

# Part Two: Practice

"When Kailani first started Young Athletes, she could not even run. Three years later, she sprints. Her motor and physical skills have improved immensely, from running to jumping, to climbing stairs to swinging a bat, and balancing etc. When we walk into the sessions you can see her excitement. Young Athletes has been greatly beneficial to these accomplishments."

Quetcy Parrish, Mom of Young Athletes, Kailani

SPECIAL OLYMPICS NEW  
JERSEY YOUNG ATHLETES™

# SPECIAL OLYMPICS YOUNG ATHLETES™

Special Olympics Young Athletes™ is an inclusive sport and play program that introduces children, ages 2 through 7, with and without intellectual disabilities, to the world of sports through a developmentally appropriate progression of motor skills activities and games. While play offers an organic learning experience for young children, quality inclusive play allows children of all abilities to improve gross motor skills, generalize social skills, develop self-confidence, and integrate cross-curricular connections in a fun environment. Early childhood educators and physical education teachers have reported that preschool students who participate in Young Athletes in school show gains across all areas of development that persist over time (Favazza & Sipperstein, 2014). The games and activities presented in this section can be implemented in an early childhood physical education or physical therapy setting and integrated through thematic units of study.

## Students will learn and practice skills in the following areas:

- Foundational Skills – Body Awareness, Strength & Fitness
- Walking & Running
- Balance & Jumping
- Trapping & Catching
- Throwing
- Striking
- Kicking





## EACH SKILL AREA INCLUDES THESE HELPFUL TEACHER TOOLS:

**Activity Suggestions:** Small and whole group activities that incorporate equipment provided in the Young Athletes school equipment kit.

**Teaching Tips for Success:** Suggested ideas for making activities more accessible and appropriate for the student's ability.



**Partner Play:** Ideas for helping students play together.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

**Progression Charts:** A three-step chart that will outline the developmental sequence of skills, giving you a gauge to measure each student's level and progression. The activities presented can be modified at all levels. The steps provide you with the knowledge base for implementing those modifications and adaptations.

\*Progression charts are not provided for Young Athletes Foundational Skills, but are included for the other skills outlined in the guide.

## USE THE TEACHING-LEARNING CYCLE: EVERYONE SUCCEEDS, EVERY ACCOMPLISHMENT IS CELEBRATED

When teaching is inclusive, success is measured individually and according to ability. Accomplishments are equally rewarding for the student who stays at the same level and makes continuous progress, as they are for the student who advances from basic skills to proficiency with ease. Continuous assessment allows for setting achievable goals so that all students can experience accomplishment at the level of their ability. In an Inclusive Gross Motor Education program, every accomplishment is celebrated!





# 1A FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

## Body Awareness

Awareness of one's self and one's relationship to the environment, along with basic health and physical fitness, is important for functional mobility, motor development and essential for success in playing any sport. For body awareness, activities such as scarf games with children's songs are recommended, as the scarf's movement allows for children to make many adjustments and postures, and still achieve success. The added benefit of promoting visual tracking translates to improved readiness for reading and writing.

### ACTIVITIES AND GAMES PRESENTED IN THIS SECTION HELP TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP:

#### Motor Skills

- Visual tracking
- Aerobic fitness
- Overall strength and stability
- Self and spatial awareness

#### Cognitive Skills

- Expressive and receptive language
- Body part recognition
- Abstract concepts

#### Social Skills

- Peer interaction

### Teaching Tips for Success

- Use high energy and enthusiasm to encourage participation in all activities.
- Make note of each student's ability to remember lyrics, activities and/or body parts, and reinforce those areas in other activities.
- Children's songs can be adapted to integrate thematic and gross motor learning. Be creative about using songs with movement in all areas of your teaching.



# FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS – BODY AWARENESS

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Scarf Games

**Equipment:** Scarves

**Description:** Drop scarves and encourage students to catch them with their hands, head or feet. Verbally cue the students to look at the scarves as they fall.

**Variation:** Pretend that the scarf is a bird and make it fly high in the sky or a fish that is swimming in the water.



**Partner Play:** Have your students work in pairs and toss the scarves to one another. Each student can take turns calling out a body part with which his partner should try and catch the scarf, or a word that his partner has to rhyme when catching the scarf.

### Activity: Children's Songs

**Equipment:** None

**Description:** Sing children's songs that associate words with actions to encourage language, body awareness and coordinated movement. Some examples include, "Wheels on the Bus," "Head, Shoulders, Knees & Toes," "Hokey Pokey" and "If You're Happy and You Know It."

**Variation:** Piggyback songs are a great way to create your own lyrics to tunes of children's songs that are familiar to you and your students. There are many websites that offer piggyback song lyrics. Try incorporating "sports terminology" within the lyrics to introduce sports terms.



# FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS – BODY AWARENESS

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Circle Time Scarves

**Equipment:** Scarves

**Description:** Have students pass scarves back and forth to one another during circle time. Simple directions can include “Pass the scarf to the person next to you,” and “Pass the scarf to the person on your right.” Complex directions can include, “Pass the scarf as we count to five,” and “If you have a green scarf, place it on the foot of the person to your left.”

### Activity: Toe to Toe

**Equipment:** None

**Description:** Have the students sit in pairs on the floor facing one another. Call out two body parts such as “toe to toe,” “back to back,” “elbow to elbow,” etc. Encourage the students to match their body parts so that their toes, backs, elbows, etc. are touching. Progress to unmatched parts such as “hand to head.”



### Activity: Obstacle Course

**Equipment:** Cones, floor markers, hoops, plastic bricks, balance beam, plastic poles

**Description:** An obstacle course can be designed to work on a specific skill using different kinds of equipment. Have students step over or go under hurdles, step on and off balance beams or incorporate themes of study. Teach various skills and concepts such as “over,” “under,” “in,” “out,” “around,” “between,” “on,” “off” and “balance.” Signs with directional arrows can be used to reinforce directional terms in an obstacle course.

**Variation:** Add letters and numbers to promote phonemic awareness and numerical concepts. Repeating the activity to fun music can help children work on rhythm and aerobic fitness.



