



# “Done-For-You” YOUTH SOFTBALL PRACTICE PLANS



*presented by:*



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# Practice 1: Fundamentals

Congratulations for making the commitment to coaching youth softball players. The positive way in which you lead them will spark their continued interest in the sport.

Your first practice should concentrate on giving the players a basic understanding of the concepts of the field, the game and learning each other's names. The more you use the players' names and incorporate them into drills, the easier this will be accomplished.

It's critical that you learn the names as quickly as possible. The coach should arrive early to practice to discuss his/her practice plan with the assistant coaches and prepare the field. Encourage players to come early as well. At this age, a practice will keep the players' attention when it lasts one hour. Repetition and competition are keys to teaching the fundamentals of softball. The following practice plan includes suggested times to keep it running smoothly.

## First 10 Minutes [Introductions]

The key is to have the players become comfortable with you. Keep the dialogue as simple as possible. Gather them in front of you (rather than a circle because you don't want your back to anyone and you want them to hear you). Introduce yourself and your assistant coaches. Then ask each girl her name and something about herself. Be specific in what you ask for; most kids will be too scared to think of something on their own. Ask, 'What's your name and favorite color?' Or, 'What's your name and do you like broccoli?' The goal is to make them laugh and feel comfortable. Repeat each girl's name and response. At the end of the introductions, review the names. The best way is to point and say, 'You're Alyssa and you love broccoli!' If you're right, great; if you're wrong, the kids will correct you and they'll think it's funny.

At this point, let them know you have rules. Again, keep it simple: 1) have FUN, 2) be on time, and 3) if a coach is talking, the players should be listening to him.

## Next 5 Minutes [Warm-Up]

Stretch, especially the legs, because the kids will be running. Have one of the girls lead the stretches, but keep a chart so each week you will have a different player leading and everyone will have chances through the season.

You can design the stretches, but here are some examples:

Sit, with legs extended out flat on the ground in a V position. Lean forward, reach for the toes and pull back on the toes. Hold for a 10 count (have the girls count down from 10). Repeat. This works the hamstrings, calves and lower back.

Stand straight, bend a leg behind the body, grab the ankle and pull the heel toward the backside. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other leg. This stretches the quad muscles.

Stand straight and extend the arms straight out. Do trunk rotations from left to right. One to two sets of 10 will suffice. This stretches the oblique muscles.

## Next 10 Minutes [The Bases]

Stand at home plate, point out first, second and third bases and explain that the object is to hit the ball, run and touch all the bases to return home.

Walk the kids around the bases, explaining this is first and this is second, noting that you can't touch second without touching first, etc. Quiz them. Say, 'Where is first?' Then stand on first and say, 'Where is third?' Walk to third, bypassing second and ask, 'Can I touch third without touching second? Of course not, back to second we go.'

### **Coaching Points**

- *Always run to first base!*

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

## Next 10 Minutes [Running Through First Base]

The drill: Place the kids in a line at home plate and a coach about 10 feet beyond first base. Have the kids, one at a time, stand in the batter's box (explain), show you their stance, swing and run as hard as they can to first; touching the bag and continuing up the line to tag the coach's hand. Do this repeatedly until each kid understands the concept.

Next, explain if the coach says 'go!' they are to touch first base and continue on to second. Place another coach at third and have the kids run from second to third, and third to home. Emphasize picking up the coach and listening for the command.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

## Next 15 Minutes [Baserunning Relays]

Divide your squad into two teams (by now you should have an idea about which kids are fast and which are not. Match them up evenly). Put half of Team 1 near home plate and the other near first base. Put half of Team 2 near second and the other near third (keep them far enough away from the bases that they're not in the way). Place one girl from Team 1 in the batter's box and another on first. Place a member of Team 2 on second and another on third. On your command, the girl at home plate runs to first, tags the hand of her teammate, who runs to second (make sure the player running to first runs through the bag). At the same time, the player at second runs to third and tags her teammate's hand. The teammate runs home. If Team 2 reaches home before Team 1 gets to second, it wins, or vice versa. Do your best to ensure the competition ends in a tie.

## Remaining Time

After the players get some water, gather them, review what they learned and congratulate them for their effort. Let everyone know the next practice time. Follow up with an e-mail to all the parents.

### **Coaching Point**

- *It is always fun to have the players huddle and place their hands together and yell, '1, 2, 3 (with the team name)!' Do this at the end of practices and before a game.*



## Practice 2: Throwing Mechanics

Congratulations, Coach, you survived your first practice. The key now is to build upon the foundation that you laid at that practice. You do that by reviewing the previous week's skill and adding a new skill each week. Today's objective is to develop the mechanics of throwing. In order to teach this effectively, you may need to get the parents involved with their daughter. The kids may not be ready yet to pair off and play catch with each other.

