



Learn to Train (L2T)

MALES: 9 – 12 YEARS
FEMALES: 8 – 11 YEARS

Long-Term Player Development in Softball

Softball Canada has a plan to systematically develop players once they enter the sport up until they reach their full potential. We call this process Long-Term Player Development (LTPD). This means:

- Teaching the right skills at the right time;
- Developing appropriate speed, strength, endurance and flexibility, and;
- Holding competitions suited to the developmental age of the players.

It's all about doing the right things, at the right time and in the right way.

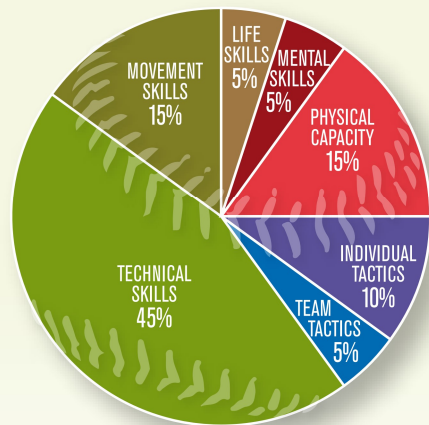
For more information about LTPD and more details about this stage, visit:

<https://softball.ca>

THE FIVE-SEGMENT MODEL

At every stage of LTPD, players need to develop stage and age appropriate skills and capacities in each of the 5 following areas: technical skills, tactical skills, physical capacities, mental skills and life skills. Each capacity has different levels of importance at different points in a player's development. For the Learn to Train stage this means:

Best Use of Softball Time



ABOUT THE LEARN TO TRAIN STAGE

This is the stage from late childhood until the onset of the growth spurt at adolescence. With near-adult sized brains, these are often called the "skill-hungry" years. This is one of the most important periods of motor development. Children are developmentally ready to acquire softball-specific skills. Children learning to play softball are NOT miniature adults, and this means taking into account how 10-year olds learn new skills, how 12-year old bodies respond to different types of training, and what strategies and tactics kid's developing brains are capable of understanding. Children at this stage aren't generally capable of dealing with complicated tactics or strategy, but are very concerned with sport being "fair". Some examples for this stage include:

- This is a great time for kids to learn fundamental softball skills like batting, throwing, baserunning, pitching and fielding - and they need lots of reps and time for practice.
- It's a great time to build flexibility (especially for boys), but not a good time to work on strength and power.
- It's a stage of development where it is more important for kids to play than to win, and when everyone needs to be playing not sitting on the bench.
- It is way too early to know who will ultimately be the best softball players, or what positions players will ultimately excel at - so it's a time for everyone to try every position and have equal playing time.
- It's also way too early for children to focus on only one sport. They should be playing 3 or 4 different sports to build all-round athleticism.

Learn to Train Basics:

- ✓ Focus on keeping softball and physical activity FUN to further develop players' love of the game/physical activity and being part of a team.
- ✓ Further develop fundamental movement skills (FMSs) in a variety of environments (land-based, water-based, and snow/ice-based), including movement-to-music programs.
- ✓ Teach fundamental softball-specific skills (hitting, throwing, pitching, fielding and baserunning) and basic tactics essential to participate in softball.
- ✓ Introduce children to physical conditioning to develop age-appropriate stamina, strength, speed, skill and suppleness.
- ✓ Introduce children to basic mental skills.
- ✓ Develop all-round athleticism including agility, balance and coordination.
- ✓ Ensure children are involved in several sports and have them try different positions or events in each sport.
- ✓ Teach the basic rules and etiquette of softball.
- ✓ Establish appropriate competitive environments where the competition is positioned as a learning experience, designed to encourage and nurture players and where winning and results are not the top priority.
- ✓ Continue to encourage children to engage in unstructured and imaginative play every day.
- ✓ Enroll children in activities that continue to develop stamina, strength, speed, skill and suppleness.

SEASON STRUCTURE

- Competition/Training Ratio: 30%/70%
- Pre-Season:
 - Early in Stage: 0 practices
 - Later in Stage: 8-12 practices
- Competitive Season:
 - Early in Stage: 8-10 weeks
 - Later in Stage: 12-15 weeks
- Softball-specific activities per week:
 - Early in Stage: 1-2 times for 90 minutes each
 - Later in Stage: 2-3 times for 90 minutes each
- Players take part in 3-4 seasonal sports as part of year round activity



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PHYSICAL CAPACITY

	Development Priority		
	Low	Med.	High
Endurance		■	
Speed - Hand/Foot			■
Speed - Whole Body		■	
Speed - Endurance	■		
Relative Strength	■		
Strength - Endurance	■		
Explosive Power		■	
Flexibility			■

NOTE

A key stage for developing hand and foot speed, and for developing flexibility.