**Partner Play:** Set up two obstacle courses and form relay teams. Encourage students to cheer each other on.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Musical Markers

**Equipment:** Hoops, floor markers

**Description:** While music is playing, ask students to run, walk backward, crawl, twist, etc. Encourage students to move to the beat of the music and/or change their movements with the changes to the tempo. When the music stops, the students have to find a marker on which to stand on or a hoop in which to stand in. Slowly eliminate the markers or hoops until there is only one large hoop or two markers for the students to share.

**Variation:** Have the students touch the markers with different body parts.



# 1B FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

## Strength & Fitness

Strength and stability through the torso, arms and legs build a good foundation for balance activities and sports. They are integral for functional movement, such as moving from a sitting to standing position, or sitting up in a chair. Strength is directly related to achieving and maintaining good posture, which is important for reading and writing readiness.

### ACTIVITIES AND GAMES PRESENTED IN THIS SECTION HELP TO PROMOTE AND DEVELOP:

#### Motor Skills

- Overall strength and stability through the trunk, arms and legs

#### Cognitive Skills

- Color recognition
- Body part identification
- Receptive and expressive language
- Cognitive concepts such as in/out, over/under and through

#### Social Skills

- Participation in activities with others

### Teaching Tips for Success

- Make note of approximately how many times or how long the student can perform each activity.
- Encourage more repetition or longer duration over several weeks to develop muscular strength and endurance.
- Have fun counting or reciting the alphabet while you play.
- Add music to create a fun environment or change pace.
- Use picture cue cards to provide visual cues.
- Demonstrate the activity while saying the words.



# FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS – STRENGTH & FITNESS

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Tunnel Crawl

**Equipment:** Tunnel, cones or plastic bricks with plastic poles

**Description:** Have students crawl through tunnels or under a series of obstacles such as foam pool noodles or plastic bars supported by plastic bricks or cones.



**Partner play:** For the Tunnel Crawl, create relay teams and encourage students to cheer for one another.

### Activity: Animal Exercises

**Equipment:** None

**Description:** Children love to pretend that they are animals and move their bodies in different ways. Be imaginative with these exercises to encourage movement and expression. Picture books or images from the computer can help students visualize the animal and movement.

- **Inchworm Wiggle:** Have students bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground. Think of the position as an upside-down V. Encourage them to move like an inchworm by walking their hands forward and then working their feet up to their hands.
- **Bunny Hop:** Have students bend forward so that hands and feet are on the ground. Encourage them to hop like a bunny by moving their hands forward and then hopping their feet up to their hands.
- **Bear Crawl:** Have students bend down with their hands and feet on the ground. Encourage them to crawl/walk like a bear. Make sure the knees do not touch the floor. Growl for fun!
- **Crab Walk:** Have students sit on the floor with feet flat on the floor, knees bent and hands flat on the floor, slightly behind the body. Ask them to lift their hips off the floor and walk their hands and feet backward. Once that is mastered, ask them to crawl sideways or forward in the same position.



**Partner Play:** Encourage students to work together as animals on a farm, park, zoo or other natural habitat.





# FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS – STRENGTH & FITNESS

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Parachute Games

**Equipment:** Parachute, ball, bean bags

**Description:** Parachute games are extremely popular with young children and very versatile, as you can incorporate a variety of cross-curricular skills and concepts and reinforce teamwork. An example of a parachute game is to first have the students throw beanbags onto the parachute, then raise and lower the parachute making sure the beanbags stay on. Continue shaking the parachute to toss off all the beanbags. Have the students run under the parachute by responding to cues like, “All those wearing blue shirts,” and “Those who have names that start with an A.” There are many books and websites that offer a wide variety of parachute games.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Yoga

**Equipment:** Mats (optional)

**Description:** Yoga offers many benefits such as flexibility, balance, strength, coordination, spatial awareness, sensory integration and self-control. Websites and DVDs that offer yoga instruction for children can be a great resource. Yoga postures associated with animals can integrate cross-curricular connections.



## 2 WALKING & RUNNING

Walking and running are basic locomotor skills that move a student from one place to another. Beginning walkers walk with their hands up at shoulder height (which is called high-guard) and their feet wide apart and turned out at the toes, offering them a wide base of support. As children feel more balanced and secure, they will drop their arms, narrow their base of support by bringing their feet closer together, and begin to rotate their trunk as they move.

Most children begin to run around six to seven months after they begin to walk. As with beginning walkers, beginning runners will use a high-guard and wide base until they feel more balanced and secure.

Walking and running are basic skills found in most sports and are important parts of social development as they allow for participation in recreational games and activities.

Activities and games presented in this section help to promote and develop:

### Motor Skills

- Locomotion skills and cognitive concepts such as walking or running forward, backward, sideways and in pathways, such as zigzag, circle and straight lines
- Object manipulation

### Cognitive Skills

- Following activity directions

### Social Skills

- Peer interaction
- Confidence

### Teaching Tips for Success

- Encourage students to look in the direction they are going when walking or side stepping and to keep the hips and feet facing forward.
- Encourage students not to crouch or make extra movements when walking or side stepping.
- Try placing a beanbag on the student's head to encourage good posture and balance for walking.
- Use visual cues for directional signs when doing activities such as "Running Styles" and "Follow the Leader."
- If arms are at high-guard or swinging across the body, offer the student a mid-sized ball or object to carry while walking or running.
- Listen and watch for foot slapping while running and encourage students to walk on their toes or heels for fun to reverse flat footsteps.
- If you notice students using too long or short strides, use floor markers to trace a pattern on the floor that demonstrates proper stride length that they can follow.