### First 10 Minutes [Warm-up]

Run through the names again, using the same strategies you used at the first practice. Get the kids laughing. Move to stretching (always important), especially the shoulder and back for today. Some stretching examples:

- Jumping jacks.
- Stand straight and extend the right arm behind the body. Grab the right wrist with the left hand and pull back and over toward the left side. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other arm. This will stretch the front of the shoulder.
- Add a light jog of moderate distance - not a strenuous jog - to your warm-up routine.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Baserunning]

Running through the bag at first base.

Running to second, third, home.

Picking up coaches and listening to commands

You also can place a cone in the basepaths and make them run around the cone to reach the next base, preparing them for a later baserunning lesson.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

### Next 20 Minutes [Throwing Mechanics]

The keys to this skill is the arm angle, step (weight transfer) and wrist snap.

- **Position 1:** Have each player pair off with her parent at a distance of about five feet. The child sits cross-legged on the ground facing her parent with a ball in her hand. **MAKE SURE THE ARM ANGLE IS CORRECT:** forearm at a 90-degree angle to the upper arm and the upper arm at shoulder height or slightly higher - extended away from the body. All we are doing from this

position is a wrist snap. Repeatedly, bend the wrist back and snap it forward. JUST THE WRIST, not the forearm. Once the wrist snap is mastered, back the parent up and move to the next position.

- **Position 2:** Have the player kneel on one knee (throwing-hand side) facing her parent. While maintaining her arm angle, have the player rotate her upper torso slightly (away from the target), with the glove hand extended out straight toward the target. Now rotate the upper torso back toward the target &ndash; maintaining the angle of the throwing arm. While pulling down with the glove hand, reach out, as if to touch your target and snap the wrist. Follow through until your throwing hand touches your glove-side knee, which is extended in front of you. Always look to hit your target square in the chest. Back the parents up and move to the next position.
- **Position 3:** This position is commonly known as the ‘crane.’ Have the player stand with her glove-side hip facing the target, feet just outside the shoulders and glove-hand extended straight out toward the target. The upper arm of the throwing hand must be shoulder height or above with the forearm now closer to a 45-degree angle to the upper arm with the ball near the thrower’s ear. Rotate the upper torso toward the target by rotating the hips, ‘squishing the bug’ with the back foot (as it turns; you’ll see this phrase in a later lesson). Reach out with the throwing arm, snap the wrist to release the ball, extend and reach out to touch the glove-side knee. Back the parents up for the last step.
- **Last Step:** This is literally just adding a step to the routine. Start in the ‘crane’ position and rock back onto your back foot (throwing-hand side). Step toward your target (make this a key point), rotate your torso, reach, snap, follow through - as listed above.

While you’re working on throwing, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.

**Batting Tee Drill:** Have the girls kneel &ndash; front leg up and back leg down &ndash; at the tee about an arm’s length away and centered to the body (you need the shortest, lightest bat you can find. If you can’t find the right one, use a Wiffle Ball bat). Take one-armed swings from the load position (alternate arms). Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down from a load position to the ball. Focus on keeping the hands inside the ball and extending to contact.

## Next 15 Minutes [Skill Game]

Create two teams. Team 1 stands near shortstop, Team 2 near second base. Place a large container (55 gallon or bigger) at third base with the opening facing the team at second base and place a second large container at first base (don’t set it up on the inside of the bag because you don’t want to teach the kids to throw the ball into the runner and injure your first baseman) with the opening facing Team 1 at shortstop. Now alternate. One coach rolls the ball to the team at shortstop and another to the team at second. They pick up the ball, hop into the ‘crane’ position, step and throw for the bucket. The team with the most balls in the bucket wins.

## Remaining Time

After the players get some water, gather them and review what they learned. Tell the players to work on the throwing mechanics at home in front of a bedroom or bathroom mirror. Congratulate them on their effort. Give them the next practice time and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





## Practice 3: Catching

You've covered basic running and the mechanics of throwing. Now it's time to move on to catching the ball. This is one of the more difficult skills to teach for a couple of reasons. First and foremost, many young girls, playing for the first time, will be afraid when the ball is thrown to them. The other major problem is that their glove may be too big for their hand or too stiff to open and close. You need to be conscious of these obstacles. If a parent asks you about a glove, tell he or she to buy the most flexible one they can find and one that fits the child's hand. A 9- to 11-inch glove is more than big enough for 5- to 8-year-olds.

### First 10 Minutes [Warm-up]

Run through the names again, using the same strategies you used the first two weeks. By now, both you and the girls should have all the names down. Get the kids laughing. Move to stretching (always important), especially the shoulder and back for today.

- Jumping jacks.
- Stand straight and extend the right arm behind the body. Grab the right wrist with the left hand and pull back and over toward the left side. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other arm. This will stretch the front of the shoulder.
- A light jog of moderate distance - not a strenuous jog.

