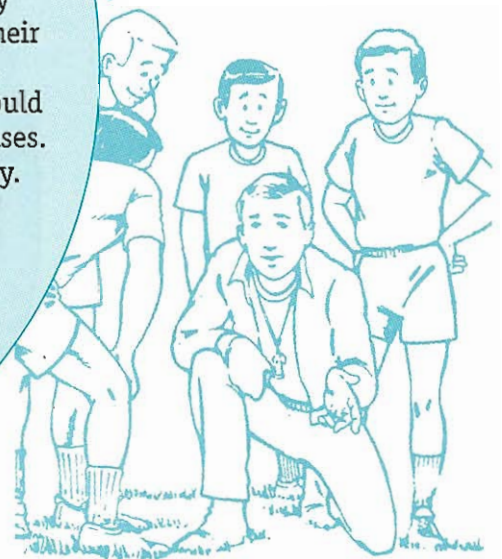
## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Caring

Gather children into a circle. Stand in the middle of the group with a ball. Toss the ball to each child and give him or her a turn to toss it back to you. "I am going to throw the ball. If a throw comes to you, toss it back to me." Work around the whole circle. Talk to the children about playing and learning when they come to practice. "Who had a turn to touch the ball?" Wait for their responses. "I made sure everyone had a chance to touch the ball. Raise your hand if it felt good to be able to have a turn. How would you have felt if you did not have a turn?" Listen to their responses. "We need to share and take turns so everyone can learn and play. Sharing and taking turns shows you care."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to second base to cut the lead runner and running from first to second base.



## Variations

- You may want to include practice on the pitcher's coverage of first base. This will depend on the experience of your players.
- Work with runners on rounding first, running from home to second base, and running from first to second (being in the ready position and knowing when to leave the base). They'll also need some work on listening to the base coaches, who should tell them whether to run or to stay on base.



☞ Continue to review and reinforce skills and rules that were taught in previous practice sessions.

☞ Rotate players from position to position, so that all of them get a chance to play at each position.



# Practice 5


## PURPOSE

To “cut” (cut off) the lead runner and to get from first to second base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, a runner is on first base, and a grounder is in the infield. The objective is for players to be able to throw to second base to cut the lead runner and to start and stop properly when advancing from first to second base.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee



 Set up some batting stations early so players can begin batting practice as soon as they arrive.

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players play catch with a partner.
2. Players jog around the bases once.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Healthy habits

Gather children in a circle. “Do you know that when your body doesn’t eat healthy foods and get enough sleep it moves slowly. Let’s pretend we have no energy to move because we didn’t eat enough healthy foods or get enough sleep.” Begin to move slowly, encouraging the children to follow. Move extremely slowly. “Everyone stop. Now I am going to fill your bodies up with healthy foods.” Act out giving them foods. “Pretend we are sleeping. When I say ‘Wake up!’ you can move faster because you have enough energy and enough rest. Wake up and move faster. Stop! What are some other healthy habits you have learned?” Examples: daily exercise, brushing teeth, saying no to drugs, no smoking. “It’s important for everyone to practice healthy habits.”

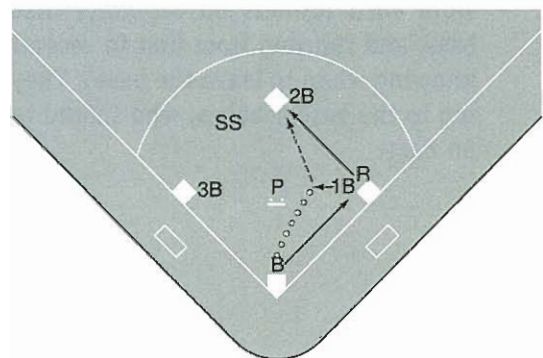
## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will run from first to second before the throw gets to second base. Players will field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there.

### Description

5 v 5 (can add more players, if needed, up to 6 v 6)—the batting team starts with a runner on first base. The batter hits and runs to first base; if the first-base runner is safe at second, the batting team scores a point. Both



# Practice 5

runners can continue running bases and can score a run if they cross home plate. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it to the score of Game 2.

