

Youth Baseball Development Program

Hi coaches/parents, this is a roadmap to help you better develop your athletes by being provided drills, social skill-building activities, and psychosocial goals/strategies for different age divisions. The guide is going to be categorized by each division and sub-categorized by development types. The goal of this is to help coaches and parents with the athletes for on-field performance and off-field success. The primary goals of youth baseball include developing skills, enjoyment, and continued participation. Below is going to be a visual roadmap for each age division followed by an in-depth analysis and summary of the drills, goals, and expectations.

Tee Ball

Week 1 drills:

- Practice running around the bases with the coaches and having players call out the base that they are running to
- Teach how to properly grip a ball and attempt an overhand throw

Week 1 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Have kids meet their teammates and coaches
- Focus on having fun, trying your best, and show good sportsmanship

Week 2 drills:

- Practice throwing
- Review grip and practice throwing into a giant target with plastic balls
- Intro to batting swings by having kids practice without a bat
- One child at a time practice swinging with the coach using a bat and tee

Week 2 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Inform them that mistakes are okay and to keep trying their best
- Learning from mistakes is how you become better
- Encourage trying your best and to have fun at the game

Week 3 drills:

- Outfield cone drill to teach where left, center, and right field are
- Players use their preferred hand to practice throwing
- Intro to swing and run to first base
- Intro to throw and catch using plastic balls and 2 hands to catch

Week 3 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Positive sportsmanship practice with teammates by high fiving each other
- Share with teammates what they did good during practice
- Reward the team for running bases in a single file line as a team

Week 4 drills:

- Scoop and throw tennis ball to coaches' drill
- Send players to infield positions and teach the names
- Introduce hitting on Tees focusing on bat grip and feet position
- Coach throws grounders for kids to throw back at the coach

Week 4 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Teaching honesty and respect to teammates, opponents, and coaches
- Determination is important for improving

Week 5 drills:

- Self-toss catching practice with kids throwing tennis ball in air and catching with glove
- Have kids start practicing throwing ball to first base (reminder this is fundamentals)
- Basic base-running relay race with one team starting at home and the other at 2nd

Week 5 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Encourage asking questions to coaches
- Give basic lesson on how listening to coaches (coachable) is the best thing for them is to improve
- Helping your teammates is very important and not helping your teammates is bad

Week 6 drills:

- Throw at the bucket drill from 10 feet away
- Tee hitting
- Catching plastic ball underhand pop flies thrown from the coaches focusing on squeezing the glove
- Follow the leader with having coach yell commands such as jump, run, walk to help with listening and coordination

Week 6 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Basic teaching of competing with focus on competing with themselves
- Don't worry about how others are doing and focus on yourself
- Give them a basic understanding of what a goal is and to help set their first goal

Week 7 drills:

- Throwing with partner, introduction to catch for warming up
- Teach basic stretching and the importance of stretching
- Focus on swing level and adding power to the swings

Week 7 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Treating opponents with respect
- Talk about how good sports will be better and that opponents can be future teammates
- Have kids make a basic goal for the remainder of the season and help build them for it

Week 8 drills:

- Teach putting glove in the dirt on ground balls
- Throwing to first base
- Introduction to “warm-up routine”
- Tee hitting
- Baserunning to first

Week 8 social skills/ psychological goals:

- Play the best that you can
- Keep up their teachable spirit
- End the season by thanking coaches
- Try to achieve their first goal in the last game of the season

Rookie Ball/ Coach Pitch

Rookie ball is the first year for players after completing a season of tee ball and is the beginning of the typical baseball game. This age group needs to focus on the listed fundamentals below and can be taught in any order. I will provide my recommended order by week assuming it's a 8-week season.