Strength training should focus on body-weight exercises, and medicine balls. Introduce hopping and bounding for power development.

MENTAL SKILLS

	Skill Competence					
	I	D	C	R	M	
Confidence and Presence	■					
• Positive attitude						
• Introduction to visualization						
Grit		■				
• Motivation						
• Goal setting						
• Developing passion						
Resilience		■				
• Mental toughness						
• Learning from mistakes						
Focus and Intensity Regulation		■				
• Attention/focus						
• Arousal regulation – breathing						
Team Player		■				
• Developing relationships						
• Communication skills						

NOTE

At this level skills and strategies can be introduced in a group setting to develop a foundation of mental skills.

Kids at this stage are not as self-conscious as during adolescence and this makes it a good time to introduce and practice sport psychology skills in a group setting.

LIFE SKILLS

Player takes responsibility for preparing equipment/clothes for training and competition.

Player takes responsibility for preparing pre-and post training snacks and drinks.

Player is comfortable traveling to and from training and competition as part of team/group.

Understands the rules and ethics of softball and makes conscious decision not to cheat.

Can be a leader and a follower when appropriate.

Appreciates diversity and accepts personal differences.

SLEEP

Sleep- Duration: 9.5-10 hours + 30 minute nap between 2-4pm

- Maintain 15-30 minute bedtime routine
- Monitor caffeine intake



Athletes with Disabilities

Children with a disability should be encouraged to take part in a wide range of sports and activities.

- Provide opportunities to develop sport specific skills like running/wheeling, throwing and catching a ball (with or without a glove), and hitting with a bat.
- Create a positive learning environment and be aware of different learning styles/needs.
- Adapt equipment, skills, and rules to allow athletes with disabilities to be activity engaged in softball.



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SOFTBALL TECHNICAL / TACTICAL SKILLS

One of the most important periods of sports skills development for children is between the ages of 9 and 12, before the onset of the adolescent growth spurt. This stage is a sensitive period of accelerated adaptation to skill learning. Boys and girls are now developmentally ready to learn fundamental softball-specific skills which will lay the foundation for advanced softball skills in later stages. Instruction from qualified coaches on correct techniques and creating environments in which players get maximum repetitions of technical skills is key. This is also the time to learn basic rules and the etiquette of the game.

SKILLS		LEGEND FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT: ■ I - Introduce, ■ D - Develop, ■ C - Consolidate, ■ R - Refine, ■ M - Maintain				
		Bold text - skill/tactic is a priority at this stage				
OFFENSIVE SKILLS	SUB-SKILL	I	D	C	R	M
HITTING						
Hitting Mechanics	Loading (Front Foot to Hand Separation)	■	■			
	Weight Transfer (From Back to Firm Front Side)	■	■	■		
	Palm Up /Palm Down Through Contact	■	■			
	Stacked Position at Contact	■	■	■		
Eye/Hand Coordination	Bat Control	■	■	■		
Strike Zone Awareness		■	■	■		
Avoiding Pitch		■	■	■	■	■
Pitch Recognition (After Release)	Spin Recognition and Reaction	■				
BUNTING						
Sacrifice (Mechanics)	Split Hands With Firm Grip	■	■			
	Barrell Above and in Front of Hands	■	■			
	Head/Eyes at Top of Strike Zone	■	■			
	Absorb the Ball (Contact End of Bat)	■				
Drag Bunt (Mechanics)	Move Through the Box to Pitcher (Back Foot to Pitcher)	■				
SLAP HITTING						
LH Running Slap	Cross Over Step Towards Shortstop	■	■			
	Hands Above Strike zone	■	■			
	Controlled Bat Path in a Downward Movement	■				
	Barrell Lags Behind Hands to Hit Ball to Left side	■	■			
BASERUNNING						
Getting Out of Batters Box		■	■	■		
Running to 1st Base			■	■		
Rounding Base	Question Mark Turn	■	■			
	J turn	■	■			
Lead Offs		■	■			
Tagging Up		■	■			
Stealing		■	■	■		
SLIDING						
Bent Leg Slide		■	■	■		
Dive Back		■	■			
Pop Up Slide		■				



