



Special Olympics
young athletes™
activity guide



Special Olympics
Athlete

special olympics young athletes

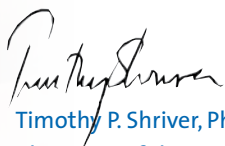
Dear Parents and Educators,

Over the years, we've heard from many families, coaches and teachers who wished they could get their children involved in Special Olympics before they reached the age of eight. Thanks to the generous support of the Mattel Children's Foundation and the pioneering efforts of Special Olympics Programs around the world, these young children with intellectual disabilities now have a setting where they can practice, enhance and display their abilities. It is with great enthusiasm and high expectations that we have created the Special Olympics Young Athletes™ program to welcome children ages two to seven years old into the Special Olympics Movement.

The Young Athlete Activity Guide was designed with a number of objectives in mind. First and foremost, we hope the activities in this guide will help children with intellectual disabilities improve physically, cognitively and socially. Secondly, we hope the program will raise awareness by educating the public about the diverse abilities of children with intellectual disability. This program will also serve as an introduction for new families to the resources and support available within Special Olympics, while providing a vehicle for families to network with each other. Of course, these future Special Olympics athletes benefit by enhancing their skills, developing confidence and increasing their readiness to compete when they reach the age of eight.

We hope that the Young Athletes activities become embedded in family life. The activities not only facilitate growth in a child, but also offer parents and other children tools to grow, to play together, and to become stronger in many ways. Thank you for your participation in the Youth Athletes program and we hope you have fun performing the activities in this guide.

Best wishes,



Timothy P. Shriver, Ph.D.
Chairman of the Board

Thank you

Special Olympics
would like to thank...

Sponsors:

The Mattel Children's Foundation

The Lynch Family Foundation

The Gang Family Foundation



Children's FoundationSM

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Special Olympics Venezuela

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Also:

Special Olympics Staff around the world who helped make the dream of Young Athletes reality.

The Young Athletes Evaluation Team.

The friends, volunteers, educators, children and families who participated in the development of Young Athletes.

And a special thank you to Special Olympics New Jersey for their pioneering efforts to create Young Athletes and share it with the world.



About Young Athletes

Young Athletes is an innovative sports play program for children with intellectual disabilities, designed to introduce them to the world of sports prior to Special Olympics eligibility for competition at age eight. Since its inception in 1968, Special Olympics has established itself as a preeminent global organization offering sports training and competition opportunities to people with intellectual disabilities ages eight and above. Over the years, families of children too young to compete looked for avenues to join the movement. Thanks to the generous support of the Mattel Children's Foundation, the Lynch Family Foundation and families through Young Athletes (tm) – a developmentally appropriate play program for children with intellectual disabilities ages 2 through 7.

Young Athletes include children with intellectual disabilities and their families to the world of Special Olympics by pursuing the following goals:

- ✓ engage children with intellectual disabilities through developmentally appropriate play activities designed to foster physical, cognitive and social development;
- ✓ welcome family members of children with intellectual disabilities to the Special Olympics network of support;
- ✓ raise awareness about the abilities of children with intellectual disabilities through inclusive peer participation, demonstration and other events.

Young Athletes is a versatile program that can work in various learning situations. Families can play with their young athletes at home in a fun atmosphere, using simple-to-follow activities. The program is also appropriate for preschools, schools and playgroups to use with small groups of young children with and without intellectual disabilities. The flexibility of Young Athletes ensures the opportunity to welcome families and their young children into the Special Olympics family.

The **Young Athletes** program includes several resources to guide family members, educators and other professionals as they conduct Young Athletes activities with their children, brothers, sisters, cousins, grandchildren, students or patients.

- Young Athlete Activities Guide includes descriptions of the official Young Athletes activities
- Training DVD - instructional video of children performing the Young Athletes activities
- Young Athletes Equipment Kit - the equipment needed to perform the activities
- www.specialolympics.org/youngathletes - further resources, materials and information

Before conducting Youth Athletes activities, families, teachers, and/or coaches should understand the following guidelines:

- Become familiar with each of the tasks listed under the major skills in the Young Athletes Activity Guide;
- Observe a skilled performer executing the skill or activity (review the activities on the DVD);
- Always begin by explaining the skill you would like observe. When possible demonstrate the skill.

Contact your local Special Olympics Program for information on specific programs in your area, but in every area there are opportunities to attend Games and competitions, either as a spectator or as a volunteer. This will further prepare young athletes for Special Olympics competition after they finish Young Athletes.



Equipment

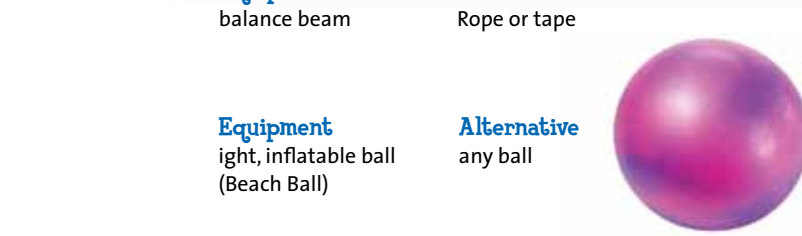
The following items are provided in the Young Athlete Program Kit.

Substitutions are listed beside each item



Equipment
balance beam

Alternative
Rope or tape



Equipment
light, inflatable ball
(Beach Ball)

Alternative
any ball



Equipment
bean bags

Alternative
Small, soft toys, figures or
natural items such as flowers,
leaves, etc.



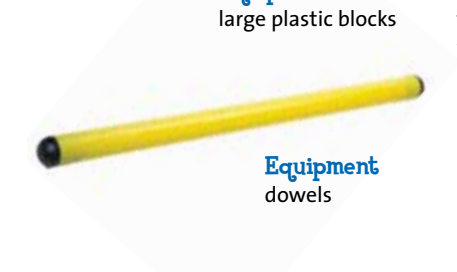
Equipment
cones

Alternative
boxes, plastic soda bottles
weighted with sand



Equipment
large plastic blocks

Alternative
foam blocks or blocks of
wood



Equipment
dowels

Alternative
yardsticks, paper towel or
gift wrap rolls



Equipment
floor markers

Alternative
placemats or tape



Equipment
hoops

Alternative
different sized boxes,
hula hoops



Equipment
Paddle

Alternative
short stick



Equipment
Scarf

Alternative
unused garbage bags or
any flowing, light material

Equipment
Slow Motion Ball

Alternative
any ball



Equipment
small foam ball

Alternative
any ball



**Additional
equipment that may
be used:** junior size basketball,
junior size plastic golf club, junior size
plastic hockey stick, junior size racket, junior
size soccer ball, playground ball, plastic bat, rope,
tee, tennis ball. Suggested equipment is listed beside
each skill throughout the activity guide





Activity List

1. foundational skills

2. walking & running

3. balance & jumping

4. trapping & catching

5. throwing

6. striking

7. kicking

8. advanced skills

1 Foundational skills

scarf games scarf

Encourage the child to follow the movement of the scarf with his/her head and eyes. Try dropping the scarf and encourage the child to “catch” the scarf with his/her hand, head, elbow, foot, etc.



sports song

(Sing with the melody of “The Wheels on the Bus”)

Encourage the child to perform the actions of the song. Use motions you have seen the child do spontaneously. See if they can be replicated on cue from the songs.



if you're happy and you know it

Sing this well-known action song and encourage the child to perform the activities. Try replacing “clapping” with stomp your feet; rub your belly; shake your body; tap your head; etc. observations and tips

Observations and Tips

Use high energy and enthusiasm to encourage participation in all the activities. Make note of the child's ability to remember lyrics, activities and/or body parts and reinforce those areas in other activities such as eating and dressing.

