

A Parent/Coach's Guide to Youth Hitting

Beginning notes:

- Hitting a baseball is not a difficult task.
- No two players are exactly the same hitter due to physical and mental attributes.
- Practice outside of team practice and games WILL improve your youngster's skill level.

Hitting Basics

1. Stance

- Rock-solid stance: Batter needs to be on the balls of the feet before, during and after the swing. Try a gentle push on the shoulder of a hitter until they can keep balance. Keeping weight back is the biggest improvement that most young players can make to elevate their hitting power and success. **Quick Toss drill** and **Knee Drill**

2. Timing

- The stride timing is not as critical as the trigger and hands. Drills and live batting practice improve timing. **Timing Soft Toss Drill**

3. Trigger

- The hip turn that starts the explosion of a swing – hands stay back while the hip starts rotation toward the ball. **Phantom Pitch** on many drills

4. Hand-eye coordination

- Eyesight and genetics play a role, but everyone can improve with practice. **Small ball, small bat** on any drill

5. Fast Hands

- Drills improve hand skill, and fast hands improve timing and power. **2-Ball Soft Toss** and **Timing Soft Toss**.

6. Keep the hands inside the ball

- The lead hand pulls the bat, the back hand doesn't push it. Hands should move across the player's body, quickly to the ball. The lead hand "punches" the butt-end of the bat toward the ball, then the barrel whips out at the end of the punch and meets the ball in front of the hitter (not over the plate). **Fence Drill**, **One Hand Drill** and **Advanced Skills Batting Tee**

7. Keep the head still

- Many young players lack the neck strength to keep their head still while swinging a bat, but coach the importance of keeping the head and eyes still. **Quick Toss Drill**

Tools of the Trade

The best coach for a young player is Mom, Dad, brother, sister, etc that reinforces the same muscle memory drills that the Baseball Coaches are teaching. These drills, when practiced correctly at home, greatly improve a young player's ability to enjoy hitting a baseball!

1. Soft Toss

- You need a backstop (soft net) and a few balls. Several "pop-open" nets are available on the market. When I was a kid, we hung a sheet over the clothes line and hit into it (where there's a will there's a way!). Do not ever hit into a solid backstop. It is also a great idea to head to the baseball diamond and soft-toss with the batter at the plate.

2. Hitting Stick

- Awesome tool that can be used for most drills and is great for warming hitters up in the on-deck circle.

3. Hitting tee

- Even the Pros use tees. Kids can practice themselves! I prefer the "Advanced Skills Tee" by Muhl Tech (www.themuhl.com) – a hitter can't hit the ball hard off of this tee unless the swing mechanics are in order.

Hitting sequence

1. Comfortable, balanced stance on the balls of the feet, weight primarily shifted to the back foot, hands back, hands at just above shoulder height, both eyes on the pitcher.
2. Stride – **short** step toward the pitcher, firmly planting the inside ball of the foot on the ground
3. Trigger – hips, back knee and back foot start a powerful turn toward the ball, hands stay back. The Trigger is emphasized by straightening of the front leg (you’ll hear coaches say, “hit with a stiff front leg”)
4. The PUNCH – hands thrown straight toward the ball – this is the fastest movement in a swing. The front hand “punches” to the ball. **Take the knob of the bat to the ball and the barrelhead will follow.** Pull the bat with the front hand, don’t push with the back hand.

Drills

Use this guide to refresh your memory when practicing at home! All of these drills can be performed with soft toss or hitting stick – never live pitching. At all times during all drills – encourage the kids!!! Get excited and smile when they execute the drill and find the positives in each attempt. A parent expressing disappointment in a player’s attempt to execute a drill only damages a young attitude. I know it’s hard – trust me!!

Knee Drill

- Hitter places back knee on the ground and front leg stretched out toward the pitcher. The inside ball of the front foot should be solidly on the ground. Never allow the player to sit on the back foot – they should be “standing” on the back knee.
- The hitter holds hands back and just above the shoulder.
- It is very difficult to move to “trigger” from this position, but that’s okay. The Drill is designed to create muscle memory and a point of reference to use during a game (Coach can say – “weight back – remember the knee drill”).
- The hitter should “punch” the front hand at the ball, keeping weight back.
- Back shoulder rotates under front shoulder (never tell the kids to keep the back elbow up!!)

Quick Toss

- Hitters must maintain balance
- After a swing, the hitter recoils back to ready position quickly
- Place the toss or pitch in the impact zone quickly enough that the player can only hit it if balance is maintained.

Timing Soft Toss

- Hitters must maintain a good stance, keep weight back and hands up.
- Vary the timing of a soft toss by varying the height of the toss
 - Toss higher to make the hitter wait – ball must be contacted in the impact zone on the way down
 - Toss lower to make the hitter use fast hands

2-Ball Soft Toss

- Coach (Mom, Dad, etc) holds a ball in each hand
- Make sure the hitter is in a good stance and ready
- Toss both balls at once – one head-high and belt high
- As you toss the balls, call “top” or “bottom”
- Hitter has to make a good swing on the ball that was called

Small Ball, Small Bat

- Commercially available training aids, but a broom handle with waffle golf balls works fine.
- Perform any drill, including live pitching from 20 feet to develop hand-eye coordination.

Phantom Pitch

- At any time during any drill – make the arm movement of a pitch but don't present the ball or hitting stick in the impact zone.
- Watch for:
 - Weight back
 - Hands back
 - Bat up
 - Trigger

Fence Drill

- The Fence Drill is a way to check and reinforce the mechanics of a “compact swing”.
- The batter needs to stand at a bat's length from the fence. To measure this distance, hold the bat straight out toward the fence at waist height. Touch the end of the bat to the fence lightly and move toward the fence until the end of the handle makes slight contact with your stomach. Without moving any closer or further away from the fence, take your normal batting stance and practice your swing. Start in slow motion, for safety reasons. If the bat makes more than light contact with the fence, you did not bring your hands through first. With hands in close to the body (inside the ball), and your back foot turn-in triggers the stroke (squishing the bug), you'll complete the drill properly. Full arm extension does not take place until the barrel passes the batter.