Coach: "What was the goal of that game if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "The goal was to catch the ball and throw to second base, ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the left side of the infield?"

Players: "The second-base player should cover it."

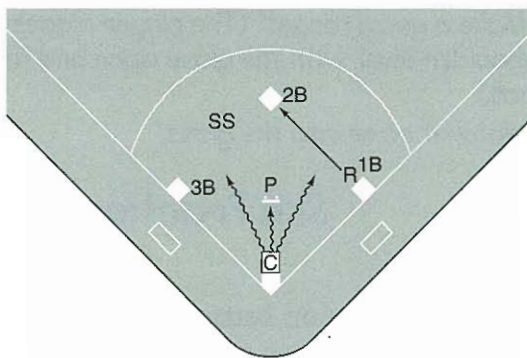
Coach: "Who should cover second base if the ball is hit to the right side of the infield?"

Players: "The shortstop should cover it."



## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover second base on a force play and how to start and stop properly when advancing from first to second base (see pages 130-131). Tell players that, to cover a base on a force play, they should keep the foot opposite their glove hand on the edge of the base that is closest to the play (closest to where the ball is coming from).
2. Practice covering second base on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from first to second base.



### Description

5 v 5—have the batting team run from first to second base. Cover the rules related to when the runner can leave first base and advance to second (see page 138). The fielding team should have players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Roll or throw (or hit off a tee) four balls to the left side, then four balls to the right side, then two to the pitcher. Signal the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play shortstop or second base (rotate in this order: first, second, pitcher, shortstop, third). Discuss the difference between force plays and tag plays (see force-out and tag-out, pages 116 and 117). Also discuss rule(s) related to overrunning first base, but not overrunning second base(see page 138).

# Practice 5

(cont'd)

## COACH'S cues



### For Advancing to Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

### For Stopping on a Base

"Lean back."

"Keep your weight on your heels."

"Bend your legs and ankles to absorb the force."

"Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

### For Covering a Base on a Force Play

"Get yourself between the ball and the base."

"Put your foot opposite your glove hand on the outside edge of the base."

"Make a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)

"Watch it come into the glove."

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of the second game with the score of the first game.

# Practice 5

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Caring

Gather children into a group. "Let's pretend we're playing a baseball [softball] game. Watch what I do with the ball." Tell a child in the group you're throwing the ball to him. Make a bad throw. "That throw wasn't very good, was it? What would you say to me so that I don't feel bad about the throw?" As children respond, toss a ball to each player who makes a supportive comment. If players make unsupportive comments, encourage them to change their words to become more supportive; after they have changed the words, toss them a ball, too. "It's very important to support your teammates, especially when they make mistakes. Saying something that makes someone feel good shows you care."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to second base to cut the lead runner and running from first to second base.



## Variations

Work on having the runner listen to the base coaches when running from first to second base.



☞ Be sure that all players are moving on every play. If they are not fielding the ball, they should be covering a base or backing up another player.

☞ Remind players to talk to each other during play; for example, they can call the ball ("Mine!") or remind each other where the next play is ("Play's at first").

# Practice 6

## PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to get from first to second base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, a runner is on first, and a grounder is in the infield. The objective is for players to be able to throw to second base to cut the lead runner as well as to use the proper start position to run from first to second base.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee
- A rubber band (optional)

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls back and forth with a partner.
2. Players run once around the bases.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Flexibility

Bring a rubber band and show children or have them visualize one. "This rubber band is like our muscles. When I pull it, it stretches; when I let go, it pulls back to its original shape." Stretch the rubber band out and back slowly and gently. "Your muscles work this way, too. When you reach and stretch, your muscles are stretching just like the rubber band. When your body comes back, your muscles go back to their original shape. Everyone reach down to the floor with your arms slowly and then bring your arms back up." Have children repeat three times. "Your leg muscles need to stretch because we use them a lot in baseball [softball]; it makes them more flexible. When muscles are flexible, it keeps them from getting hurt and makes the muscles feel good."