Week 1:

- Know where the bases are
- Know what the defensive positions are
- What is an out and what is being safe

Week 2:

- Catch the ball with 2 hands
- What a single, double, triple, and home run are
- Basic introduction to the baseball ready position

Week 3:

- What is being out mean
- What is a run and throwing to first base
- Knowing you can overrun first base but not 2nd or 3rd

Week 4:

- What is a force out, fly out, and tag out
- Throwing basics focusing on upper body
- How to grip an actual baseball

Week 5:

- What is a foul ball and a fair ball
- Throwing basics including footwork
- Swinging the bat level

Week 6:

- Why are there coaches' boxes
- Where are the coaches' boxes
- Catch the ball with one hand
- Introduction to four-seam grip

Week 7:

- Grounders and throwing to first
- Introduction to throwing the ball in from the outfield
- Throwing mechanics

Week 8:

- Focus on batting stance
- Understanding of the rules and the different types of outs
- Lesson on the baseball ready fielding position

Season-long hitting objectives:

- Teach basic batting grip with lining players knuckles up
- Teach basic batting stance with knees slightly bent and weight on back foot
- Bat needs to cover the entire plate by placing bat to the opposite back corner of home plate
- Teach to not fear the ball hitting them

Season-long fielding objectives:

- Teach fielding process of creeper step, bend knees/ lower torso, glove out-front and in the dirt, receive ball, basic transition, throw to target using glove to lead throw
- Teach basic stances and where to position themselves
- Basic pop fly tracking
- How to throw using a four-seam grip

Season-long baserunning objectives:

- Purpose of base running and when to run through first
- Basics of rounding a base
- Sliding introduction
- When to run to the next base

Pee-wee 7 – Pitching Machine

This is the last division with a pitching machine, so it is important to focus on all the other aspects of baseball. This age is the first year to start teaching the difference of balls and strikes and each batter receives 5 pitches.

General practice recommendations:

- Give well defined goals to accomplish during each practice to keep the kids engaged
- Give praise along with constructive advice
- Teach during the water breaks and give basic lessons on being coachable
- Focus on contests instead of typical drills to create friendly competition
- Give praise for hustle and break the team into groups to prevent boredom
- Break kids into groups for pop fly's, grounders, hitting, catching
- Have kids' field for the kids hitting to make plays at first base
- Combine team for baserunning drills and basic rules
- Introduce respect for the game and sportsmanship

Basic skills to develop:

Throwing:

- A good throw starts from the feet and the hand is the last part of the body involved
- Point toe and foot in the direction you are throwing
- Front foot points towards the target
- Focus on the shoulder being high as the arm moves forward
- As the ball is being thrown towards the target be sure to transfer weight forward
- Extend the elbow and follow through towards the target
- Introduce a two-finger grip across the seams

Grounders:

- Introduction to "ready" position
- Basic positioning needs to be taught for when lefties and righties are up to bat
- Knees need to be slightly bent, weight on their toes with their upper body bent slightly forward
- Glove needs to be in an out-front position with parallel feet
- When the ball is hit, they need to position glove low to the ground with their glove foot slightly in front and watch the ball into the glove
- Once the ball hits the glove, it is important to build the habit of securing the ball with their throwing hand
- This age group has a big emphasis on charging slow rolling balls
- Teach all players how to field a grounder and to throw to first

Pop Fly's:

- First step should always be back, and it is easier to run in on a ball rather than back
- Focus on teaching to throw to the cut-off and to never hold the ball
- Glove is tilted towards the throwing arm and catch above head
- Work on keeping grounded balls from getting past you by body blocking
- Slow progression by throwing balls during practice and advance it to hitting
- This will require repetition throughout the entire year

Baserunning:

- Teaching to “dig” for running through first base or to round towards 2nd
- Run on the basepath and to keep eyes looking ahead when running
- Don’t watch where the ball lands after you hit it
- Hit the inside part of the base when running to the next base
- Teach basic feet first slides

Hitting:

- Make sure the kids are using the proper bat weight, lean towards being too light over too heavy
- Teach a downward swing by getting the barrel of the bat to the hitting zone
- Start with teaching a compact swing and hit every practice

Peewee 8 – First kid pitch age

This league is very similar to peewee 7 aside from the pitching machine being replaced by pitching. Coaches should refer to the peewee 7 coaching focuses from above and I will add-in new elements for pitching, catching, and hitting. Development in this age group is very similar and there are minor changes listed below.