# WALKING & RUNNING SKILL PROGRESSION STEPS

## WALKING

### Basic

- High-guard
- Toes point out, wide base of support
- Flat feet
- Independent steps are taken, no trunk or pelvic rotation

### Proficient

- Low-guard, minimal reciprocal arm swing (opposite arm to opposite leg)
- Less toeing out, decreased base of support
- More fluid motion of legs
- Increased stride length

### Advanced

- Reciprocal arm swing (opposite arm to opposite leg)
- Maximum stride length and fast speed
- Narrow base of support
- Pelvic rotation

## RUNNING

### Basic

- High-guard
- Short, limited leg swing
- Toeing out, wide base of support

### Proficient

- Increased stride and speed
- Arm swing increases
- Less toeing out
- Swinging foot crosses midline, placed near center of gravity (less base of support)

### Advanced

- Maximum stride length and fast speed
- Arms swing in opposition, elbows at 90 degrees
- Toes contact ground on landing, followed by heel



# WALKING & RUNNING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Run and Carry

**Equipment:** Floor marker, three to five objects such as beanbags

**Directions:** Place several objects (i.e. beanbags) on the floor several feet from a floor marker. Encourage students to run, pick up an object from the pile and then run to place it on the floor marker. Repeat until all objects are on the floor marker.

**Variation:** Objects can be part of a thematic unit or props from a story that students need to pick up in sequence. Objects can be counted as students put them on the marker. Repeat several times to develop endurance.



**Partner Play:** Have two or more students take turns running to retrieve an object. Encourage students to cheer for one another or give a high five to signal the other's turn.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Side Stepping

**Equipment:** Floor markers, hoops

**Directions:** Set out a path marked by hoops, floor markers or cones and have the students side step to each object.

**Variation:** Place an object at the end of the path for students to pick up and then bring back to the starting point.

### Activity: Run and Leap

**Equipment:** Plastic poles, foam pool noodle

**Directions:** Set out a low hurdle, foam pool noodle or plastic bar. Have students run and leap over the object(s). Verbal cues can include, "Run big," to initiate the leap.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.





# WALKING & RUNNING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Follow the Leader

**Equipment:** None

**Directions:** Encourage students 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). This prepares them to start and stop moving, as needed in sports competition. Use music, blow a whistle or clap.



**Partner Play:** Have students take turns as the leader.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Running Styles

**Equipment:** Gym floor tape

**Directions:** Mark out a path using gym floor tape. Model different types of running (slow, fast, zigzag, etc). Decide on a command signal, such as a whistle, clap or hand signal. Each time you use the command signal, students should change their running style.



**Partner Play:** Have students choose and use the start and stop signal.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: A Walk in the Park

**Equipment:** None

**Directions:** Tell students to pretend they are taking a walk in the park. As they walk (inside or outside), suggest different ways to move their arms. Walk and reach up high to touch the sun. Walk and swing your arms as the wind blows. Walk and reach side to side with the right hand and then left hand to catch raindrops. Lift knees high to step over logs or branches. Take big steps to leap over brooks or creeks.



**Partner Play:** Have students work as partners.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Follow the Path

**Equipment:** Cones, floor markers, hoops, plastic bars

**Directions:** Set out a path marked with hoops, cones or floor markers. Encourage students to follow the path.

**Variation:** Place a plastic bar in the path for students to step over. Have students take turns as the leader. Vary the path from straight to zigzags or spirals.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.



# 3 BALANCE & JUMPING

Adequate balance is a requirement of many sports and gross motor activities. Poor balance can affect safety and mobility skills at home and at school.

## Balance can affect a child's ability to:

- Get on and off the school bus
- Climb stairs
- Get in and out of a car
- Feel comfortable on playground equipment at school or a park
- Walk on grass or sand
- Walk up a curb
- Kick or throw a ball

There are many factors that can have an effect on balance including visual impairments, vestibular difficulties and low muscle tone. A child will typically have the best balance when her eyes are open, feet are wide apart, she is close to the ground and the surface she is standing on is firm, even and stable. Standing with the feet together or eyes closed will likely cause a child to sway.

Activities and games presented in this section help to promote and develop:

## Motor Skills

- Stability
- Coordination
- Leg strength
- Core strength
- Jumping

## Cognitive Skills

- Remember a sequence of directions

## Social Skills

- Teamwork
- Peer interaction
- Taking turns
- Empathy



## Teaching Tips for Success

- Avoid having students close their eyes during activities, as they can sway and lose their balance.
- To make an activity or game involving balance easier or more difficult, consider changing the support surface (sand, grass, mat, etc.) or base of support (balance beam, floor markers, etc.).
- Be patient and work on balance and jumping activities often.
- New jumpers will push off and/or land with one foot leading the other, rather than both feet pushing off and landing at the same time. It will take some time, but encourage students to jump off and land with both feet at the same time.
- Ask students to look at a still object (the teacher, a picture, stuffed animal, etc.) to help maintain balance.





# BALANCE & JUMPING SKILL PROGRESSION STEPS

## BALANCE

### Basic

- Able to walk on a line
- Able to stand on a balance beam
- Able to stand on one foot momentarily

### Proficient

- Able to stand on one foot for 10 seconds
- Able to walk across a 4 inch balance beam

### Advanced

- Able to stand on one foot for 60+ seconds
- Able to balance on tiptoes with eyes closed for 10 seconds

## JUMPING

### Basic

- Almost no arm action
- Feet do not leave or return to the floor simultaneously
- No preparation to jumping
- No bending of hip and knees on landing

### Proficient

- Arms used, but not through full range
- Two foot takeoff, loses balance on landing
- Slight crouch when preparing to jump
- Bending of hips and knees on landing

### Advanced

- Arms extended backwards and upwards with deep crouch when preparing to jump
- Two foot takeoff and landing, balance maintained
- Hips and knees fully extended at takeoff
- Hips and knees bend on landing



# BALANCE & JUMPING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Step & Jump

**Equipment:** Balance beam, floor markers

**Directions:** Have students step up onto a balance beam and then step or jump down from it. As students' abilities improve, progress to having them jump farther out onto a marker or down from higher steps or surfaces.