## Game 1 (10 minutes)

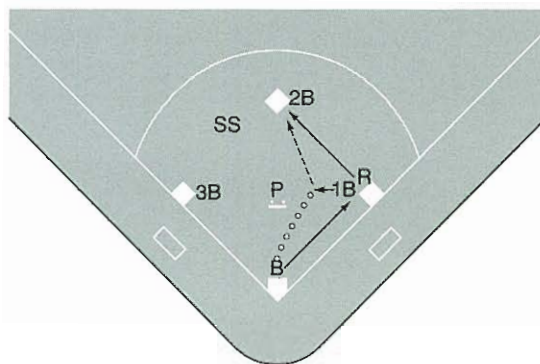
### Goal

Players will run from first to second before the throw gets to second base. Players will field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there.

### Description

5 v 5 (can add more players, if needed, up to 6 v 6)—the batting team starts with a runner on first base.

The batter hits and runs to first base; if the first-base runner is safe at



# Practice 6

second, the batting team scores a point. The runners can continue running bases and can score a run if they cross home plate. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to second base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it to the score of Game 2. Introduce the rules related to running bases and scoring (see page 138).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game, if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "The goal was to catch the ball and throw to second base, ahead of the runner."

Coach: "What happens if the infielder catches the ball before it hits the ground?"

Players: "The batter is out, and the runner cannot run to the next base."

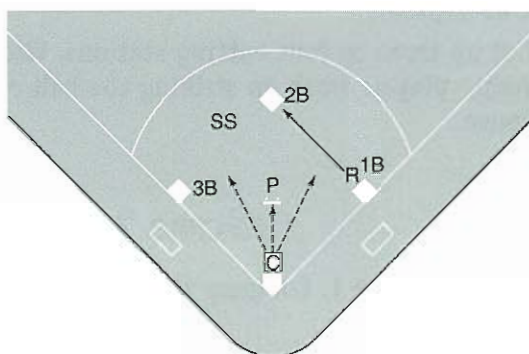


## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover second base on a force play and how to start and stop properly when advancing from first to second base. Demonstrate how the runner hesitates on a fly ball, leading off the base a few feet and either returning to first if the ball is caught or running to second if the ball is not caught. Show players how to get back to first base quickly. They should stay crouched with feet apart and body centered, ready to move either to second or first.
2. Practice covering second base on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from first to second base.

### Description

5 v 5—have the batting team run from first to second base. The fielding team should have players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Throw them (or hit off a tee) four balls to the left side, then four balls to the right side, then two to the pitcher (mix in some fly balls and line drives). Signal the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play shortstop or second base (rotate in this order: first, second, third, pitcher, shortstop). Review the rules about which bases a player can overrun and which he or she cannot (see page 138).



Be sure all players get to play shortstop and second base so they come to understand how to cover a base on a force play, as well as who should cover second base in each situation.

Help fielders differentiate when they need to throw and when they need to "flip" or toss the ball to the player covering second base.

## COACH'S cues



### For Advancing to Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

### For Stopping on a Base

"Lean back."

"Keep your weight on your heels."

"Bend your legs and ankles to absorb the force."

"Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

### For Covering a Base on a Force Play

"Get yourself between the ball and the base."

"Put your foot opposite your glove hand and on the outside edge of the base."

"Make a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)

"Watch it come into the glove."

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of the second with the score of the first game.

# Practice 6

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a circle. You're in the middle of the circle with a ball and a bat. You'll try to tap the ball out of the circle with the bat. The children will have two chances to keep the ball from escaping the circle. During one turn they'll use minimal effort, and during the second they'll use their maximum effort. "I'm going to try to hit the ball out of the circle. Everyone work together to keep the ball in the circle. Pretend that you're snails that can't get to the ball fast enough." Try to get the ball out of the circle, reminding players that snails move slowly. "Okay, good. Now this time move like busy bees that fly fast and keep moving." Repeat the activity, encouraging players to be busy bees. "When you try to be like busy bees, you're being responsible to your teammates."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to third base to cut the lead runner and running from second to third base.