“i spy with my little eye....”

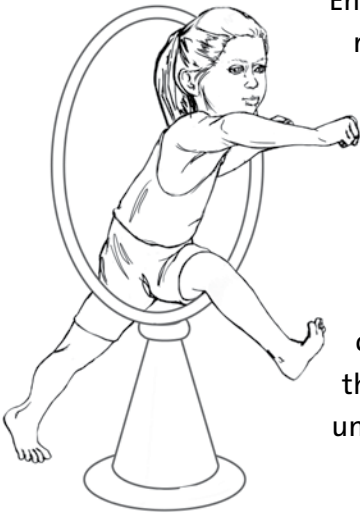
floor markers, bean bags

A player calls out the name of an object that is visible and then everyone races to the object by walking, running crawling, etc. Progress the game by calling out a feature of an object (color, shape, etc). If it is a color, (e.g., blue) each player can go to a different object that is blue. Players can also go in pairs, if someone is challenged by colors or shapes.



obstacle course

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels



Encourage verbal, color recognition, object recognition and counting development by calling out colors, names and numbers of objects used in each activity. Ask children to repeat the objects you reference, including their name, color and number.

Set up cones, hoops, etc., and have the child play “follow the leader.” Sing or chant the activities you are doing, such as: over/under, around/between, on/off, slow/fast.

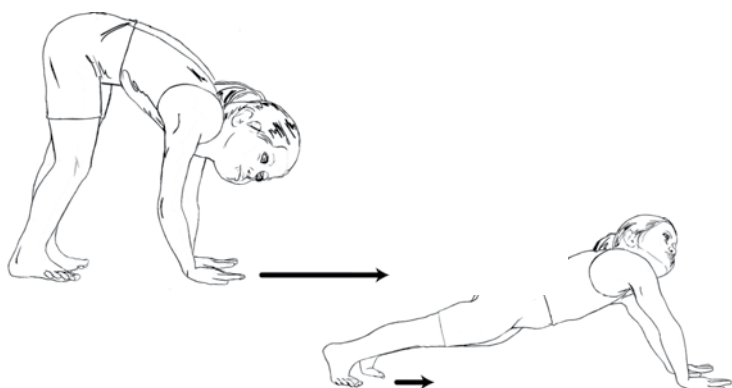
Observations and Tips

Make note of the concepts the child has mastered and those that are still developing (e.g., knows on/off, not up/down; identifies red, not blue). Incorporate concepts during play and other activities such as giving directions to moving around stationary objects like a couch or crawl under a table to retrieve a play toy.

1 foundational skills

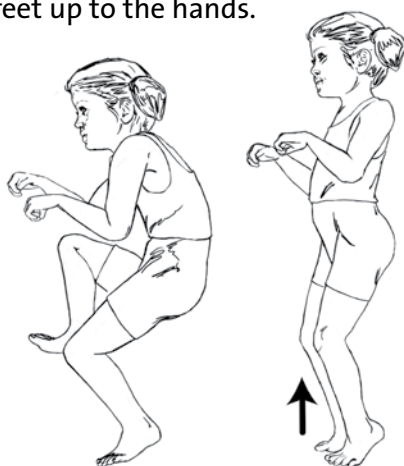
inchworm wiggle

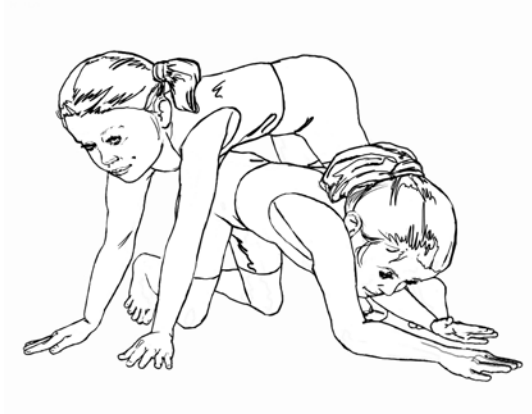
Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage the child to move like an inchworm by walking the hands forward and then walking the feet up to the hands.



bunny hop

Bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground and encourage the child to hop like a bunny by moving the hands forward and then hopping the feet up to the hands.





bridges and tunnels

Tunnel: One player forms a tunnel by touching the ground with his/her feet and hands or by getting down onto hands and knees (all-fours). The other player crawls, scoots, walks or runs through the tunnel.

Bridges: One player forms a bridge by sitting with his/her feet and hands flat on the ground and pushing his/her bottom up in the air.

The other player crawls, scoots, walks or runs under the bridge.

Observations and Tips

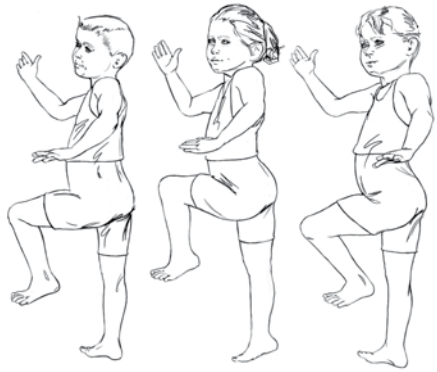
Make note of approximately how many times the child can perform the activity (inchworm wiggle, bunny hop) or how long the child can hold up the bridge or tunnel. Encourage more repetitions or more time over several weeks to develop muscular strength and endurance. Encourage bridges and tunnels to be rigid and strong while people and objects pass under and through.