### Activity: Jump & Grab

**Equipment:** Scarves, balance beam, floor markers

**Directions:** Hold a scarf and encourage students to jump up and grab it as they:

- Jump down off a step or balance beam
- Jump down from a step or balance beam onto a floor marker
- Jump to a floor marker a few inches away
- Jump over a rope or floor marker

### Activity: Balance Beam Walk

**Equipment:** Balance beam

**Directions:** Ask students to walk forward, sideways or backwards across a balance beam.

**Variation:** Have students walk, stop, balance on one foot and then turn around.

### Activity: Tick-Tock the Croc

**Equipment:** Floor markers

**Directions:** Set out floor markers and pretend they are rocks in a river. Ask students to pretend that there is a crocodile in the river and they need to get across by stepping on the "rocks" so that they don't fall in. Increase the difficulty by having the markers farther apart.



**Partner Play:** Have students hold hands or help each other across the river.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.





# BALANCE & JUMPING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: "Coach Says" (Simon Says) Game

**Equipment:** Floor markers

**Directions:** Ask students to copy your movements and assume different positions.

**Some positions that may challenge their balance might be:**

- Stand on tippy-toes or heels
- Stand with one foot directly in front of the other
- Stand on one foot
- Stand with feet together and arms out
- Stand with feet wide apart
- Stand with one foot on a floor marker (can work on color or shape recognition)

### Activity: Trees in the Forest/Flowers in the Garden

**Equipment:** Scarves, floor markers

**Directions:** Have students pretend to be trees or flowers by having them stand with their feet on two floor markers. Pretend to be the wind and move around the students fanning them with a scarf as they bend and sway in the breeze. Increase the difficulty by moving the floor markers closer together, having them put both their feet on one floor marker or stand on one foot.



**Partner Play:** Have students take turns pretending to be the breeze.

### Activity: Jumping Beans

**Equipment:** Balance beams, plastic domes or plastic bricks, music

**Directions:** Set up paths of plastic domes, plastic bricks, balance beams or other low level equipment (Make sure plastic domes and bricks are secure and do not slip). While the music is playing, ask students to go through the path, stepping up and down along the way. When the music stops, students should stand on a dome, brick, beam etc. and freeze. When the music begins again, students should jump down and off the equipment and continue along the path.



## 4 TRAPPING & CATCHING

Trapping is when a child stops a ball with the legs or feet. Catching is when a child uses his hands to receive a ball that is thrown, bounced or rolled.

### Trapping and catching require:

- Visual tracking and eye-hand coordination (1 – Foundational Skills)
- Stability and strength (1 – Foundational Skills, 3 – Balance & Jumping)

Trapping and catching are required in many sports, such as soccer, basketball and softball.

Activities and games presented in this section help to promote and develop:

### Motor Skills

- Visual tracking
- Eye, hand and foot coordination
- Timing

### Cognitive Skills

- Following directions
- Staying focused on an activity
- Remembering cues

### Social Skills

- Taking turns
- Teamwork



### Teaching Tips for Success

- Begin with rolling or passing the ball, rather than throwing it to the student.
- Choose a lightweight ball or a favorite color ball.
- Use a stuffed animal or ball with a sound.
- Make sure the ball is the correct size. An appropriate sized ball will be approximately the width between the child's hands.
- It is easier to trap or catch a rolled ball than a tossed ball.
- Catching or trapping slower moving objects is easier when first starting out. Bubbles, beach balls and the fly-weight ball, included in your Young Athletes kit, have longer flight times than playground balls and will often help your student achieve early success in catching.
- Ask students to bring their arms out in front with the palms up. When catching above the waist, fingers point up.
- Verbal cues include "Eyes on the ball" and "Hands ready."
- A new catcher is often only as successful as the person who is tossing.
- Velcro gloves and paddles are great to use for transitioning from two to one-handed catches.





# TRAPPING & CATCHING PROGRESSION STEPS

## Basic

- Palms held upwards, thumbs pointing outwards
- Arms outstretched and stiff, fingers tense
- Traps ball on body
- Avoidance reaction (doesn't want to catch the ball)
- Body movement is limited, arms remain stationary while ball is in flight

## Proficient

- Palms face each other, thumbs point upwards
- Elbows flexed
- Hands and arms brought towards body
- Less avoidance reaction
- Adjusts arms and hands to flight of ball, eyes track ball

## Advanced

- Eyes follow ball, hands and arms adjust to level of ball in flight
- Hands grasp ball in well-timed motion, arms "give" to absorb force of ball
- No avoidance reaction



# TRAPPING & CATCHING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Rolling and Trapping

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, small to medium-sized ball

**Directions:** Sit opposite the student with legs outstretched in a straddle position, so that legs are touching and a diamond shape is formed. Roll the ball back and forth to each other, catching/stopping with hands

**Variation:** Decrease the size of the ball or increase the speed. Kneel or side-sit.



**Partner Play:** Have students roll the ball to each other. Encourage them to watch the ball as it rolls.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Big Ball Catch

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, small to medium-sized ball

**Directions:** Stand facing the student and slowly pass the ball to him. Repeat several times, moving more quickly each time. Next, have the student grab the ball from your hands. Then, tell him that the ball will be let go right before it reaches his hands. Practice this several times before actually tossing the ball.

**Variation:** Try a small beanbag instead of a big ball. Encourage the student to catch the beanbag with one hand.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: High Ball Catch

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, small to medium sized ball

**Directions:** Kneel about 3 feet away from the student. Gently toss a beach ball or slow moving ball from chest level to the student and encourage him to catch the ball with fingers pointing up. Be sure to throw the ball with fingers pointing up.

**Variation:** Move farther away as you toss the ball. Vary between high tosses and low tosses.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.



### Activity: Bounce Catch

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, playground ball

**Directions:** Face the student and bounce a beach ball or medium to large-sized ball so that she can catch it without moving. Progress to moving farther away and using smaller balls.



**Partner Play:** Have students bounce the ball to each other. Encourage them to watch the ball as it bounces.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

#### Verbal Cues for Trapping and Catching:

"Hands ready!"

"Eyes on ball!"

"Look at ball."