## Variations

For the final game, add a catcher and play a 6 v 6 game.



- ☞ Continue to review and reinforce skills and rules taught in previous practice sessions.
- ☞ Describe and review the rules as needed during practice and game play.



# Practice 7

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls back and forth with a partner.
2. Players run around the bases once.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Muscular strength and endurance

Gather children in a group. "Watch how far the ball goes when I throw two different times." Throw the ball to show children the difference between a throw with minimal effort and a throw with close to maximum effort. "Let's line up, and you show me how you would throw the ball. Show me an easy throw. . . . Now show me a hard throw." Highlight the ball going farther in the second throw. "You can throw the ball farther when the muscles in your arms are strong. The muscles in your arms get stronger by practicing throwing."

## PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to get from second to third base, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs, runners are on first and second, and a grounder is in the infield. The objectives are for players to throw to third base to cut the lead runner and also to use the proper start position to run from second to third base.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

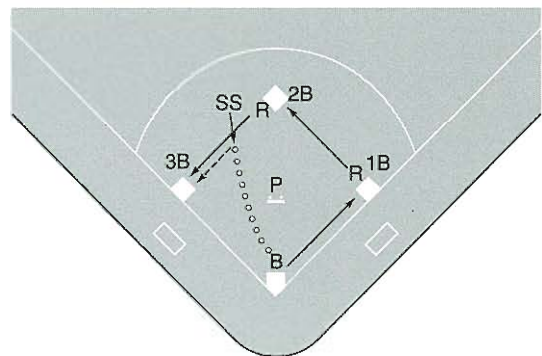
## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will run from second to third before the throw gets to third base. Players will field and throw the ball to third base before the runner gets there.

### Description

5 v 5 (can add more players, if needed, up to 6 v 6)—the batting team starts with runners on first and second base. The batter hits and runs to first base; if the second-base runner is safe at third, the batting team scores a point. The runners can continue running bases and can score a run if



# Practice 1

they cross home plate. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to third base before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it to the score of Game 2. Review the rules related to running bases and to not overrunning second or third base (see page 138).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game, if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "The goal was to catch the ball and throw to third base ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover third base in this situation?"

Players: "The third-base player should cover it."

Coach: "What if a ball gets hit to the third-base player? Should you field the ball or cover third base?"

Players: "You should field the ball."

Coach: "Then who should cover third when the third-base player is fielding the ball?"

Players: "The shortstop should cover it."



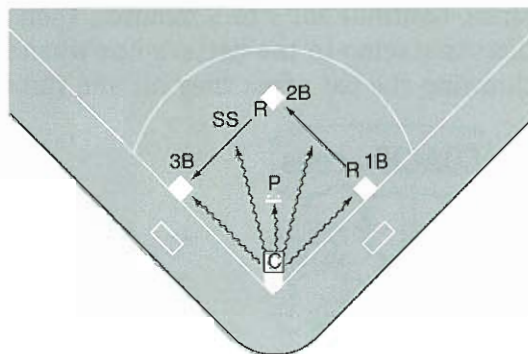
## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover third base on a force play and how to start and stop properly when advancing from second to third base. Show how the shortstop should cover third base when the third-base player fields the ball. As the third-base player is fielding the ball, the shortstop runs to third and covers the base for a force play.
2. Practice covering third base on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from second to third base.

### Description

5 v 5—have the batting team provide runners at first and second base. The fielding team should have players at first, second, third, shortstop, and pitcher. Roll or throw two balls to each of the five infielders, signaling the runners to run each time. After you have thrown

10 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play third base or shortstop (rotate in this order: first, second, third, pitcher, shortstop). Review the rules related to when the player can leave second base and advance to third (see page 138), and teach the kids how to stop at third base. Review what a force play is (see *force-out*, page 116), and differentiate between a force play and a tag play.



# Practice 7

(cont'd)

## COACH'S cues



### For Advancing to Next Base

"Take off when the bat hits the ball."

"Run hard."

"Lean back with your weight on your heels."

"Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

### For Stopping on a Base

"Lean back."

"Keep your weight on your heels."