2

walking & running

follow the leader

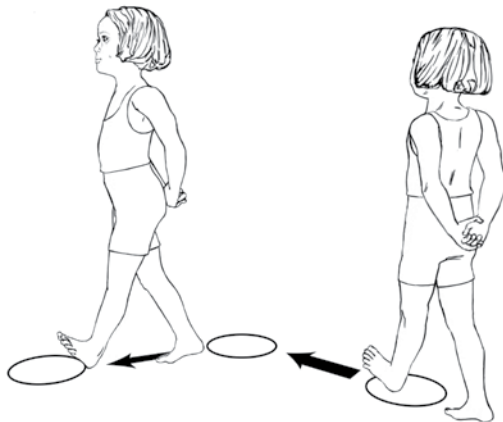
Encourage the child to “follow the leader” as you walk in different ways (slow, fast, march, etc.) and move different parts of your body (arms up, arms out, etc.)



follow the path

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Encourage the child to follow a path marked with hoops, cones or markers.



side stepping

floor markers, bean bags



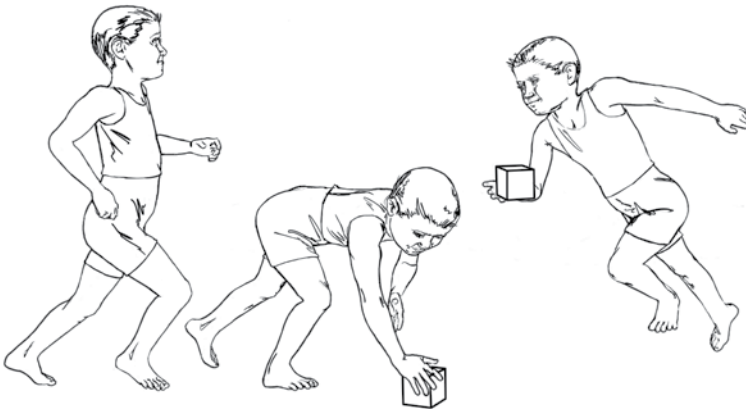
Encourage the child to sidestep right and left onto a variety of markers.

Objects can be placed on markers several feet away that the child can retrieve and place on a different marker.

run and carry

bean bags

Encourage the child to run a distance, pick up an object from the ground and run back to the starting point. Repeat several times for endurance training.



Observations and Tips

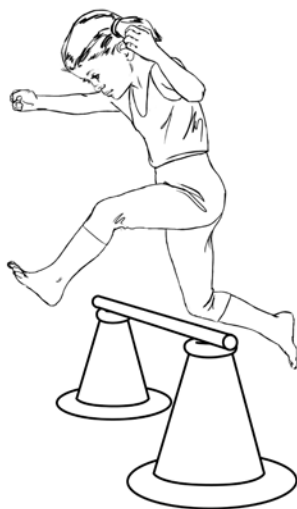
Encourage the child not to crouch or make extra movements when walking or sidestepping and to keep his/her hips and feet facing forward. Try placing a beanbag on the child's head to encourage good posture and balance.

2 walking & running

obstacle course

cones, floor markers, hoops, dowels

Set up cones, markers, hoops, etc., and encourage the child to walk, crawl, climb, jump or run through/around a series of obstacles. Begin with a straight course with similar activities at each “station” and progress including a variety of tasks, zig-zags, reversals, etc.



running styles

Demonstrate different types of running (slow, fast, backward, etc.) Decide on a command signal that the child likes (e.g., whistle, clap, saying “Now” or “Change”). Each time the command signal is called, the child must change the running style.

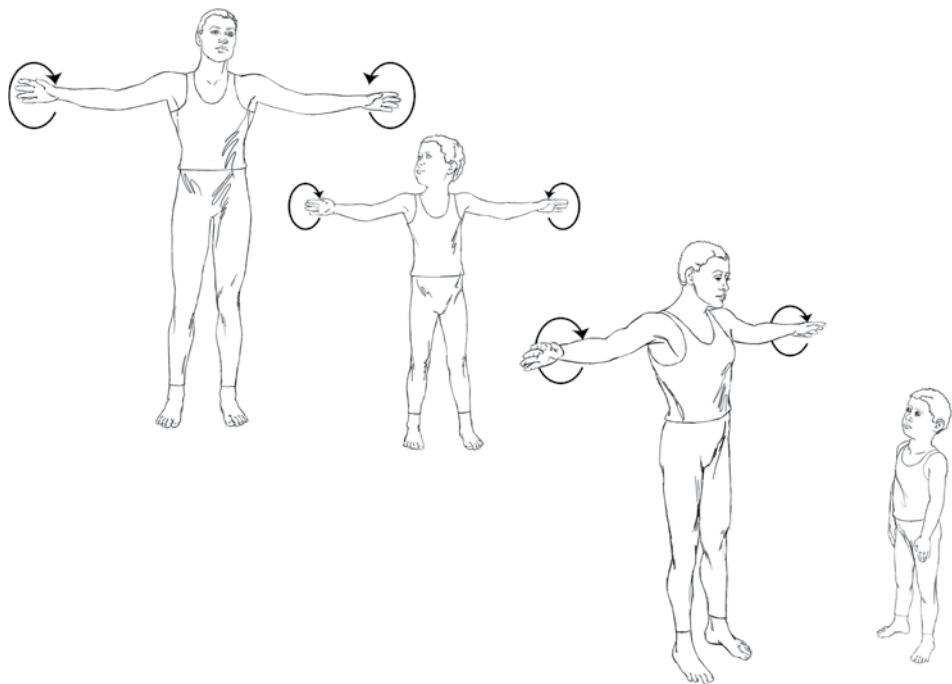
Observations and Tips

If arms are swinging across the body or not in opposition with the legs, work on this while standing or running in place. If foot slapping is noticed or heard, encourage toe-running and heel-running. If the stride length is too small, encourage the child to step or run between or onto markers. Gradually increase the distance between the markers.

3 balance & jumping

“coach” says

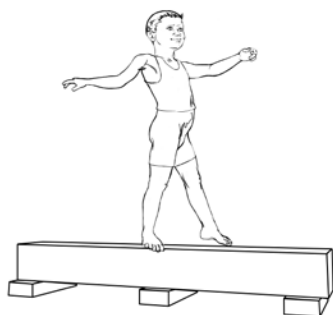
Ask the child to copy your movements and assume different positions. Encourage the child to perform actions that require balance, such as standing on tiptoes or heels, standing with one foot directly in front of the other, standing on one foot.



3 balance & jumping

balance beam

balance beam, rope

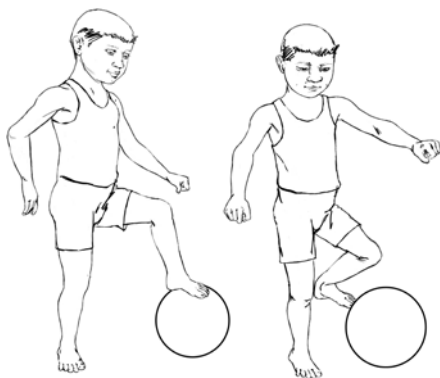


Follow a straight path, walking along a rope or balance beam. Progress to straddling the rope or beam while walking, then walk on top of the rope or beam.

foot trap slow motion

ball or junior size soccer ball

Have the child place his/her foot on top of the ball and maintain balance before kicking the ball. Progress by having the child trap a ball that is rolled slowly toward him/her.



