



**Westford U8
Recreational Softball
Practice Drills for
Coaches**

Introduction:

First and foremost **Thank You!** for coaching Softball. Without volunteers like you our young players would not be able to start their journey with a sport that is rooted in history and Americana. So from the WBSYL we thank you for your time and commitment to the league and, more importantly, the players.

The key to successful coaching is being prepared and organized. It is important to take advantage of the limited time you get each week with the players. This guide is designed to help you, as a coach, with guidance and support. It will present a handful of fundamentals and drills allowing you to choose which drills you will run at your practices. If you have other drills that teach the same concepts, by all means introduce them to your team.

Coaching youth sports can be challenging. With some guidance and organization your experience can be extremely rewarding. These drills have been used successfully and were created so the coach can effectively communicate and the players can easily understand. Included are organized batting, throwing, catching and fielding drills along with suggested practice plans. The plans were created to keep the players interested and provide a positive learning experience.

Recommendations:

It is recommended teaching a couple drills at a time. The most important thing is focus on the proper form of each drill and do not lose sight of the fundamentals of the game. A few tips on how to have a successful practice are below:

1. **Prepare for practice before you arrive to the softball field:** Once you arrive to the field you will be bombarded with players, parents, other coaches and the task of setting up. Especially with players at a younger age, taking time to figure out what you will work on will prompt the players to run around and engage in other non-softball activities. Keeping them interested and moving will help you maintain a level of order.
2. **Be clear of the goals and expectation of the practice and the season:** Be sure to state the plans for the day and expectations as practice starts. This is also important to address at the beginning of the season when addressing the coaches, players and parents. You will also need to reinforce these throughout the practice to keep players at younger ages understanding why they are doing something.
3. **Ask for Help:** If you don't have assigned assistant coaches, ask for help from the parents. This will be valuable for practices and games. The players will enjoy their experience and will get better instruction if they can split up into small groups to run the drills. Plus it helps players keep focus if they are in smaller groups and not standing around for long periods of time. Having a total of 3-4 coaches may help keep players engaged. One head coach and 2-3 assistant coaches/helpers.

4. **Keep the practice moving.** Especially with this age group players typically have a short attention span and will lose interest. Be prepared to quickly explain the drill and then get it started. The more the players are moving to various stations, the less likely you'll have to deal with other issues.
5. **Focus on the fundamentals.** Always keep player development at the top of the priority list. Younger age softball leagues are instructional leagues, meaning there is less focus on scores or winning and more focus on learning. There are a lot of opportunities to teach fundamentals. If each player leaves the season better than when they arrived, you have succeeded.
6. **Encourage effort.** The players are going to make many mistakes, some more than others. The players will be trying new things and advancing in their development at different paces. The one thing they can all be good at is EFFORT. This will instill confidence in the players and provide them with a base for getting better.
7. **Don't worry about the small things.** Kids will be kids. There is nothing anyone can do to ever change that. There should be certain guidelines for conduct, but kids being kids is going to happen. Set basic guidelines, and reinforce during practice.
8. **Coaches are role models:** Remember to always talk positive about players, parents, other teams, and coaches. Players look up to the coach, so it's important to provide them with a positive image. What we say, how we say it, and how we act can leave a lasting impression on a young player. Always be positive, even on those days that seem most challenging.
9. **Have Fun!** Coaching kids should be enjoyable. Try to have fun, and keep the season in perspective.

Areas of Focus:

This season may or may not be the players first interaction with organized sports. You have the opportunity to instill in these young players habits they will carry with them as they grow and develop as athletes and as people. So not everything you will teach will be about softball.

Below is a list of overarching learnings we would like players to know by the end of the softball season.

1. **Safety is the #1 Priority:** Softball is a sport where injuries will happen, but we want to teach the players how to minimize the chances of them getting hurt.
2. **Warming up is important in any sport:** At such a young age athletic injuries are pretty uncommon, but getting the players in the habit of warming up their bodies and muscles before any athletic activity is good practice, especially as they get older and their activities become more competitive.
3. **Mistakes are Ok:** A lot of player this age want to emulate college and other bigger league players, but they must understand they are learning and when we

make a mistake we can use it as an opportunity to learn from that mistake. Softball is a game of little success, top players fail as often as they succeed.