"Bend your legs and ankles to absorb the force."

"Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)

### For Covering a Base on a Force Play

"Get yourself between the ball and the base."

"Put your foot opposite your glove hand, on the outside edge of the base."

"Provide a good target." (The player places his or her glove at about shoulder-level, with the glove open and facing the player throwing the ball.)

"Watch it come into the glove."

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence. Continue for 3 to 5 minutes, then repeat one or two more times. Discuss staying in the batter's box when hitting. Also talk about not throwing the bat when they hit and run to first base.

## COACH'S cues



"Get in the ready position."

"Watch the ball on the batting tee."

"Step and swing fast."

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the score of the second with the score of the first game.

## COACH'S point

Be sure all players get to play third base and shortstop so they come to understand how to cover a base on a force play, as well as *who* should cover third base in each situation.

# Practice 7

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Respect

Gather children into a group. "I'm going to ask you some questions about things I notice on this team. Tell me if you agree. Do you try to learn new skills at practice? Do you work hard to improve your skills? Do you help your teammates? Do you follow directions? Do you feel good about yourselves when you play a good game?" Listen to responses following each question. "Think about players who will be your opponents. What qualities or things do they have or do? Are they the same as you?" Listen for yes or no. "It's important to think of our opponents in the same way we think of ourselves. You respect yourself, and you should respect your opponents. They are a lot like you and are learning the same things."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—throwing to home plate to cut the lead runner and running from third to home.



## Variations

- For the final game, play a 6 v 6 game.
- During the practice task, mix in some line drives or fly balls. Then review information from Practice 4.



- Remember to teach off-the-ball skills, such as base coverage and backing up the player fielding the ball.
- Teach runners to look at and listen to the third-base coach as they are running to second base.

# Practice 8

## PURPOSE

To cut the lead runner and to get from third base to home plate, focusing on the situation in which there are no outs; runners are on first, second, and third; and a grounder is in the infield. The objective is for players to be able to throw to home plate to cut the lead runner and to use the proper start position to run from third to home.

## Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- Three or four batting tees
- Five balls at each tee

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls back and forth with a partner.
2. Players run once around the bases.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Training and conditioning

Gather children into a circle. "What will you do tonight after you eat dinner?" Wait for their responses. "At the end of the day, what do you do?" Encourage children to discuss sleep. "Let's pretend you're at home, and you climb into bed to go to sleep. Everyone lie down. Now let's pretend it's morning and a new day. You don't have practice today. What should we do to move our bodies? Your body needs to move every day to stay in good physical condition for baseball [softball]." Wait for their responses. If a child suggests an activity such as biking, walking, or swimming, have everyone pretend to do that activity. Then have them "sleep" again, wake up, and choose another physical activity.

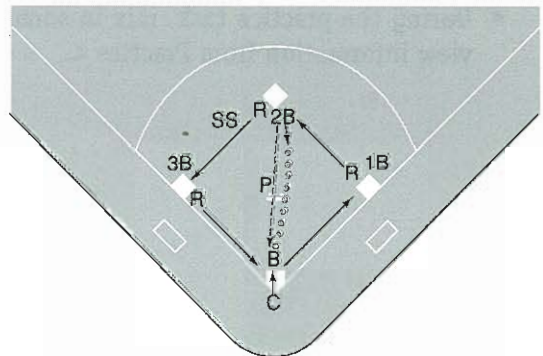
## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will run from third to home before the throw.  
Players will field and throw the ball to home before the runner gets there.

### Description

6 v 6 — the batting team starts with runners on the bases. The batter hits and runs to first base; if the third-base runner is safe at home plate, the batting team scores a point. The fielders attempt to field and throw the ball to home plate before the runner gets there. The side is retired after three points or three outs, whichever comes first. Keep score and compare it with the score of



# Practice 8

Game 2. Review the umpire signals for safe and out (see page 139). Also review when to run in an arc outside of the base path (see page 131).

Coach: "What was the goal of that game, if you were playing the infield?"

Players: "To catch the ball and throw to home plate ahead of the runner."