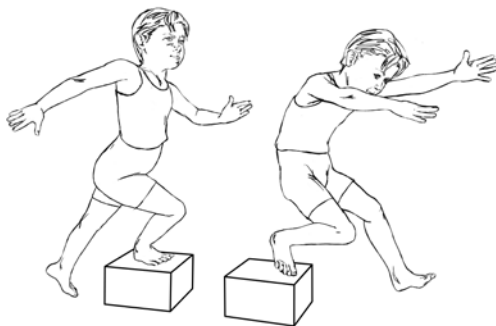
Observations and Tips

Encourage the child to mimic your movements during Coach Says. Try placing a beanbag on the child's head to encourage good posture and balance. Encourage landing with two feet at the same time.

step and jump

balance beam, floor markers

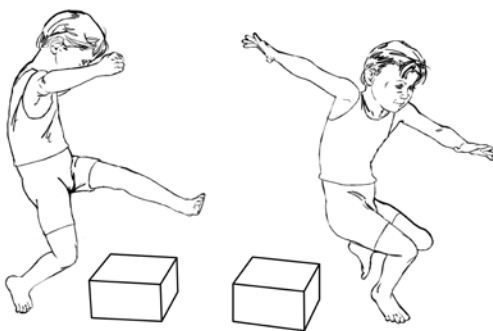
Encourage the child to step up onto a balance beam or step up and then jump down from it. Progress by having the child 1) jump further out onto a marker, 2) jump down from higher steps or surfaces.



jumping high

dowel, rope, floor markers

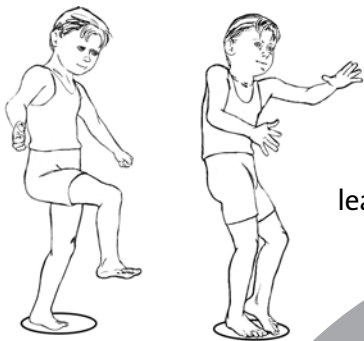
Encourage the child to jump over a dowel, rope or marker. Or encourage the child to jump up to grab an object. If the child cannot clear feet from floor, encourage jumping up for an object while “jumping down” from a beam or step.



frog hopping/leapin' lizards

floor markers

For frog hopping, encourage the child to jump forward from one marker to the next. Progress to leapin' lizards by encouraging the child to run forward and leap into the air either over or onto a marker.



Observations and Tips

If the child takes off or lands flat-footed, encourage leaning forward and bending the knees. If leaping is difficult for the child, run along the child's side, holding his/her hand and practice leaping onto a marker over an object.

4 trapping & catching

goalie drill slow

motion ball, cones

Have the child stand in front of 2 cones that have been set up to form a goal.

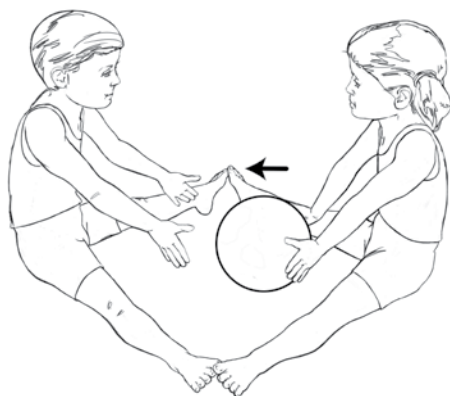
Encourage the child to stop the ball with his/her hands so that the ball doesn't roll between the cones.



rolling and trapping slow motion

ball, small foam ball, tennis ball

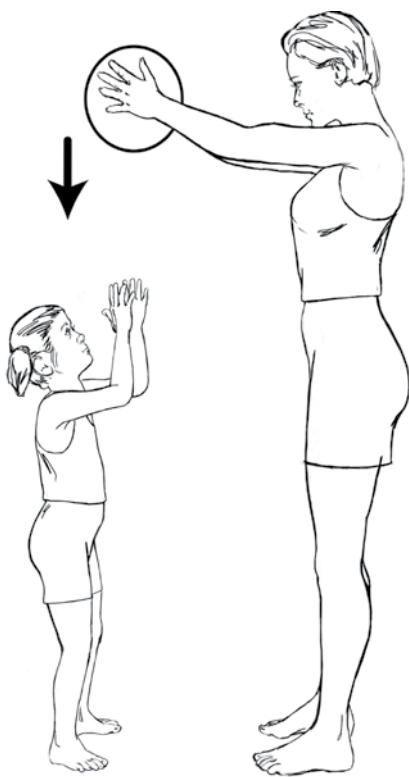
Sit opposite the child with legs outstretched in a straddle position, so that legs are touching and a diamond shape is formed. Roll the ball to each other and catch/stop it with your hands. Progress this activity so that you're kneeling or standing.



big ball catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

Stand facing the child and slowly bring the ball toward the child. Repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next, have the child grab the ball from your hands. Then, tell him/her that the ball will be let go right before it reaches his/her hands. Practice this several times before actually tossing the ball.



Observations and Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball.

Fingers should be spread apart and facing down when rolling or catching a ball that's below the waist. The ball should be controlled with the hands only, not the chest, legs, etc.

4 trapping & catching

bean bag catch

bean bag

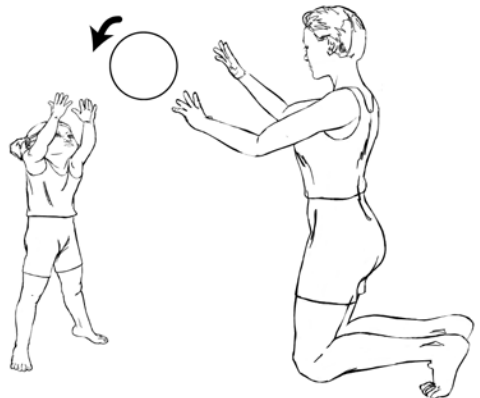
Stand facing the child and repeat the process of the Big Ball Catch using a small bean bag. Encourage the child to catch the bean bag with one hand.



high ball catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

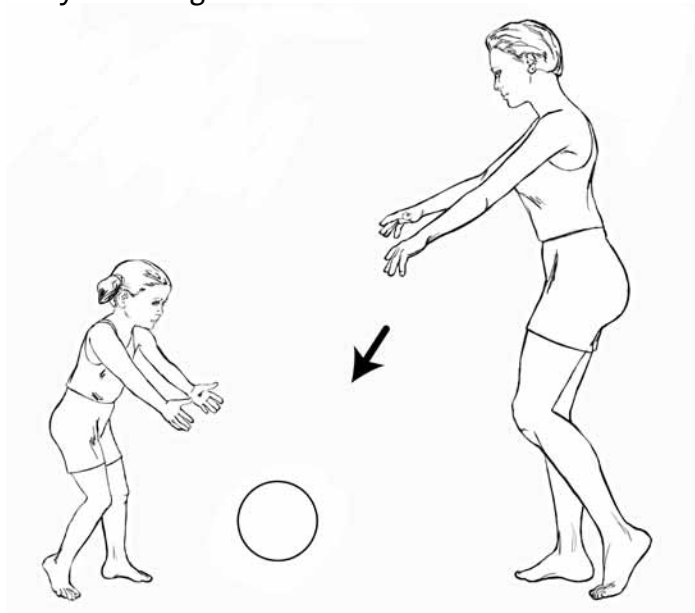
Kneel facing the child, who is about 3 feet away. Gently toss a beach ball or fairly large ball to the child and encourage catching the ball with fingers pointing up. Be sure the toss is done from the chest level and with the fingers pointing up. Progress by moving further away and mixing up high and low tosses.



bounce catch

beach ball, slow motion ball

Face the child and bounce a beach ball or fairly large ball so the child can catch the ball without moving. Progress to moving further away and using smaller balls.



