

Developing Ball Skills - Catching

What is age appropriate?

- 3 years: Catches an 8-10 inch ball from 5 feet by trapping it to chest/encircling with arms.
- 4 years: May begin to catch an 8-10 inch ball with hands, but may still trap to the chest.
- 5 years: Catches an 8-10 inch ball from 5 feet using hands only.
Catches a tennis ball from 5 feet using 2 hands.

Strategies

- *Start with larger/lighter balls:* Beach balls and balloons move slower in the air so these work well for children that are afraid of the ball (close eyes/cover face) as well as children with motor planning/coordination difficulties since these allow them more time to react. For children who already catch an 8-10 inch ball, you can begin to reduce the size of the ball when they are consistently catching larger balls.
- *Start with short distances:* When beginning to teach a child how to catch or how to catch with hands only, start at distances of 5-6 feet away and slowly begin to move further apart as the child masters the skill at each distance.
- *Start by throwing directly to your child:* As the child masters catching a ball at a certain distance when it is thrown directly to him/her, begin to throw the ball slightly to the left or right of the child's hands so he/she has to adjust hand position to catch the ball.
- *Work towards catching with hands only:* the child needs to have mastered the skill of catching the ball in any way at that distance first. This skill usually begins to emerge around age 5. Provide verbal and/or visual cues to remind the child to use only his/her hands to catch the ball. Hand over hand assistance by a 3rd person may be required for some kids so they can get the idea of how it feels to catch the ball using their hands only.
- *Practice catching in various contexts:*
 - Practice hitting a balloon into the air with the goal being that the balloon cannot touch the ground – this activity will help with improving the hand-eye coordination that is required for catching.
 - Play catch and each time somebody catches the ball, take a step back until the child begins to have difficulty catching the ball, then take a step forward each time. This will allow the child to begin to work on catching a ball from different distances.
 - Have your child catch different sized stuffed animals and then have him/her toss or drop it into baskets at different distances/locations.