Pitching:

- Start developing pitchers early and focus on 5-6 kids who want to pitch
- At this age, control is more important than speed
- Fundamental pitching involves pitching from a wind-up instead of a stretch motion
- Keep motions short and focus on them keeping their head up and looking towards the target
- Some kids can use their glove to guide them as they pitch towards the catcher
- Focus on teaching a smooth pitching motion

Catching:

- Catchers need to focus on holding the glove in front of them and in the position for the pitcher to throw a strike
- Basic lessons on blocking low pitches
- Throw the ball back to the pitcher as fast as they can
- Be involved in the game and take the mask off when the ball is in play
- Teach the proper distance for the catcher to be in their stance and make sure they aren’t too close or far away from the hitter
- Teach to move the body on bad pitches and to not fully reach on the bad pitch

Hitting:

- Don’t be afraid of the ball and protect the body from being hit
- Teach where it is better to take pitches and how to get away from being hit
- Teach the basic 3 strikes and 4 balls count

- Teach how foul balls work and when the batter is out
- This division also requires the understanding of when a ball is fair or foul

Minors: Ages 9-11 Basic

9-11 years old is going to be a diverse age group for teaching and it takes a lot of adapting with coaching techniques and skills. This is the universal baseball age where pitching machines and coach pitching is eliminated, and the kids must start developing swing decisions. Make sure the practices are fun and engaging because they are still beginners and it's about having fun! Keep focusing on most of the drills and advice from the peewee section because skills take many years to develop. Listed below are new additions to the peewee division for the athletes to take their next step.

Hitting:

- Developing an eye to recognize a non-hittable pitch
- Getting into a launch position and properly loading up
- Focus on learning how to hit fast balls
- Developing basic hitting fundamentals and adjusting to pitches
- Fundamental self-correcting and adjusting to pitches

Pitching:

- Focus on developing command before speed
- Make sure the kids are having fun
- Learn how to throw fastballs and changeups, other pitches can be dangerous to the child's body
- Try to not exceed 85 innings pitched in a 12-month period
- Teach them to find the strike zone and understand the rules of the game
- Continue teaching them with a wind-up motion

Fielding:

- Continue to teach the basic rules and practice scenarios of where to throw the ball
- Introduce how to position for double plays based off righties and lefties
- Out fielding should be progressed by hand tossing repetition increasing distance

Catching:

- Continue to focus on the catchers positioning and understanding of the rules
- Make sure the catchers take off their mask when the ball is in play and that they are squatting
- Catchers need to understand where the strike zone is for each batter and to place their glove accordingly

Baserunning:

- Teach runners how to round the bases while using the best base running path
- Fundamental slide techniques and how to protect their body while sliding
- Introduce how to properly push off a base when going for the next base

Majors: 10-12 years old Intermediate/Advanced

This is where players start to get away from the beginning stage and start developing into their positions. The major division is made for more advanced younger kids to join more developed 11- and 12-year-olds. This age group is where pitchers start advancing, batters start hitting better, and introductions to advanced skills begin to develop. This is the age where the pack starts to set themselves apart and games become more competitive.

Hitting:

- Start learning how to hit the curveball
- Focus on controlling what can be controlled due to kids' differences in physical development
- Incorporate game situations and other competitive elements into batting practice
- Keep the focus on being a well-rounded hitter and make sure the kids are still having fun
- Keep the bat inside by staying tight to the body and direct to the ball
- Sit on fastballs and adjust to changeups and curveballs

Pitching:

- Continue to focus on control first and increase speeds
- Learn how to grip a curveball but don't use it
- Develop wind-up motions and practice consistently placing the ball
- Introduce a stretch pitching motion but don't have them use it often
- Make sure that pitchers aren't getting overused and still play other positions when not pitching

Fielding:

- Develop 45-degree angles to the ball
- Practice fielding from baseball bat hits and getting comfortable extending their glove when catching the ball
- Lots of repetitions and composure from making mistakes
- Communication practice between the fielders
- Focus on hitting the cutoffs

Catching:

- Introduction to framing pitches
- Start learning how to throw a pickoff to 2nd base
- Body blocking and fully understanding the scenarios in the infield
- Making habits of throwing mask off when needed and practice catching foul balls