Observations and Tips

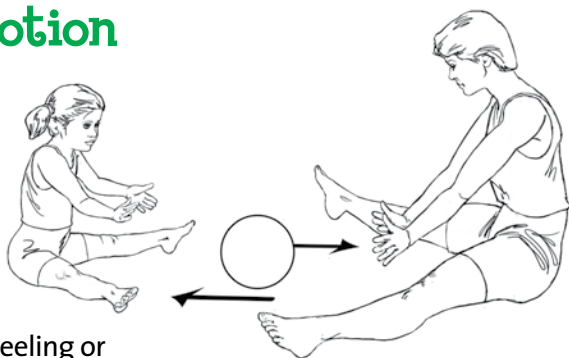
Eyes should be focused on the target. Fingers should be pointing down when catching a ball that approaches below the waist and pointing up when the ball approaches above the waist.

5 Throwing

rolling slow motion

ball, cones

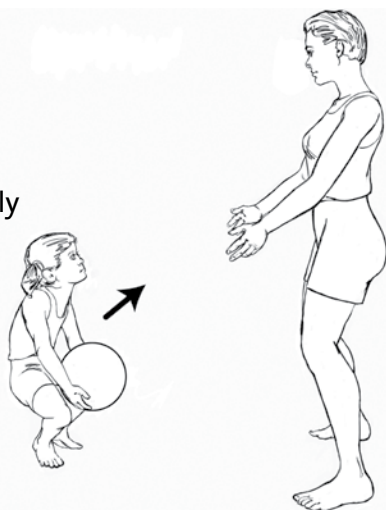
Sit on the ground with your legs straight out to the side and roll a ball back and forth. Progress this activity so that you're rolling the ball from half-kneeling or standing. Encourage the child to roll a ball from a standing position so that it passes between two cones to score a goal.



two-hand underhand

slow motion ball

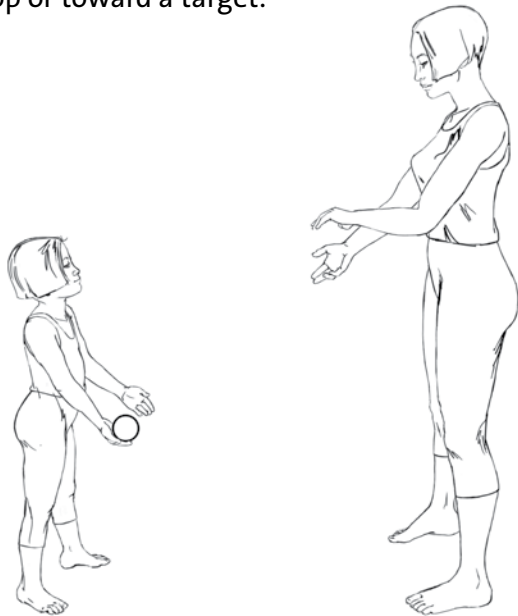
Encourage the child to stand with bent knees and hold an inflatable ball or fairly large ball with two hands. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball underhand to you.



underhand toss

small foam ball, bean bag, tennis ball, hoop

Encourage the child to stand with bent knees holding a small ball or beanbag with one hand. Ask the child to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands. Progress to tossing an object through a hoop or toward a target.



Observations and Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball.

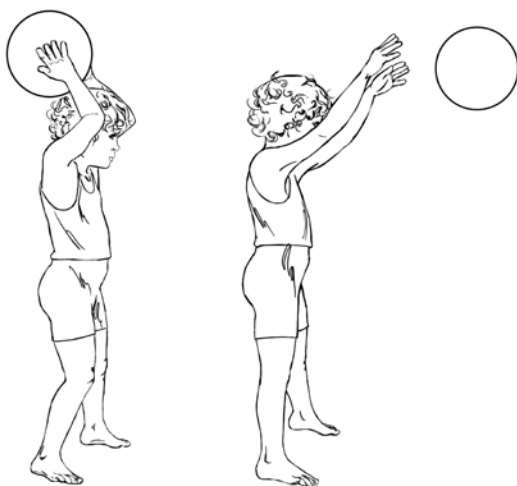
Fingers should be facing down when tossing a ball underhand. The foot opposite the tossing hand should be forward in an open stance.

5 throwing

two-hand throwing slow motion ball

junior size soccer ball

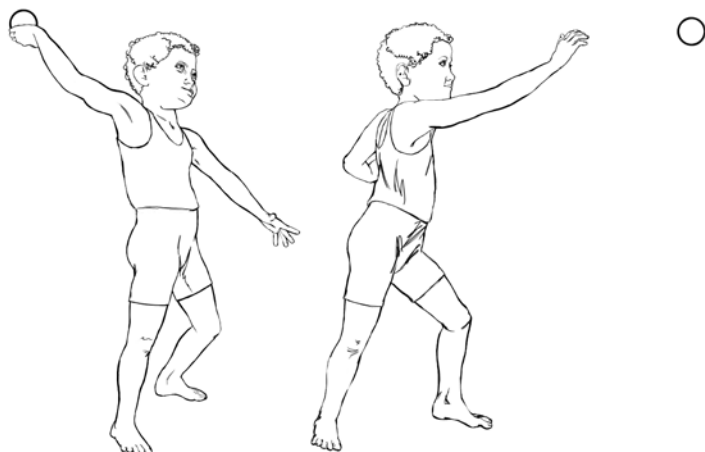
Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to rock back and forth. As the child rocks to the back foot, ask him/her to raise his/her arms up over the head. When rocking forward, encourage him/her to bring the arms forward to throw the ball.