# TRAPPING & CATCHING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Sit, Roll and Trap

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, playground ball, beach ball

**Directions:** Ask the students to sit in a circle and roll a ball to each other. Cross-curricular connections can include counting, rhyming or telling the sequence of a story/lifecycle each time the ball is rolled.

**Variation:** Decrease the size of the ball or increase the speed. Have students kneel rather than sit.

### Activity: Stand, Roll and Trap

**Equipment:** Slow motion ball, playground ball, beach ball

**Directions:** Follow the directions for “Sit, Roll and Trap,” but have students stand in a circle and trap the ball with the bottom of their feet. Model first and use a slow moving ball to allow for early success.

### Activities: Bubble Catching

**Equipment:** Bubbles, floor markers

**Directions:** Have the students stand on floor markers. Blow bubbles in the direction of the students and ask them to catch the bubbles with one or two hands while remaining on the marker. Encourage them to clap or squeeze a bubble. Bubbles have slow flight characteristics which can help children achieve early success in catching rather than trapping.



**Partner Play:** Have students take turns blowing the bubbles.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.



# 5 THROWING

Throwing requires strength, flexibility, balance and coordination. Early development of grip and release begins with two-handed underhand tossing of a light weight, medium size ball. A good rule of thumb is if the ball can easily be lifted above the head with two hands, then the ball is a good size for the child. Progression then continues to two-handed overhand throwing and then one-handed throwing. Throwing is an essential component in many sports and mastering it will allow children to feel comfortable joining in recess games on the playground.

**Activities and games presented in this section will help to promote and develop:**

## Motor Skills

- Tossing underhand and/or throwing overhand and underhand
- Flexibility
- Balance
- Coordination
- Eye-hand coordination
- Strength

## Cognitive Skills

- Understanding the difference between the different types of throws
- Listening
- Following directions and cues

## Social Skills

- Teamwork
- Communication
- Taking turns



## Teaching Tips for Success

- Throwing and catching are closely linked, so you will often find yourself working on both at the same time.
- Beginner throwers will stand with their feet even, regardless of whether they are tossing underhand or throwing overhand.
- To advance the skill of throwing, encourage the student to have her feet hip-width apart with one foot slightly forward so that weight shifting and trunk rotation can occur. Floor markers can be used to encourage correct feet position.
- As throwing skills progress, the student's arm will move forward, bend at the elbow and then straighten when the ball is released. The wrist will also slap down as the ball is released.
- For the overhand throw, cue the student to have his elbow up and the hand near the ear to begin the throw.
- If the student is having difficulty releasing the ball, practice grasp and release with a beanbag or tennis ball, or release into a hoop or bucket.
- When the right hand is used for throwing, the left foot steps forward. When the left hand is used, the right foot steps forward.





# THROWING PROGRESSION STEPS

## Basic

- Ball is held in palm of hand, fingers spread to release ball
- Action is caused by bending the elbow without trunk rotation
- Trunk remains facing the target, no rotation
- Follow through is forward and downward, bending at waist
- No weight transfer, feet remain stationary

## Proficient

- Arms move backwards and sideways behind head
- Trunk and shoulders rotate towards throwing side when preparing to throw
- Follow through with trunk bending and forward motion of body and arm

## Advanced

- Arm swings backwards and upward in preparation, elbow fully extended to release ball
- Shift weight to back foot when preparing to throw
- Full trunk rotation
- Follow through with hips, trunk and arm



# THROWING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Rolling

**Equipment:** Slow motion or playground ball

**Directions:** Sit on the ground with your legs stretched out to the sides in a V formation. Roll a ball back and forth with the student. Progress this activity so that you're rolling the ball from half-kneeling or standing. Verbal cues can include, "Hands ready," and, "Push the ball."

**Variation:** Encourage the student to roll a ball from standing position so that it passes between two cones to score a goal.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

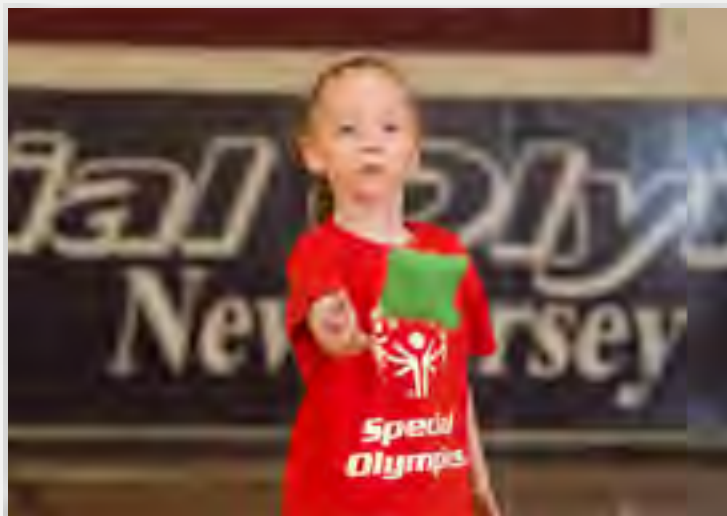
### Activity: Two-Handed Underhand Throw

**Equipment:** Slow motion or playground ball

**Directions:** Encourage the student to stand with bent knees and hold a beach ball or flyweight ball with the fingers pointing down. Ask the student to look at your hands and toss the ball into your hands. Verbal cues can include, "Toss up," and, "Look at me."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.



### Activity: One-Handed Underhand Toss

**Equipment:** Small ball, beanbag, tennis ball, hoop

**Directions:** Encourage the student to stand with bent knees holding a small ball or beanbag with one hand. Ask the student to look at your hands and toss the ball or beanbag into your hands. Verbal Cues can include, "Step and toss."

**Variation:** Toss the ball or beanbag through a hoop or at a target. Progress to stepping with the opposite foot to the tossing hand when throwing.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Two-Handed Overhand Throwing

**Equipment:** Slow motion or playground ball

**Directions:** Have the student stand with feet hips-width apart and one foot in front of the other. While facing the direction of the throw or a target, encourage the student to rock forward and back. As she rocks to the back foot, ask her to raise her arms up over the head. When rocking forward, encourage her to bring her arms forward to throw the ball. Verbal cues can include, "Ball up," and, "Step and throw."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: One-handed Overhand Throwing

**Equipment:** Small balls, beanbags

**Directions:** Using the same techniques as two-hand throwing, encourage the student to bring his arm back and forward and step forward with the opposite foot as the throwing arm, to throw a small ball towards your hands or a target. Verbal cues can include, "Elbow up," and, "Step and throw."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.