4. **Teamwork:** Softball is a team sport. Within that team there are players who have different levels of ability, experience and skill. But we want to make sure we are creating a positive team environment. We want only positive comments from teammates, coaches and even parents. If a player doesn't get a hit, or doesn't throw the ball to the right place, try to find a positive. "Your swing looked awesome!" or, "Your throw was very strong and straight!"
5. **Good Sportsmanship:** Softball is a competitive sport. At this level we focus on good sportsmanship. We want to avoid negative comments to the other team. If a player on the other team gets hurt all players take a knee. We line up the teams and shake hands (give high-fives) at the end of the game. Only thing players should say is, "Good Game!"
6. **Fundamentals:** It is not by mistake the actual softball activities are last. At this level there will be varying levels of skill. But if we teach and reinforce fundamentals throughout the year you will be surprised how quickly many of the players will progress.

We Are Always Teaching Safety

Softball can be dangerous so the most important thing to teach players is how to be safe on the field and in the dugouts. Just because the balls are "soft" doesn't mean nobody can get hurt. Actually, it's the bats that cause the most damage. Put a big metal stick in the hands of a young player and there are a lot of bad things that can happen if we are not very careful. Here are some safety rules you may want to enforce with your team.

1. Never allow a player to pick up a bat unless given permission to by a coach.
2. Players should ALWAYS wear a helmet when handling a bat. At younger ages, the helmets are more for protecting players heads from getting hit by bats than by balls.
3. If a player has a bat, try to have a coach nearby to supervise.
4. Even when hitting off of a tee, the batter should always wear a helmet. Players can actually hit themselves with a bat in the head at the tee.
5. Tell all the players to never go near another player that is holding a bat. You never know when that player with the bat will decide to swing it without looking to see if anybody is nearby.
6. We do not have on-deck batters at any age.
7. Always use the provided softballs for your age level.
8. All defensive players must wear fielding faceguards and catchers must wear their full gear when warming up a pitcher.

Table of Contents

Throwing Drills pages 5-8

Outfield Drills page 9

Infield Drills pages 10-11

Base Running Drills page 12

Hitting Drills pages 13-14

THROWING DRILLS

Criss-Cross Apple Sauce

To practice proper throwing technique.

Have the players start approximately 4-6 yards from their partners, sitting "Indian style." By throwing in this position, the players isolate the upper-body motion, using the glove hand for proper shoulder rotation. To help emphasize proper follow-through, the players should follow through, with their throwing arm elbow outside their knee, as if picking a blade of grass. (This can also be done in the kneeling position: with both knees on the ground, bodies square to their partners.)

One-Knee Drill #1

To practice proper throwing technique.

This drill isolates your snap

Starting about five feet away from your partner with your back knee on the ground, raise your throwing hand so your elbow is in front of your body, pointed towards the target. Hold your wrist with your glove hand (no glove needed), and snap your wrist to release the ball. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

Move back five more feet and return to the one-knee position. The "L" position of your throwing arm should now be in front of your body. Rest your throwing elbow on your glove (which is across your body). After you snap, follow through with your arm. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

Finish the drill by moving back another five feet. Return to the one-knee position and practice the full range of motion for throwing. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

One-Knee Drill #2

To practice finishing the arm route and to develop good follow through.

Set up with a partner or a target at a distance of 7 to 10 feet, with one softball. Begin with your throwing-side knee on the ground, The glove-side knee will be bent at a 90-degree angle with your foot flat on the ground pointing at the target. Do not let your bent leg wander. Your upper body should be erect. Don't sit back on your heel. Start with hands together in the center of your body, then break with your thumbs down and proceed in slow motion up to the "T" position. From this starting position, begin accelerating your arm and release the ball out in front with your arm extending outside your lead knee to slap your side. Reinforce the hand break and a good "T." Make sure the player gets extension through the release point and finishes the arm route.

Throwing T Drill

To become familiar with the proper throwing position, achieve a good follow-through and develop an efficient hand break. This will help fielders lessen their errors.

Players set up with a partner or a target at a distance of about 15 feet with one softball. Start with your toes about shoulder-width apart, pointing at the target and with your knees flexed comfortably, With your hands together, rotate your shoulders and assume the "T" or throwing position. Continue your arm action and throw the softball. Make sure that your arm and head are out in front of the body

when you finish- Bend at the waist during the follow-through. Your feet will remain stationary throughout the drill in order to isolate your upper body and your throwing-arm action.

Target Drill

To improve softball throwing accuracy for younger players.