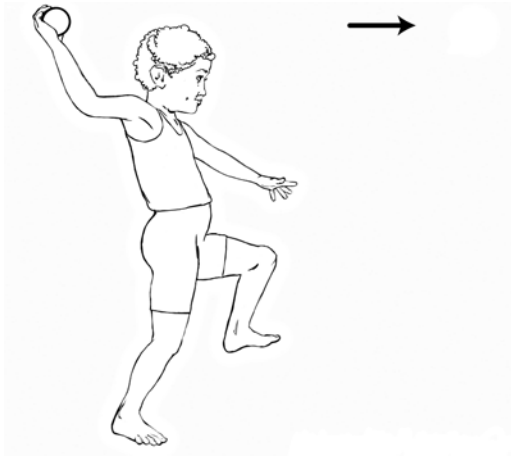


overhand throwing small

foam ball, tennis ball

Using the same technique as two-hand throwing, encourage the child to use one hand, bringing his/her arm back and forward overhead to throw a small ball towards you.





throwing for distance and accuracy

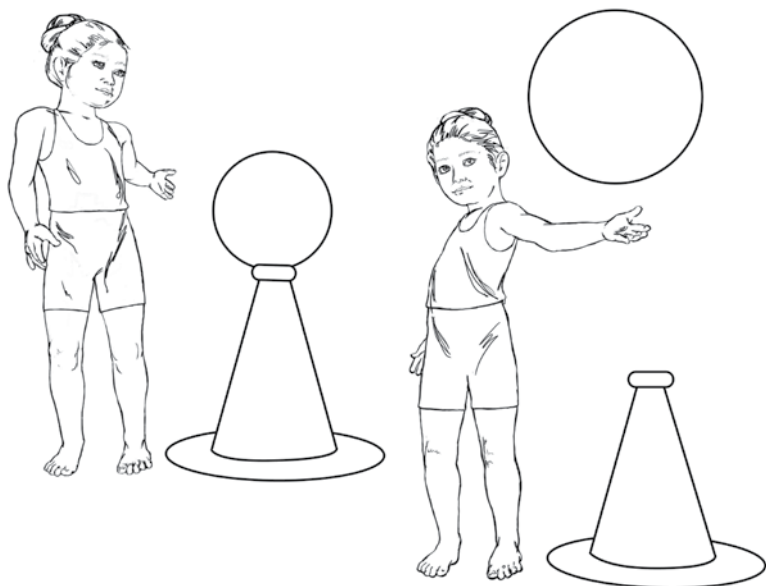
small foam ball, tennis ball, hoops, cones

Encourage the child to throw a small ball as high or far possible. Set up markers at different distances so the child can focus toward a goal or target.

Observations and Tips

The opposite leg steps toward the target and the hips and shoulders rotate forward. As the arm moves forward, it bends at the elbow and then straightens at ball release. The wrist snaps downward when the ball is released.

6 striking



handball

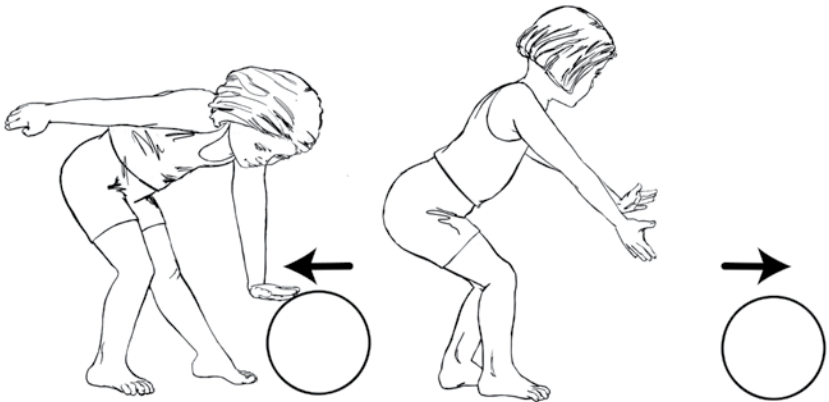
beach ball, cone, tee

Place a beach ball on a cone or tee. Have the child hit the beach ball with a fist or open hand.

ball tapping

beach ball, slow motion ball

Tap a beach ball toward the child and have him/her tap the ball back toward you with an open hand. Progress to having the child in a sideways, ready position. Toss beach ball to the child and have him/her hit the ball with an open hand.

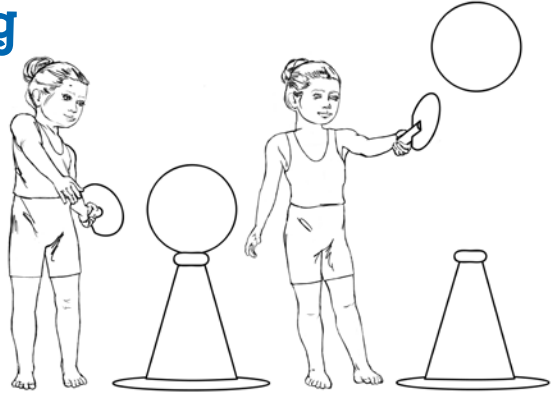


Observations and Tips

Encourage the child to stand sideways to the ball with good balance.

Markers can be used for the child to stand on. Eyes should be focused on the ball. Encourage follow-through by having the child twist his/her belly forward and/or clapping the hands out in front. If the child is not transferring weight, have him/her rock front and back while standing on markers.

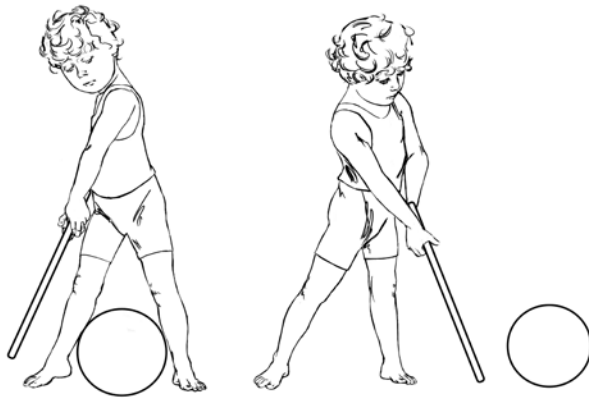
6 striking



side striking

beach ball, slow motion ball, paddle, junior size racket, plastic bat

Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to strike a tossed beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, bat, etc.



beginning hockey

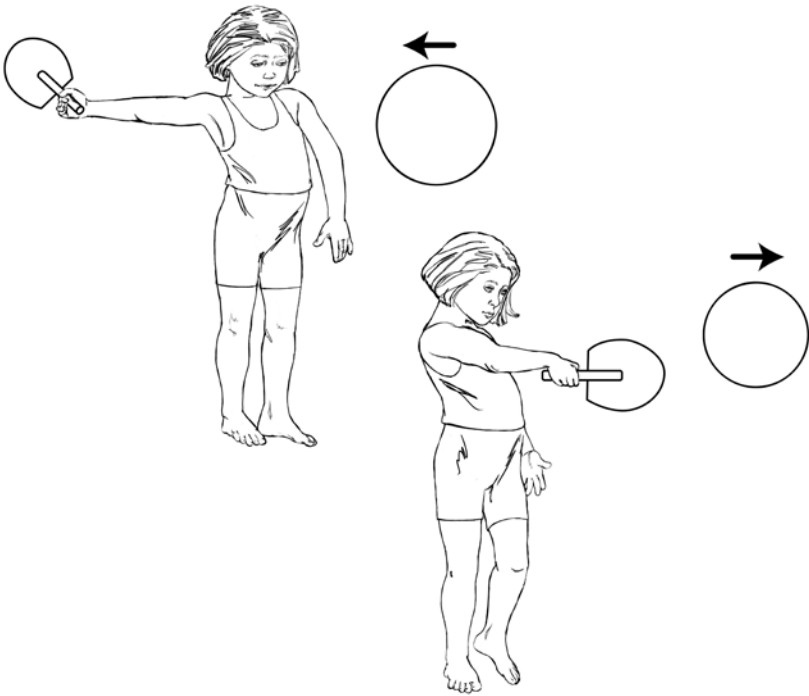
beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball, dowel, junior size plastic hockey stick, junior size plastic golf club