Baserunning:

- Pickle drills for both the baserunners and infielders
- Focus on improving speed and jumping on pitches

- Introduction into stealing bases and how to get back to avoid being picked off
- Proper sliding techniques and introduction to swim moves

Prep 13/14U: Advanced

Though the prep divisions are 13U, 14/15U, and 16/18U, this section is focusing on developing 13–14-year-olds. This group is one of the best to coach because it involves introducing new intricate skills while also enforcing the fundamentals. This is where most players begin to develop bat control for opposite field hits, secondary pitches are developed, and when most athletes decide they want to continue baseball through high school. We will highlight important general skills to develop in this age group.

Hitting:

- Focus on bunting angles, directions, body position, and hand position
- Teach the difference of sacrifice bunting and bunting for a base hit
- Introduce hit and runs and when to use them
- Ensure fundamentals are comfortable and address them individually with hitters

Pitching:

- Introduce using a rare curve ball
- Have pitchers focus on controlling their fastballs and changeups and being able to throw strikes consistently
- Help pitchers develop a fastball over 53 mph with control
- 4 days rest if the pitcher throws over 66 pitches in a game

Fielding:

- Coaches will do routine fielding practice by hitting balls to each position
- Outfielders will take turns throwing to 2nd, cutoff, 3rd base, and home
- Infielders will complete “around the horn” throws 2-3 times before fielding
- Infielders will practice making throws to home, 1st, and 2nd for double plays
- 1st baseman will work on footwork and scooping throws in the dirt

Catching:

- Practice framing pitches on inside and outside corners
- Practice framing or positioning glove for slightly low pitches to be strikes
- Blocking drills
- Have the catchers throw balls to 1st, 2nd, and 3rd base

Baserunning:

- Advanced practice on pickle situations
- Learn steal commands from coaches and when the signal is canceled
- Teach the proper lead off stance and distance for each player individually

Prep 15/16 U Advanced

This is the last age group that the guide is going to cover due to most athletes joining their high-school league, coaches being experienced, and most skills at this point are progressed and each athlete develops individual needs. This section is going to be shorter because most baseball skills have been introduced and players will begin to specialize in their respective positions.

Pitching:

- Foundation of the four-seam fastball and changeup is needed
- Slider and curveballs can be added to the arsenal with special attention to the elbow
- Focusing mechanics to prevent injury and proper form is developed
- Being able to control pitch placement on their primary pitches

Hitting:

- Developing multiple batting stances outside of a square stance
- Learning to be defensive for contact when down in counts
- Reading pitch releases and understanding pitching queues
- Hit location practice to place balls in desired areas based on the defense

Fielding:

- Outfielders should focus on uncomfortable hits such as gap shots, warning track, and shallow hits
- Infielders need to practice routine double plays and have full understanding of situations
- Infielders can practice playing deep and shallow and develop their location for throwing home
- Full understanding of bunt scenarios, and pickle situations
- 1st baseman can stretch and scoop

Catching:

- Develop framing skills and proper position
- Pickoff routines for all bases
- Focus on transition from glove to hand for pickoff time
- Understanding their pitchers' tendencies and to keep them composed

Baserunning:

- Understand pitchers' queues for attempting pickoffs
- Understand pitchers' queues to steal bases
- Know all game situations including pickles and bunts
- Proper leadoff distance and swimming tag attempts
- How to get the best jump for stealing a base

Development Physical and Psychosocial by age

Below is going to focus all development areas outside of the skill roadmap to help coaches better understand their coaching techniques. The goal of this guide is to optimize performance and to help create the proper environment for kids to play longer. With coaching, there are more aspects than in-game skill development, and coaches have a lasting impact on kids outside of baseball.