# THROWING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Target Practice

**Equipment:** Beanbags, small balls, tennis balls, gym floor tape or pictures/targets, floor markers

**Directions:** Tape targets, pictures or shapes to the wall at various heights. Using floor markers to designate the distance from the target and encourage proper foot placement, have the students stand on the markers and throw a small ball or beanbag at the targets. Verbal cues can include, "Look at the target," and, "Point to the target."

**Variation:** Targets or pictures can correspond to thematic lessons, shapes, colors, mathematical or reading/language concepts, or a favorite cartoon character or animal.



### Activity: Bowling

**Equipment:** Bowling pins or stacking cups, ball, soft balance beams

**Directions:** Create your own bowling lane with two balance beams and stacking cups in a pyramid formation or other configuration at the end of the "lane." Have the student roll a ball towards the pins or cups.

**Variation:** Have the students plan a bowling "party." Set up one or two lanes, keep score and make a poster with the name of your very own bowling alley! Invite other classes to play.

### Activity: Shoot to Score Basketball

**Equipment:** Basketball hoop or adjustable basketball stand, floor markers, basketballs of appropriate size

**Directions:** Set out floor markers at various distances from the basketball hoop or adjustable stand. Have students stand on the markers and throw overhand to get the ball in the hoop.

**Variation:** Keep score by assigning point values to attempts at the basket and actually scoring.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.



## 6 STRIKING

Striking is a term used to describe an action of hitting a ball or object with one's hand, stick, bat, paddle, racket, etc. Striking or even tapping a stationary ball with a fist or open hand encourages development of the skills necessary for sports such as tennis, golf, softball, volleyball and hockey.

### Striking requires:

- Eye-hand coordination  
(1 – Foundational Skills)
- Spatial awareness  
(1 - Foundational Skills)
- Strength and flexibility  
(1 - Foundational Skills)
- Balance  
(2 - Balance & Jumping)

**Activities and games presented in this section will help to promote and develop:**

### Motor Skills

- Visual tracking
- Eye-hand coordination
- Balance and stability
- Strength
- Body coordination

### Cognitive Skills

- Direction following
- Remembering cues
- Remembering proper grip for holding paddle, stick, etc.

### Social Skills

- Teamwork



### Teaching Tips for Success

- Encourage the student to keep his eyes on the ball (visual tracking).
- Encourage the student to stand side-on to the ball with good balance. Using floor markers can help the student stand in the proper position. A side-on stance is important for good balance and rotation.
- Have the student twist his bellybutton forward when striking the ball to encourage follow through.
- Shifting weight is important to correct striking form. If the student is not shifting her weight, have her rock forward and backward while standing on floor markers.
- Large balls are easier to strike than small ones, and stationary objects are easier to strike than moving ones.
- Throw the ball slowly and with a small arc when just starting out, having the student strike a moving object.
- Increase the skill level by increasing the distance of the ball from the body. This allows the student to progress from using a hand to strike, to striking with a paddle and then to striking with a bat, golf club or hockey stick.
- If student is unable to make contact with the ball, use a suspended ball hung at different heights for practice.





# STRIKING PROGRESSION STEPS

## Basic

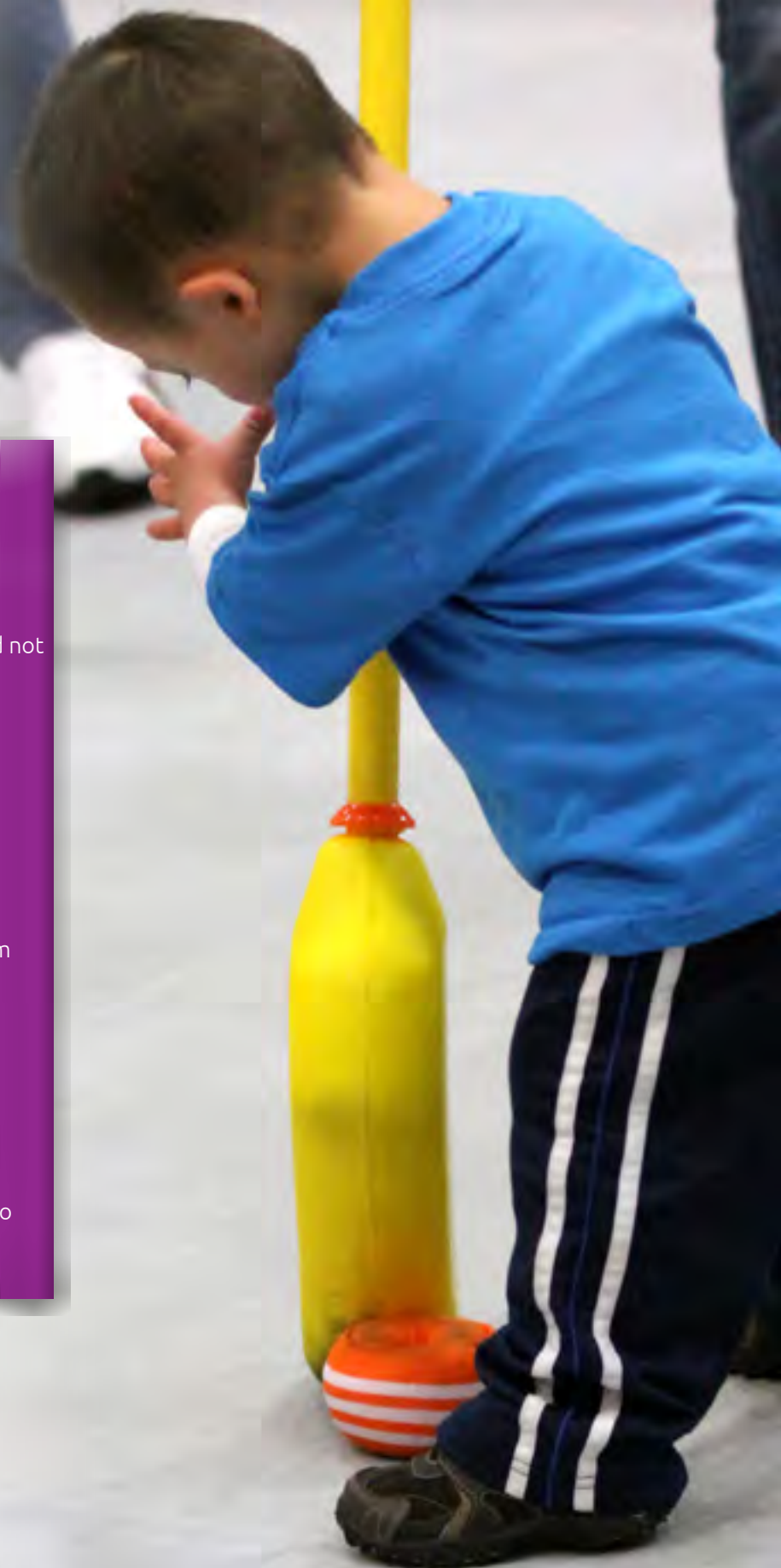
- Faces the direction of the object
- No trunk rotation
- Feet stationary
- Force is applied only from extending the arms and not from the core or from rotation