Place a large ball on the ground. Encourage the child to be positioned sideways to the ball. Have the child hold onto a dowel, hockey stick, golf club, etc., with two hands and encourage him/her to strike the ball with the club or stick.

intermediate tennis/softball

beach ball, slow motion ball, small foam ball, tennis ball, junior size racket, plastic bat

Using a sideways stance, encourage the child to strike a bounced beach ball or other ball with a racket, paddle, stick, etc.



Observations and Tips

Encourage the child to stand sideways to the ball with good balance.

Markers can be used for the child to stand on. Eyes should be focused on the ball. Encourage follow-through by having the child twist his/ her belly forward and/or clap the hands out in front. If the child is not transferring weight, have him/her rock front and back while standing on markers.

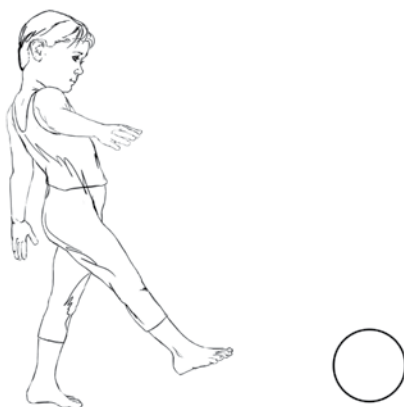
7 Kicking



Kicking

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball

Place a ball on the ground and have the child stand behind it.
Have the child kick the ball toward you with his/her preferred foot.



penalty Kick prep

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size ball, playground ball

Place a ball on the ground and have the child run up to the ball to kick it toward you.



Kicking for distance

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers'

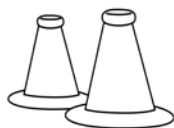
Encourage the child to run up to a ball and kick it for distance by having him/her kick a ball past various markers.

Observations and Tips

Eyes should be focused on the ball.

Non-kicking foot is just behind and to the side of the ball. The kicking leg should be bent at the knee for a back swing and should follow through. The opposite arm swings forward as the ball is kicked.

7 Kicking



Kicking for accuracy

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball,
playground ball, cones, floor markers

Place a ball on the ground. Encourage the child to run up to the ball to kick it toward a goal or between two cones.



Kickball

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball,
playground ball, cones, floor markers

Roll or kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball to you or toward a goal or target.

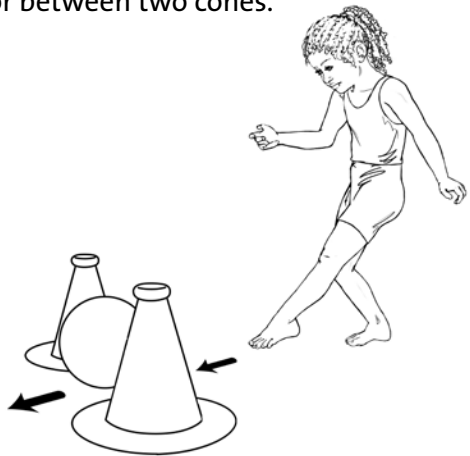




give and go

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size soccer ball,
playground ball, cones, floor markers

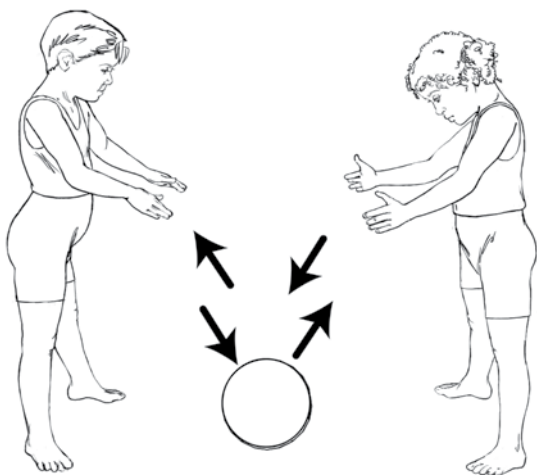
Kick a ball toward the child and encourage him/her to kick the moving ball toward a goal or between two cones.



Observations and Tips

Eyes should be focused on the target. Weight shifting to the non-kicking leg is necessary for control and balance. When kicking, the body leans back just before contact with the ball. The opposite arm swings forward with the kick. The kicking leg should follow through.

8 advanced skills



bounce & catch

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball, small foam ball, tennis ball

Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing and catching a ball. Then, stand in front of the child and bounce the ball so the child can catch it without moving. Encourage the child to bounce pass the ball back to you. Progress to greater distances between players and smaller balls.

dribble

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball

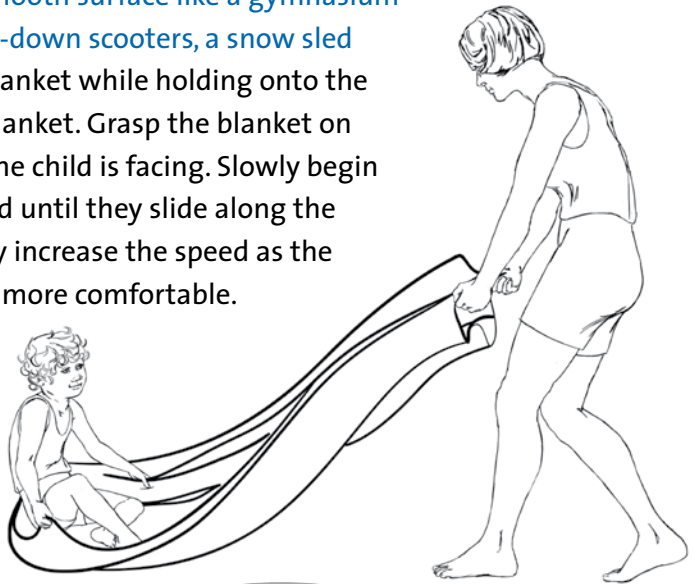
Stand behind the child and assist him/her in bouncing a beach ball with two hands, but without catching it. Provide less assistance as child's skill improves. Progress to a different ball, then progress to bouncing (dribbling) with one hand.



magic carpet ride

blanket and smooth surface like a gymnasium floor sheet, sit-down scooters, a snow sled

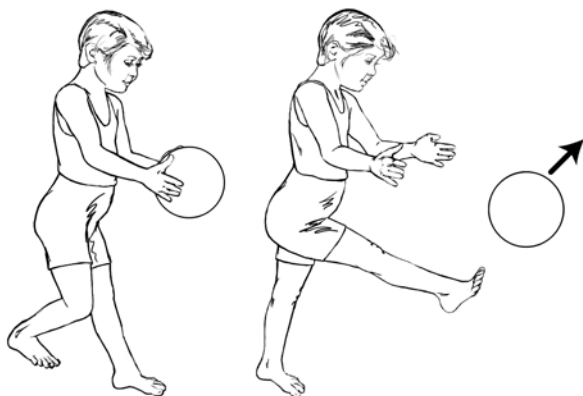
Child sits on blanket while holding onto the edges of the blanket. Grasp the blanket on the side that the child is facing. Slowly begin to pull the child until they slide along the floor. Gradually increase the speed as the child becomes more comfortable.