Tee Ball

Physical

- Develop basic movement skills and motor skills such as running and jumping
- Fundamental skills such as throwing an overhand throw, squeezing their glove, and a basic swing to make contact
- Coaches need to often demonstrate the fundamentals to help kids visually learn
- Introduce warm up routines to build habits of injury prevention
- Don't have them do yearlong participation in the sport and no pitching

Psychosocial

- Focus on making the kids enjoy physical activity by playing with friends
- Activities should be fun and will develop internal motivation for lifelong participation
- Ensure that positive social interactions and communication is developed between the kids, parents, and coaches
- Baseball should be a place for the kids to make new friends and have positive experiences
- Coaches need to understand the importance of not creating a negative experience in the foundation year of joining a sport and remember that these are little kids
- Mental health and performance by introducing setting goals to promote health and performance
- Kids should be trying all sports and not having a sport specification
- 1-2 days a week participation

Rookie Ball and Pee wee divisions

This age group is where baseball skills are being introduced and taught. Coordination will begin to improve during this time and positive experiences still need to be emphasized. Sampling of sports and learning to succeed alongside teammates and opponents is needed.

Physical

- Continue basic motor and movement skills and improve speed, balance, agility, and body coordination
- Athletes will progress from intro skills, to moderate, and some will reach advanced skills

- Visual examples of the correct movement pattern for basic skills such as swinging and throwing
- Introduce self-reflections such as “how do you feel” “are you doing this right”
- Let the athletes be active in the decision-making process for skill development
- Develop how proper techniques feel for the kids to start developing proper fundamental habits
- Focus on good mechanics and skills to prevent injury
- Stretching before participating

Psychosocial

- Emphasis on enjoyment of being physically active
- Provide opportunities for success and highlighting them to create sport competency
- Minimal punishment for incorrect actions
- Positive social interactions and experiences with teammates, coaches, and parents
- Develop communication with others and enforce positive coaching environment
- Focus on individual aspects of the sport that the kids enjoy and promote having fun
- Monitor stress levels and introduce fundamental skills to help with stress and concentration such as breathing exercises

Minors and Majors

Psychosocial development during 9-12 years of age is extremely important to help with because many behavioral developments at this age are permanent. There needs to be a proper balance of skill learning, improving, putting in effort, while still having fun. At 11-12 years old on average is where kids start to differ in skill level, and it is important to still focus on teamwork and setting personal and team goals.

Physical

- Introduction to strength and conditioning that are age appropriate
- The strength and conditioning are technique focused and don't involve much weight
- Learn basic movement patterns and progress to advanced exercises while focusing on gaining confidence
- Keep providing feedback and teaching techniques with throwing, fielding, and hitting
- Injury prevention becomes more focused and proper usage rates are needed
- Pitchers should only throw fastballs and changeups
- Pitchers should not exceed 80 innings pitched in a 12-month period and should have a 4-month break from throwing
- Athletes should not be playing for multiple teams and introduce nutrition

Psychosocial

- Create a motivational atmosphere where individual skill development, effort, and improvement are rewarded
- Reinforcement and communication to encourage positive peer interactions and teamwork
- Critical time where peer acceptance and social comparison are important to the kids
- Intrinsic motivation by emphasizing mastering skills and satisfaction of putting in effort

- Setting goals for individual and team success
- Monitor athlete stress levels and health markers such as anxiety and depression

Prep 13/14U

This age group will start to focus on skill training and awareness. Self-motivation will become more common in athletes and self-diagnoses from the athletes will help coaches cater the training. Competitive play will increase, and more time should be spent practicing and training.

Physical

- Athletes will begin to self-correct their mistakes and coaches need to start focusing on providing feedback and solutions for the skills that the athlete struggles with
- Introduce to closed skills to make mechanical adjustments before they use the new mechanics in an open environment
- Simulate game experiences during practice to help with in-game scenarios
- Focus on correct movement patterns with catching, hitting, and throwing
- Introduce video feedback
- Continue strength and conditioning appropriate to each player's body type with some weight but not too much to cause stress
- Continued injury prevention with stretching and proper mechanics
- Advanced pitchers can introduce a breaking ball at minimal usage to protect the developing elbow
- Pitchers should not pitch more than 100 innings in a 12-month period
- Introduction to a full-body strength and conditioning program to have symmetrical balance

Psychosocial

- Continue many of the aspects taught in the minor and major divisions
- Enhance baseball enjoyment by making the sport cost-effective and allow the athletes to have input on their sport decisions
- Utilize positivity when communicating needed corrections
- Monitor athlete stress levels by enhancing well-being and performance
- Enhance earlier efforts of enjoyment, positivity, and relationships created due to baseball
- Educate athletes on how to re-charge, prevent burnout, and to keep motivation
- Higher talent level baseball players can reduce involvement in other sports

Prep 15/16U

Athletes' development should become more personalized and needs to cater to their own growth. Position specialization needs to become implemented and safe training methods needs to be maintained. This is the time where open communication between parents, coaches, and players will help them succeed both on and off the field. Rest and recovery after workouts are important and the athletes need to understand that rest is just as important as working out.