Equipment required soft-covered softballs, colored masking tape, access to a fence or a wall, time taken 4 to 6 minutes, on a wall or fence mark off three or four squares with blue painter's tape, 15 inches by 8 inches. The squares should be about 4 to 6 feet apart from each other. Within the large blue squares mark off smaller squares with white tape. Mark a line on the ground in front of each square. The distance between the line and the box depends on the age and skill level of the players. Divide the team into as many groups as there are large squares or the fence or wall. Give each player 3 to 5 balls. The first player in each line throws the ball against the fence. Award one point for throwing the ball within the blue square and two points for hitting one of the smaller white squares.

Golf Softball

To develop softball throwing accuracy and to provide a game to break up practice.

Equipment: A bucket of softballs, four to six cones. Time: 6 to 8 minutes.

1. Depending on the number of players, set up four to six cones about 50 feet apart from one another.
2. Divide the team into three groups. Each group throws toward its own cone.
3. Station one coach or parent with each group.
4. Each team's goal is to knock down its cone with the fewest throws possible.
5. The first person in each group throws the ball at the cone. The ball is left where it lands.
6. The second player in each group throws at the cone.
7. As in a foursome in a golf game, the player whose ball is farthest from the cone after the first throw is the first to make the second attempt from where her first throw landed.
8. Again as in golf, each player keeps track of the number of throws it takes to knock over the cone.
9. After each group is finished, the players rotate to the next cone (or hole).

Around the Horn and Reverse

To improve the infielders' throwing accuracy for softball fielding. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.**

The catcher, first baseman, and third baseman are at their respective bases. The second baseman and shortstop are both at second base. The ball should be thrown continuously in the following sequence: catcher to first baseman, first baseman to second baseman, (the shortstop alternates

taking throws at second base), second baseman to third baseman, and third baseman to catcher. When the ball reaches the catcher, the drill sequence is reversed around the horn. Repeat the drill as many times as desired.

Quick Feet and Hands

A drill that has players throwing softball and having them develop fast feet in assuming the proper throwing position.

The player starts with a ball in the glove and in correct fielding position with the glove on the ground and the throwing hand just outside the glove. The player takes the ball out of the glove quickly and jumps to the throwing position. She can freeze in that position or throw easily to a partner about 20 feet away.

Thrower in the Box

To locate a target and use proper body alignment, helping a player with softball throwing mechanics.

The thrower stands in the middle of a square or in the middle of the diamond. When using the diamond, receivers should use correct positions at the bases. The coach throws or rolls a ball to the thrower and calls a position number where the throw is to be made. The receiver returns the throw quickly and accurately to the catcher so that the drill can continue. Go as fast as players' skills will allow.

Scarecrow

A softball drill which teaches athletes how to throw a softball by letting players practice fielding and throwing techniques and check mechanics.

The player takes two steps forward to field an imaginary ground ball. She gathers the ball in and then quickly jump turns to a throwing position with both elbows up. The player holds that position, check alignment (sideways to the target, feet in proper position, and shoulders level), and maintains balance.

Two Hand Pick Up

To practice picking up the ball with two hands to get a secure grip.

The player places the ball on the ground in front of her, picks it up with two hands, and throws it to a partner. The partner repeats the procedure on the return throw.

Rapid Throw Drill

To develop quickness and proper catching and throwing techniques. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.** Please make sure the players are wearing Rip-Its or Batting Helmets!

One softball for each pair of players, gloves. Divide the team into pairs. Kids in each pair should be of similar age and skill level. Each pair stands 25 to 30 feet apart, facing each other. For safety purposes, make sure there is at least seven feet between each pair. On the "go" command, partners throw a ball back and forth as fast as they can while keeping their throws under control, After 10, 15, or 20 seconds, the coach yells, "Stop." The players keep track of the number of successful catches

they make within the allotted time. Award 10 points for 10 successful catches. After each round, players can move back two or three steps. This game can be played up to any number of points.

OUTFIELD DRILLS

Positioning the Glove

To practice adjusting the glove position depending on the location of the ball.

The player starts with the glove above the head at twelve o'clock with the fingers pointed up. If the glove is on the left hand, the player makes a circle clockwise to three o'clock, then six o'clock, and continuing around while keeping the pocket of the glove open just like she would if she were catching the ball. The player keeps the elbows bent and the glove close to the body in a catching position. For right-handers, at three o'clock the fingers should still be pointed up. As the hand drops below the waist, the fingers slowly rotate down until they all point directly down at five o'clock. As the hand crosses the midline of the body at six o'clock, the hand rotates over to a backhand position (balls caught on the side of the body opposite the glove are caught backhanded). The player rotates the thumb down toward the ground, keeping the palm open to the ball. At nine o'clock, the fingers once again rotate to an upward position. When the player is used to proper positioning, a partner tosses her balls to catch in various locations.