Observations and Tips

These skills require the integration of strength, balance, vision and coordination. Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which ones are not. Preliminary and basic skills for these activities can be developed through the other activities described in this program.

8 advanced skills



punting

beach ball, slow motion ball, junior size basketball, playground ball

Encourage the child to practice one-legged standing balance with the leg forward and the arms out to the sides. Then, have the child swing the kicking leg back and forward. Next, have the child hold a beach ball in both hands, drop it and kick it.



galloping

floor markers

Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker with his/her preferred leg. Then, ask the child to bring up the trailing foot to the marker and hop onto it. Continue leading with the preferred foot.

skipping

floor markers

Place a series of markers on the ground in a straight line. Have the child step onto the marker and then perform a low hop on that foot. As the hopping foot lands, place the other foot on the next marker.



Observations and Tips

These skills require the integration of strength, balance, vision and coordination.

Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which ones are not. Preliminary and basic skills for these activities can be developed through the other activities described in this program.

Additional opportunities

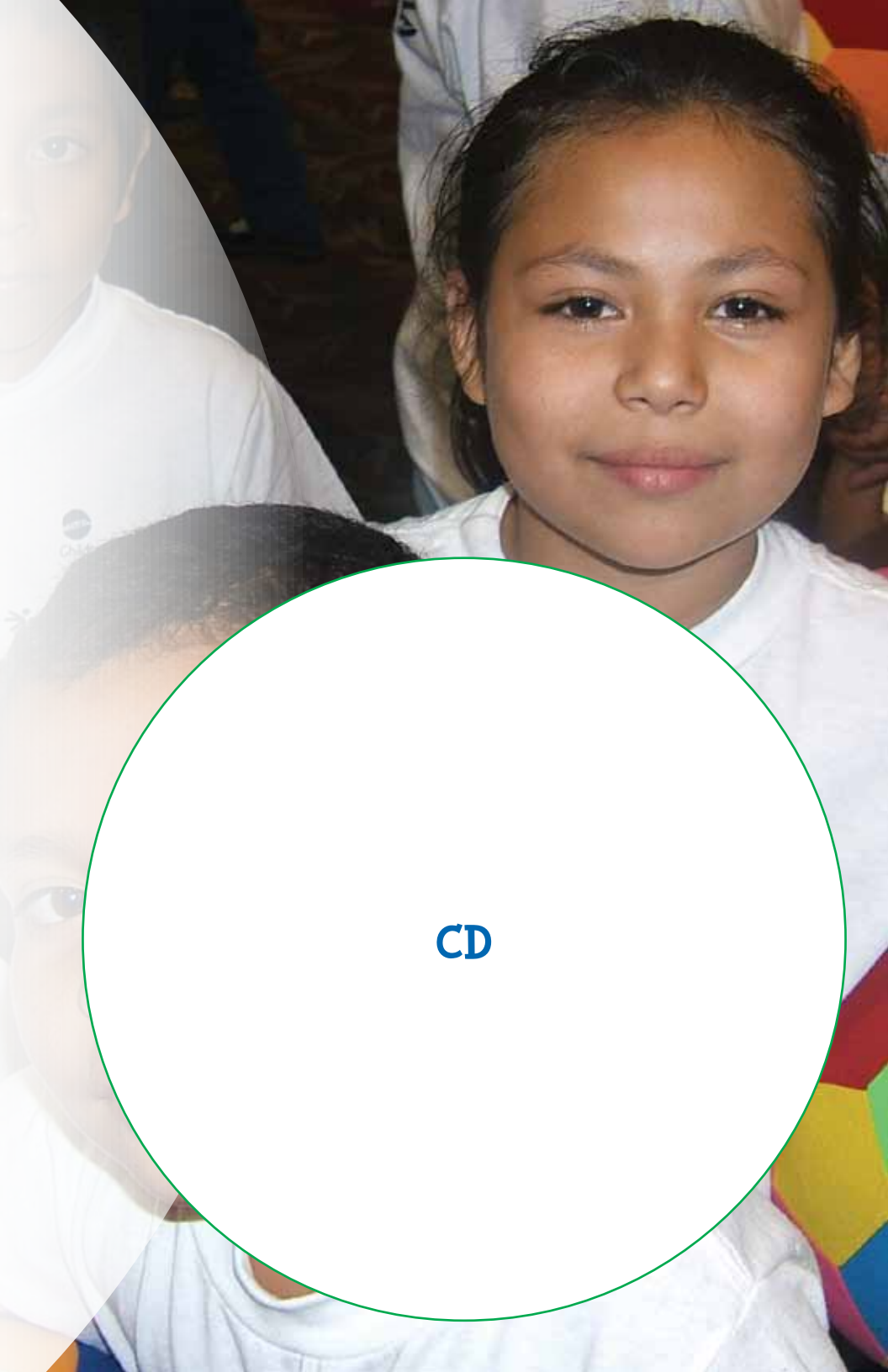
Congratulations.

Your child has completed the Young Athlete Program and has developed many of the fundamental skills designed to prepare him/her to take part in a variety of sports. Regardless of the level of achievement, there is a Special Olympics sport for your child. Until the young athlete is eligible to train and compete in Special Olympics, we hope you will take advantage of the other opportunities and resources available to families and young athletes.

You have already started your child on the road to being a Special Olympics athlete through the activities included in this program. Aptitude or quick mastery of specific skill sets could indicate a talent in a specific sport. For example, running between markers is a skill used in track and field competition, dribbling a ball around cones translates into basketball skills, running up and kicking either a moving or stationary ball is the foundation for soccer.

Participation in Special Olympics requires a commitment to training and learning sports that will lead to a child's success in Special Olympics, greater acceptance in activities in the community and enhanced self-esteem. Just as any child is provided the opportunity to play baseball, soccer or basketball, so too can your child experience the benefit of playing and excelling in sports.

Special Olympics invites you to join us in a lifetime of sports!



CD



Special Olympics

www.specialolympics.org/youngathletes

*Created by the Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. Foundation for
the Benefit of Persons with Intellectual Disabilities.*