Coach: "Who should cover home plate in this situation?"

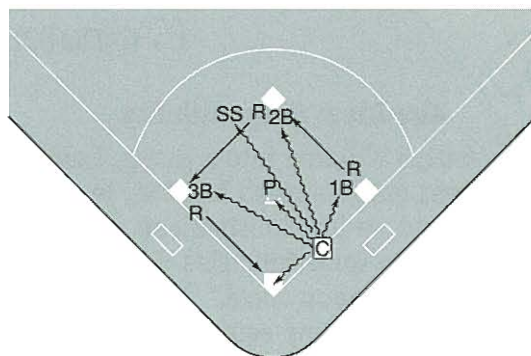
Players: "The catcher should cover it."

## Skill Practice 1 (10 minutes)

1. Introduce, demonstrate, and explain how to cover home plate on a force play and how to start and stop properly when advancing from third base to home plate. Show how the pitcher should cover home when the catcher fields or chases an overthrown ball.
2. Practice covering home plate on a force play and starting and stopping properly when advancing from third base to home plate.

### Description

6 v 6—the batting team provides runners on the bases. The fielding team has players at first, second, third, shortstop, pitcher, and catcher. Roll or throw two balls to each of the fielders, signaling the runners to run each time. After you have thrown 12 balls, the teams should switch. Continue through three rotations so that all players get to play catcher or pitcher (rotate in this order: first, second, pitcher, shortstop, third, catcher). Review the rules related to when a player can leave the base (see page 138) and how to make a force play. Remind runners that they can overrun home plate and they will score a point if they cross home.



### COACH'S cues



#### For Advancing to Next Base

- "Take off when the bat hits the ball."
- "Run hard."
- "Lean back with your weight on your heels."
- "Gather." (Bend at the hips, knees, and ankles.)

#### For Stopping on a Base

- "Lean back."
- "Keep your weight on your heels."
- "Bend your legs and ankles to absorb the force."
- "Hold the base." (Keep your foot on the base at all times.)



COACH'S  
point

Be sure all players get to play catcher and pitcher so they understand how to cover a base on a force play, as well as who should cover home plate in each situation.

## For Covering a Base on a Force Play

- "Get yourself between the ball and the base."
- "Put your foot opposite your glove hand on the outside edge of the base."
- "Make a good target."
- "Watch it come into the glove."

## Skill Practice 2 (10 minutes)

### Description

Set up three or four batting stations. With your or an assistant coach's help, players work on striking the ball off a tee, hitting it against a fence.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Same as Game 1. Compare the Game 2 score with the score of the first game. If you want to try playing with nine players in the field, discuss where the outfielders should throw the ball when they get it (see page 120).



Continue to review and reinforce off-the-ball skills and communication skills.

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Responsibility

Gather children into a group. Dump five to six balls, bats, and gloves out of a mesh ball bag, leaving them where they stop. "Pretend we just finished one activity in practice and we're getting ready to do something else. Everyone walk away from the equipment and make a group circle." Pick up the balls, bats, and gloves, then go to the group. Dump equipment out again. "Now come back and help me pick up the balls, bats, and gloves, and then go make a circle. . . . Which way makes it faster for me to get to your circle?" Listen to their responses. "What do you think we should do with the equipment?" Listen to their responses. Discuss picking up equipment before doing another activity. "We can have more fun and learn more when we work together and share the responsibility."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—playing well in a game.

# Practice 9

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players throw grounders, line drives, and fly balls back and forth with a partner.
2. Players run around the bases once.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Muscular strength and endurance

Have children spread out in a group. "Put your hand on the front of your thigh, then lift it up and set it down. Did you feel the muscle get tight when you lifted it up and then relax when you set it down? Try it again five times." Assist players if needed. "Muscles tighten or contract when you move. You use your thigh muscles and quadriceps when you play baseball [softball]. The more you practice, the stronger your thigh or quadriceps muscles will get. That's called improving your muscular strength."

## Game 1 (10 minutes)

### Goal

Players will recognize the situation and make the right play.