## Proficient

- Some preparation by using back swing
- Trunk faces side-on in anticipation of strike
- Some trunk rotation
- Weight shifts prior to strike
- Force is applied from extending the arms and from rotation

## Advanced

- Full preparation by using back swing
- Trunk faces side-on in anticipation of strike
- Rotation in hips and then torso
- Weight shifts to back foot during backswing and to forward foot at contact



# STRIKING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Handball

**Equipment:** Cone/tee, flyweight, beach ball or volleyball

**Directions:** Place a beach ball or flyweight ball on a cone or tee. Have the student hit the ball with a fist or open hand. Verbal cues can include, "Look and hit," and, "Look at ball, hit with hand."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Roll & Hit

**Equipment:** Medium-sized flyweight ball, beach ball or volleyball

**Directions:** Roll a medium-sized ball towards the student. Encourage the student to use his hand to hit the ball as it is rolled toward him. Verbal cues can include, "Eyes on the ball."

**Variation:** Vary the speed at which you roll the ball. Roll the ball so that the student has to move to the side to strike it.

### Activity: Ball Tapping

**Equipment:** Medium sized flyweight ball, beach ball or volleyball

**Directions:** Tap a beach ball or flyweight ball toward the student and have her tap the ball back toward you with an open hand. Progress to having the student in a side-on or sideways ready position. Toss the ball to the student and have her hit the ball back with an open hand. Verbal cues can include, "Eyes on the ball."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Ball Bouncing- Drop Catch

**Equipment:** Medium sized playground ball or basketball

**Directions:** Ask the student to hold the ball with two hands. Instruct him to drop the ball and catch it as it bounces back up. Verbal cues can include, "Drop and catch."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Ball Dribble

**Equipment:** Medium sized playground ball or basketball

**Directions:** Have the student use two hands to bounce the ball. Emphasize pushing with finger tips and keeping firm wrists. Verbal cues can include, "Fingertips push."

**Variations:** Students can progress to bouncing (dribbling) the ball with one hand. Add walking and running while dribbling once the student is ready.





# STRIKING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Beginning Tennis/Tee-ball

**Equipment:** Tee, cone, ball, paddle, racquet or bat

**Directions:** Place a large ball on a cone or tee. Encourage the student to face the ball with his belly button facing the ball. (This would be different if the ball were being pitched and the student would take a side-on stance to the ball instead of a front stance). Have the student hold a paddle or racket and encourage him to strike the ball with the paddle or racket. Verbal cues can include, "Eyes on ball," "Swing back and hit," and, "Swing and hit."

**Variation:** Toss a beach ball or flyweight ball with a slow and low arc to the student rather than using the tee or cone. Have the ball bounce prior to the student attempting to hit it.



**Partner Play:** Create "bases" for the children to run around after they hit the ball. Keep score for a math cross-curricular connection.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Beginning Hockey/Golf

**Equipment:** Medium to large-sized ball, hockey stick, plastic stick, golf club

**Directions:** Place a large ball on the ground. Have the student hold onto a hockey stick, long stick or golf club with two hands and strike the ball with the stick.

**Variation:** Set up two cones to be the goal and have the students shoot on goal. Use floor markers to assist with positioning of feet. Progress to rolling the ball towards the student to strike.



**Partner Play:** Have students take turns striking the ball and playing "goalie."



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Beginning Volleyball

**Equipment:** Beach ball, balloon, slow motion ball, volleyball floater

**Directions:** Using a slow high arc, toss the ball to the student. Encourage the student to use two hands to hit the ball up in the air. Verbal cues can include, "Hands up," and, "Eye on the ball."

**Variation:** Add a low net and begin to hit back and forth with the student.



**Partner Play:** Have one student throw the ball to another student to hit. Keep count on how many times each student hits the ball.



# 7 KICKING

Similar to striking, kicking a stationary, medium or large-sized ball is easier than kicking a small or moving ball. Unlike striking, however, kicking requires the ability to balance, at least for a moment, on one foot. Beginner kickers will lean forward when they are kicking a ball. More advanced kickers will lean their body back just before contacting the ball. Most beginners will be successful in kicking if they run up to a stationary ball to kick it, because they will essentially run through the ball with one foot.

Once your students master running and kicking, have them stand behind a stationary ball and practice kicking it. This challenges the students to stand on one foot and disassociate one leg from another. The kicking leg should bend at the knee for a back swing, then straighten at contact. The opposite arm swings forward with the kick to allow for stabilization and power. Advanced kickers will have more bend in their knee and will swing the opposite arm forward as the ball is kicked.