Face Drill

To improve the outfielder's technique of opening her body to catch a fly ball: to her right, to her left, and over her head.

The coach stands around twenty feet away as the outfielder takes a ready position. A proper ready position for a right-handed outfielder is a position in which the outfielder stagger her left foot slightly ahead of her right foot. The coach throws the ball to one of the three spots. The coach should either throw the ball as a line drive or a fly ball. When fielding a fly ball, an outfielder's first step should be in the direction in which the ball is heading. When fielding a line drive, the outfielder should use a cross-over technique as her initial step.

Lead Drill

Develop ability to catch on the run. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.**

Prepare a bucket of softballs, gloves, an empty bucket. The players line up in a single-file line. The coach, with a bucket of softballs, stands beside the first player. On the "go" command, the player runs away from the coach, looking over his shoulder at the coach. At the opportune time, the coach throws a softball, "leading" the runner with the throw like a quarterback leading a receiver. The player should not have to break stride to catch the ball. The player catches the ball, drops the ball in the bucket, and returns to the end of the line.

INFIELD DRILLS

Team Infield Drills

Learn the fundamentals of fielding a ball.

You will need the following equipment tennis balls and gloves, regulation balls for older players. Explain and demonstrate each of the disciplines. Work in groups of two. Start off bare-handed. Then add in gloves and infielder paddles (if available). Include the following:

1. Glove Work: Roll ball to each other in the crouched stance with an open glove.
2. Grounders Straight On: Same as above except start standing up.
3. Circle: Same as above except circle balls to the left and right.
4. Forehand: Charge to the glove side, field the ball, and swing the back leg over (as if facing first base).

Soft Hands

Learn to field ground balls properly.

Partners without gloves on their hands stand 15-20 feet apart and they throw one-hoppers back and forth. They need to use "soft hands" to field the ball and bring it to the cradle or heart position. Use a softer ball to start.

Hole in the Diamond

Learn to keep the ball in front of you.

The team will be needing a bucket of softballs, a bat, players have their gloves with them. Divide the players into four teams of three, assuming there are 12 available players. One team spreads out between first and second base and another team spreads out between second and third base. Both teams situate themselves halfway between the infield and the outfield grass. The two other teams stand in the outfield and back up the first two teams. The coach hits a softball to the team on one side of the diamond. The infielders try to prevent the softball from reaching the outfield grass. The coach then hits a softball to the team on the other side of the diamond. If the ball reaches the outfield grass, the other team receives one point. Each infield team fields four to six balls, then rotates with the teams in the outfield. Some players might want to dive to keep the ball from going into the outfield the coach must decide whether this should be allowed or not. Coaches should remind players should watch the ball go into the glove.

Chair Drill

Learn to stay low on a ground ball.

Two players face each other a short distance apart. The fielder sits on the front edge of the chair's seat. The right-handed fielder should position her feet with the left foot slightly in front of the right. The feeder should toss ground balls to the glove side of the fielder, straight at the fielder, and to the fielder's backhand. The fielder can use a glove, a paddle or her bare hand.

Back up Drill

Learn the importance of backing up your teammates.

This drill needs a bat, gloves and balls. Arrange a fielding line up. Hit fly balls and grounders. On each ball hit, every player should be doing something. Whether it's pitchers backing up the plate on throws home, catchers running behind first base on ground balls in the infield, infielders backing up "neighbors" on fly balls or grounders, or middle infielders backing up throws to the pitcher when there is a runner on third base. Pre-think your role on each situation. Extra players or coaches can act as runners (don't forget helmets!)

Two Ball Drill

Develop good hand-eye coordination. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.**

Five softballs for each pair of players. The players are randomly paired. Each player stacks two balls in his glove-hand, which is bare-handed. The two players stand approximately 10 feet apart as they face each other and play catch with the fifth ball. Each player uses the two balls stacked in his glove-hand for a glove. As the ball is tossed over-handed, the player who is catching the ball should turn his body slightly away from the player who is tossing the ball. Turning away from the player who is throwing the ball keeps the receiver's glove-hand near the thrower. This position places the body in the correct position to throw the ball once the player makes the catch. During this softball fielding drill, the players should exhibit "happy feet" i.e., feet continually moving in place in a short choppy manner.