### Description

6 v 6—play a game with regulation rules. If a ball rolls or is hit out to the outfield, have the closest infielder chase it down and throw it into the infield. Discuss any rules not previously covered that arise during the course of the game.

**Coach:** Where's the play in this situation?

**Players:** (whatever arises during the game)

## Skill Practice (20 minutes)

Identify where individual players or the team as a whole are having trouble, then select or design a drill or practice game that will help them improve that aspect of the game. If individual players need work, send them off with an assistant coach to get some help. Review rules that apply to specific situations as they arise.

### PURPOSE

To cut the lead runners, focusing on varying situations. The objective is for the players to be able to make the appropriate play during a 6 v 6 game.

### Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- One batting tee





# Practice 9

(cont'd)

For example, if players are having difficulty recognizing when to run and when to tag up, set up a practice in which you alternate throwing grounders and fly balls while there are runners on base.

Here's another example. If players have difficulty moving to ("charging") the ball, set up a base about 10 to 15 feet in front of them and throw them grounders. Tell them to try to get to each ground ball before it reaches the base.

## Game 2 (10 minutes)

Follow the same directions as in Game 1.



## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Respect

Gather children into a single-file line near two bases about 10 feet apart. "I am going to walk down the line two times. Remember how it feels each time I pass you." Walk down the line and nod to each player. Repeat, but this time tell each player "great game" or "nice play today" and shake his or her hand. "Which time that I passed you made you feel better?" Ask children to stand near a base that represents their choice. "Shaking hands and saying 'good game' are important traditions that show we appreciate our opponents' efforts in a game. It shows respect for your opponents." Divide the team in half and have them practice an end-of-game "respect ritual."

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about practice. Remind the children of the next practice's day and time and give them a sneak preview of that practice—playing the game during *all* the practice time.

### COACH'S point

☞ Review the rules as they play. To demonstrate a rule (or proper procedure), repeat a play (like an instant replay).

☞ Ask the children questions frequently to check for understanding.

☞ Praise and encourage players often.

## Variations

Add outfielders.

# Practice 10

## Warm-Up (10 minutes)

1. Players run around the bases twice.
2. With you or an assistant coach as partner, players practice catching fly balls.

## Fitness Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Healthy habits

Gather children into a group. "When I say 'Go!' all of us will run as fast as we can, without bumping each other, all around the field staying in this area." Mark boundary areas for children. "Ready, go!" Have children run for about a minute or until fatigued. "You had enough energy to run. But when you don't take care of your body, you can get tired much faster playing baseball [softball]. I am going to say a habit and you shout if it is healthy or unhealthy." Examples: taking drugs, smoking, brushing teeth, drinking plenty of water, getting plenty of sleep/rest, eating a variety of foods. "Can you think of any others? Healthy or unhealthy?"

## Game (40 minutes)

### Goal

Players play the game without interruption.

### Description

6 v 6—play a game with regulation rules. If a ball rolls or is hit out to the outfield, have the closest infielder chase it down and throw it into the infield. Discuss any rules not previously covered that arise during the course of the game.

## Variations

Add outfielders.

### PURPOSE

To give players a chance to experience a longer game, reviewing skills and tactics.

### Equipment

- Six bases and two home plates (set up two fields, minimum)
- One glove per player
- One ball per player (minimum)
- One batting tee



☞ Review the rules as they play. To demonstrate a rule (or proper procedure), repeat a play (like an instant replay).

☞ Frequently question your young players to check for understanding.

☞ Praise and encourage players often.

## Team Circle (5 minutes)

### Key Idea: Keeping perspective

Gather children into a group near two bases about 10 feet apart. "What did you most enjoy learning about in baseball [softball] this season?" Listen to their responses. "Players who thought they tried their best to learn, stand by this base. Players who think they had fun this season, stand by this one. Both of those are important. You should try your best and have fun no matter what happens during the season. The most important thing in baseball [softball] is to have fun playing with friends and to learn new skills. I think you all did that! Next year is another chance to have fun and make new friends!"

### Wrap-Up

Make summary comments about what was learned by all over the season. Encourage players to come back next year!