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DEFENSIVE SKILLS		SUB-SKILL				
		I	D	C	R	M
THROWING						
Overhand Throwing Mechanics	Elbows and Shoulders Level	■	■	■		
	Pull Front Elbow into Body on Shoulder Rotation	■	■	■		
	On Release Throwing Elbow Above Shoulder	■	■			
	Ball Release Creates a 12-6 Rotation on Ball	■	■			
	Transition Footwork (Shuffle or Crossover)	■	■	■		
Side Arm Throwing	■					
Flips and Tosses	■	■				
Throwing on the Run	■	■				
RECEIVING THROWS						
Soft hands (absorbing ball)		■	■			
Transfer		■	■			
FIELDING						
GROUND BALLS						
Ready Position		■	■	■		
Ground Ball Fielding Mechanics	Glove Foot Ahead of Throwing Foot	■	■			
	Glove Fingers Point Down/Out Front & Down	■	■	■		
	Bum Down, Weight on Balls of Feet, Eyes Up, Chin Down	■	■			
	Throwing Hand Follows Ball into Glove	■	■	■		
Glove Work	Forehand	■	■			
	Backhand	■	■			
	Shorthops	■				
FLYBALLS						
Flyball Fielding Mechanics	Get Behind the Ball, Glove Foot Ahead of Throwing Foot	■				
	Wrist Back, Glove Above Forehead and Center of Body	■	■	■		
Flyball Footwork	Drop Step	■				
Flyball Catches	Basket Catch	■				
	Over Shoulder Catch	■	■			
Diving Catches	Feet First Sliding	■				
Playing the Sun		■				
Fielding At / Off Fence		■				
MULTIPLE PLAYER DEFENSIVE SKILLS						
Tag Plays		■	■			
Cut Offs		■	■			
Relays		■	■			
Rundowns		■				
PITCHING						
Pitching Mechanics	Leg Drive	■	■	■		
	Stacked or Power Position	■	■	■		
	Arm Action in Joint Sequence	■	■	■		
	Hides Pitches					
Pitches	Fastball	■	■			
	Change	■				
Control (In and Out of Strike Zone)	Throw to Multiple Locations	■	■			
	Throw One Pitch to Multiple Locations	■				
Pitch out		■				



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SKILLS		I	D	C	R	M
DEFENSIVE SKILLS						
SUB-SKILL						
CATCHING						
Receiving Position						
Blocking						
Framing						
Throwing	Around Batter					
	From Knees					
Giving Signals						
Balls at the Backstop						
MIDDLE INFIELDER						
Double Play Footwork	Receiving					
	Throwing					
Relay Throws						
MIDDLE INFIELDER						
Double Play Footwork	Receiving					
	Throwing					
Relay Throws						
CORNER INFIELDER						
Fielding Bunts						
1st Base Skills	Footwork at Bag					
	Stretching					
	Picks					
OUTFIELD						
Long Throw Mechanics	Approach to Ball					
Safety Catch						





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TACTICS

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OFFENSIVE TACTICS

SUB TACTIC

HITTING TACTICS

		I	D	C	R	M
Making Adjustments	From at Bat to at Bat or Within at Bat					
	From Pitcher to Pitcher					

BASERUNNING TACTICS

		I	D	C	R	M
Reading and Reacting	Coach Signals					
	Passed Ball/Wild Pitch					
	Hit Ball					
	Lead Runner					

1st and 3rd Steals

HITTING/BUNTING TACTICS ON STEAL PLAYS

		I	D	C	R	M
Run and Bunt / Hit / Slap						
Fake Bunt						

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

SUB TACTIC

DEFENSIVE TACTICS

		I	D	C	R	M
Communication with Teammates Pre Pitch	Indicating the Number of Outs					
	Calling for the Ball					
Communication with Teammates during plays	Calling Which Base to Throw to					
	Calling Bunt/Slap/Steal					
	On a Hit Ball					
Backup Plays	On a Throw to a Base					
	Balls Hit to Infield and Outfield					
Coverage Plays (Defensive Movement)	Bunt Plays					
	Slap Plays					
	Steals					
	Passed Balls/Wild Pitches					
Angles to the Ball	Flyballs					
	Groundballs					

TEAM DEFENSIVE STRATEGY

		I	D	C	R	M
Defensive Positioning	Game Situation (# Outs, Score, Inning, Runners on Base)					
	Field or Environmental Conditions					
Situational Plays	Steal Defense					
	Bunt Defense					