BASE RUNNING DRILLS

Line Jogging

Improve Speed and work on base running.

The team's divided into two groups. Each group forms a line with one player behind the other. The drill is conducted within the boundaries of the softball field. The first line of players starts to jog with equal distance between the players. When a signal is given by the first person in line, the last player in line moves out of formation to the right and sprints to the front of the line. The sequence continues for as long as desired. When there's enough room, the second line of players starts to jog.

Competition Running Drill

Improve Speed and work on base running.

Drill can have as many runners as desired in lines at first base and third base. The head coach is at home plate, and the assistant coach is at second base. On the head coach's signal, the runner at first base tries to reach second base before the runner at third base reaches home plate. The runners then jog to the ends of the opposite lines.

Three Stops Drill

Works on baserunning skills. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.**

Divide the team into three groups and place them in lines at home, first, and second. Position your third base coach in the third base coaching box. With a command from the third base coach, the three baserunners begin running at the same time. The coach can either stop the lead runner at third or let her score. On the next play, the coach can allow the runner to score from first or stop the runner at second with a double. The options are endless. Perform this drill for four to six minutes nonstop.

HITTING DRILLS

Don't Miss

Learning how to hit.

You will need Tees, bats, balls, helmets, bases, cones, and bicycle tires or hula hoops. Devise two teams. The batter hits off of the tee placed on home plate- If they miss the ball, or if they knock the tee over, it's a strike. Three strikes and you're out. They are also out if they fling the bat after contact. To prevent this, instruct the kids to place the bat on the bicycle tire or hula hoop just behind the plate. After a fair ball, He/she runs to first base.

Single Tee Drill

Learning how to hit.

You will need a single batting tee, a plate, a bucket of softballs, and a batting cage or a soft toss hitting area. Have the batter stand in the batter's box so that she stands in front of the plate, the batter should assume a proper batting stance and "measures up." To measure up, the batter reaches out with her bat and touches the opposite side of the plate.

Beach Ball Tee Drill

To learn to hit properly.

Batting tees, a bathroom plunger, a bat, beach balls. Place a batting tee at home plate. Stick a bathroom plunger into the tee with the rubber part facing up. Place a beach ball or a large lightweight ball on top of the plunger. The player stands next to the batting tee and hits the ball off the plunger with the bat. Each player can take three or four swings. Softball hitting is one of the hardest skills in sports to master; however this low-skill drill for very young softball players offers a guarantee of success.

Mirror Drill

To observe your own hitting technique.

A full-length mirror and a softball bat. Assume batting stance as if the mirror were the pitcher. Go through your swing in slow motion. Say aloud the different hitting stages — stance, stride, pivot, swing, follow through. Verbalizing reinforces the natural sequence and promotes good muscle memory. Watch yourself in the mirror for the entire swing process. After a few swings, pick up the pace. After fifteen to twenty swings, the player should be at full speed. The mirror is an effective teaching tool and can be used in many of the other drill the player can develop a "feel." The notion of getting a "feel" and connecting the visual process with the coach's comments and corrective strategies is essential for correcting errors.

Pivot Rotation

To develop proper hip rotation while pivoting on your back foot and remaining balanced.

Put your bat behind your back and lock your arms around the bat. Take your normal stance and pop your hips quickly rotating your trunk while pivoting on your back foot and after you rotate, stay balanced and don't move either foot.

Snap Backs

To develop quick hands, a small stride, and forearm and wrist strength. **We suggest this drill be used LATER IN THE SEASON.**

The partner stands six feet from the batter and tosses balls in rapid succession to the contact point of the strike zone. The hitter is standing up and drives one ball after another into a net by taking her swing and snapping the bat back to the starting position in preparation for the next toss.

Hip Turn Drill

To improve opening of hips.

The hitter puts the bat behind her back and interlocks both elbows. Without moving the feet, the hitter whips the hips open. The coach should make sure that the hitter pivots on the ball of the rear foot.

Practice Pan Template

Note: Activity Times Should Average 15 minutes per activity

Time Allotted	Area of Focus	Activity	Notes
5 Minutes	Team Meeting		
10 Minutes	Warm Ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Light stretching: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Toe touches o Stretch Arms Over head o Arm circles Big o Arm circles Small - Calisthenics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Jumping jacks o Running in place with high knees o Running in place with butt kicks <p>Run from home to first – First to Home</p>	
15 Minutes		Activity 1:	
15 Minutes		Activity 2:	
15 Minutes		Activity 3:	
Total 60 Minutes			