Physical

- Major changes in growth are experienced during this time and coaches need to revisit throwing and running fundamentals to ensure that the athletes stay coordinated as their bodies change
- Using expert model information with athletes self-coaching their strengths and weaknesses
- Athletes will begin to benefit more from individualized training
- Training intensity can increase
- Complete body fitness, strength, and motor skills are being improved
- Pitchers need to focus on body mechanics when developing pitches
- Full injury prevention and strength and conditioning routines
- Focus on body recovery and nutrition
- Pitchers should not pitch multiple games on the same day

Psychosocial

- Due to an increase in competition, focus on self-determined forms of motivation
- Coaching methods that promote motivation, effort, persistence
- Still encourage positive and cooperative interactions and relationships
- Educate athletes and parents on factors that contribute to sport related stress, while also introducing sport psychology
- Important psychological skills will help with their sport enjoyment, social-life, and overall wellbeing
- Balance nonsport activities and remember that they are still kids with their own life
- Ensure game enjoyment and teamwork

Drills

This section is going to list the top drills for each age group. Some of these drills were part of the roadmap and can be searched for on Google or YouTube.

Tee Ball

- Run the bases
- Team throwing
- Hit the bucket
- Throw through hula hoop
- Invisible swing
- Tee swing
- Scoop and throw to coach

Rookie Ball

- Ready to throw- freeze in throwing position

- Throw to coach
- Partner catch 10 feet apart
- Coach says “Simon Says”
- Coach roll to players in fielding stance
- Batting practice
- Run to 1st

Peewee

- Throwing and catching basics
- One knee wrist flicks
- No stride throws
- Regular throws
- Practice follow through form
- Around the horn
- Batting stance review
- 10 Tee hits
- 10 coach toss hits
- Baserunning relay race

Minors

- Try everyone out at pitching
- Flipper
- Knock it off from 20 feet (Soccer ball on Tee)
- Scoop and throw to coach
- Tee hitting to focus on hitting line drives
- Mind the gap
- Throw into the trash can at home plate from 2nd base

Majors

- Stop at contact
- Deep tee drill
- Learning strike zone
- Batting fundamentals and intro to loading and forward moving swings
- Inside outside drill
- Bunt defense drill
- Pickle offense/defense
- Ground ball shuffle

13/14 U

- First baseman footwork and receiving throws
- Infield practice throws to 1st
- Double play practice
- Bunting feet and shoulder position
- Catchers receiving and blocking drills

- Lead-off and stealing intro
- Inside swing
- Step forward drill
- Fastball hitting drill
- Fastball pitching drill
- Relay throws and cutoff

15/16 U

- Catch and throw
- Pickle drill
- Pepper
- Hit the relay
- Lead runner scenario
- Eye on the spot hitting
- Batting stance
- Hit and Run
- Pull hitting
- Follow through
- Swing down
- High and low hitting
- Base relay
- Tag up and stealing
- Quick jump
- Squeeze and sacrifice plays
- Double Steal
- Balance and posture for pitching
- Target practice
- Changeup grip and arm speed

Conclusion

This youth baseball development program was created to help coaches better understand where athletes should be for each age group. Often coaches get carried away with thinking their 12-year-old should be having high school skills which isn't good for the development of the athlete. These athletes are kids, and they need a balance of skill development, social skills, and still being a child. This guide can help new coaches develop their athletes properly which will leave a lasting impact on the child beyond their sport endeavors. The drills can be found online and I recommend looking into different videos and articles to get a more in depth explanation of each drill and how practices should be organized.