**Activities and games presented in this section help to promote and develop:**

## Motor Skills

- Balance
- Eye-foot coordination
- Strength

## Cognitive Skills

- Listening and following cues
- Body awareness
- Spatial planning

## Social Skills

- Taking turns with others



## Teaching Tips for Success

- Encourage the student to keep her eyes on the ball and then on the target. Use a ball that is the student's favorite color or a ball with a bell inside.
- Weight shifting to the non-kicking leg is necessary for control and balance.
- Use verbal and visual cues to identify and differentiate the right foot and the left foot, one as the kicking foot and one as the stabilizing foot.
- If the student loses her balance while kicking, use a lightweight ball or volleyball floater, or have the student hold your hand while kicking.





# KICKING PROGRESSION STEPS

## Basic

- Arms held at sides
- No preparing for kicking with kicking leg
- Pushes leg forward into the ball
- No trunk rotation

## Proficient

- Some arm movement
- Steps forward with the non-kicking foot
- Minimal windup with kicking leg
- Minimal trunk rotation
- Knee bent on contact

## Advanced

- Opposite arm swing
- Steps forward with non-kicking foot
- Winds up kicking leg prior to kick
- Trunk rotation
- Knee extended on contact





# KICKING

## INDIVIDUAL AND SMALL GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Run and Kick

**Equipment:** Soccer ball, playground ball, volleyball floater

**Directions:** Place a ball on the ground and have the student run up to the ball and kick it toward you. Verbal cues can include, "Look at the ball," and, "Run and kick."

**Variation:** Encourage the student to kick for distance by having him kick past various markers.

Encourage the student to kick the ball between two cones to score a goal.



**Partner Play:** Have one student set up the markers for distance kicking or play "goalie" for kicking for accuracy. Students take turns switching roles.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Stationary Ball Kick

**Equipment:** Soccer ball, playground ball, volleyball floater

**Directions:** Place a ball on the ground and have the student stand behind it. Have the student kick the ball toward you with the toe of his preferred foot.

**Variation:** Encourage the student to kick for distance by having him kick past various markers.

Encourage the student to kick the ball between two cones to score a goal.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Passing Practice

**Equipment:** Soccer ball, playground ball, volleyball floater

**Directions:** Kick a ball toward the student and encourage her to kick the ball back to you.

### Activity: Give and Go

**Equipment:** Soccer ball, playground ball, volleyball floater

**Directions:** Kick a ball toward the student and encourage him to kick the moving ball toward a goal or between two cones.



# KICKING

## WHOLE GROUP ACTIVITIES

### Activity: Kick Ball

**Equipment:** Beach ball, slow motion ball, playground ball, cones, floor markers

**Directions:** Set out “bases” and a “home plate.” Students can either kick a stationary ball from home plate or one rolled to them. After kicking the ball, encourage each student to run around the bases.



**Outdoor Play:** This activity is also suitable for outdoors.

### Activity: Cone Dribble

**Equipment:** 10 – 12 cones, soccer balls

**Directions:** Set up cones at random in the play space. Ask students to lightly kick the ball as they move around the space without hitting the cones. Students can take turns or you can have several students dribbling at one time. Verbal cues can include, “Light kicks,” and, “Little kicks.”

### Activity: Pin Ball

**Equipment:** Balance beams, domes, cones or stacking cups

**Directions:** Use the balance beams to create a rectangular “pinball machine” frame. Place cones, domes and/or markers within the rectangle to create obstacles. Have several students stand on the balance beams. Roll a ball into the rectangle towards one of the students. Using their feet as the “flippers,” students kick the ball once it is in play. The students kick the ball to each other, having it remain moving in the rectangle. Keep score by counting how many times the ball is kicked during play. Add an extra point if an obstacle is hit.



# MOVING FORWARD: FUNDAMENTAL SKILL DEVELOPMENT

The challenge and excitement of teaching is providing an atmosphere for all students to grow and develop at their own pace, while gaining personal confidence and having fun!

**Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED.** resources assist educators in meeting the individual needs of students, giving them the opportunity to develop at their own pace. Special Olympics Young Athletes provides early childhood educators with activities that support the progression of gross motor skills in children ages 2 through 7. Knowing that all children develop at various rates, both volumes of **Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED.** can be used in conjunction with one another to create an appropriate educational learning environment for students of all abilities.



As students practice the activities and games presented in Young Athletes, rates of progress will vary. It is likely that while some students are challenged by the activities presented in Young Athletes, others will be ready to move on to more advanced skills and games. **Learn. Practice.**

**Play. UNIFIED. Guide to Inclusive Physical Education and Sports Activities** provides activities and games that promote fundamental and specific sport skills so that all students can fully participate in recreational games, Inclusive Physical Education and Special Olympics Unified Sports®.

## Teaching Complementary Skills

Young Athletes, included in **Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED. Guide to Inclusive Gross Motor Education and Play** and Fundamental Skill Development, included in **Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED. Guide to Inclusive Physical Education and Sports Activities**, provide instruction for locomotor, balance and object manipulation skills. Select activities from each guide that meet the needs and abilities of the students, and align with education goals and curriculum standards.

## High Expectations and Slow Pace!

The Fundamental Skill Development games and activities presented in **Learn. Practice. Play. UNIFIED. Guide to Inclusive Physical Education and Sports Activities** require an integration of cognitive skills such as teamwork, learning rules, following multi-step directions and integrating strength and coordination. As students are challenged to reach new goals, regression in skills is common. Observe which components of the skill are well developed and which ones require more time, practice and guidance, and then return to the basics in Young Athletes to reintroduce skills that are developmentally appropriate for your students.

## Assess Equipment Needs

As students progress, there may be a need for more developmentally or age appropriate equipment. Special Olympics New Jersey **Play UNIFIED School Partnership Program** offers stipends for adaptive equipment based on your level of partnership. Contact Special Olympics New Jersey if adaptive equipment or training is needed.