### Next 10-15 Minutes [Review Throwing Mechanics]

Employ your parents again because you can get more repetitions in. Repeat all four stages of the throw: sitting wrist flicks, kneel and toss, the crane and finally step and throw. Remember to focus on the arm angle and have the players reach, snap and follow through, touching the glove-hand knee. If you don't have the help of your parents, line the kids up, and you and your coaches can move down the line while the girls go through the stages.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Catching the Ball]

First you need some sort of a soft ball, preferably a heavier softball-sized Nerf ball. That will help alleviate some of the fear for the girls. If you have two coaches, form two lines. If you have three coaches, form three lines.



Teach the set position: feet outside the shoulders, balanced on the balls of the feet, knees flexed slightly with the arms extended out from the body and bent about 45 degrees at the elbow. Have the thumbs and index finger touching - forming a triangle at chest height. Instruct them to maintain this triangle for all throws above the waist and to move their hands to the ball and look it all the way into their hands. Then toss the ball to their chest, to the left side of their body; chest high, to the right of their body; chest high; and then just above their head.

Next, have them get in the set position, but this time, have the hands extended down in front of the body, just above the knees. Place the hands palm up with the outside tips of the pinkies touching. Throw the ball near their knees and then off to each side of their body, below the waist, always stressing to look the ball into their hands. Repeat over and over, above the waist, below the waist. Now have them use their gloves; same set positions, same hand positions. Teach them to use two hands to catch the ball even with the glove.

### *Coaching Point*

- *Players should look the ball into their hands and get their glove in the proper position.*
- *While you're working on catching, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.*
- *Batting Tee Drill: Have the girls kneel - front leg up and back leg down - at the tee about an arm's length away and centered to the body (you need the shortest, lightest bat you can find. If you can't find, the right one, use a Wiffle Ball bat). Take one-armed swings from the load position (alternate arms). Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down from a load position to the ball. Focus on keeping the hands inside the ball and extending to contact.*

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

## **Next 10 Minutes [Catching]**

Have the girls lay on their backs with plenty of room between each child. Have them gently toss the ball into the air and catch it as it comes down. This will force them to get their hands in the proper position. You can do this drill with or without gloves. Graduate to using regular softballs at a pace that you think is right. When you first graduate to regular softballs, have the kids wear a batting helmet with the protective face guard. Also stress to the kids that they can do this drill at home.

## **Remaining Time**

After the players get some water, gather them together. Congratulate them for working hard and mastering another skill. Review what they learned and tell them about the next practice. Follow up with an e-mail.

Are you ending practice with everybody placing their hands together and yelling, '1, 2, 3 (with the team name)!'? Remember, to make it a team staple.



## Practice 4: Infield Defense

Now that the basic mechanics of running, throwing and catching have been taught, it's time to move on to the nuts and bolts of the game.

### First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]

Have the players stretch - especially the arms, back and legs - and have them jog a moderate distance. Some stretches:

- Jumping jacks.
- Sit, with legs extended out flat on the ground in a V position. Lean forward, reach for the toes and pull back on the toes. Hold for a 10 count (have the girls count down from 10). Repeat. This works the hamstrings, calves and lower back.
- Stand straight, bend a leg behind the body, grab the ankle and pull the heel toward the back-side. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other leg. This stretches the quad muscles.

Now it's time to incorporate throwing and catching into the warm-up routine. Form two to three lines, depending on your number of coaches. One at a time the girls step up in a ready position, balanced on the balls of their feet, with their hands in the proper position. Throw them the ball and have them throw it back - always stressing the proper mechanics. That includes the stride, arm angle, proper trunk rotation and snap on the throw (always have them aim to hit you square in the chest with the throw). When catching the ball, stress the proper placement of the glove and remind them to look it all the way in and to squeeze the glove.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Infield, Fielding Ground Balls]

Demonstrate the following and have each player mimic the movement:

**Infield Set Position:** Middle infielders will have their feet outside the shoulders, be balanced on the balls of the feet, knees flexed and butt down with the arms down and away from the body and the glove as close to the ground as possible. The consensus now is to have corner infielders with their gloves up - near the face - to protect themselves against hard-hit line drives.

**Fielding Position:** Feet outside the shoulders with the glove-side foot about a foot or more in front, knees flexed, butt down, with the hands out away from the body and the glove on the ground (tell them you want them to bring up dirt with the ball), with the throwing hand about 18-24 inches above the glove.

**Accepting the ball:** As the ball enters the glove, trap it with the throwing hand and in one motion, funnel both hands to the waist, straighten up, step through with the plant foot, step and throw (to teach the step through, put them in the fielding position and draw a circle in the dirt, one stride in front of them. Have them funnel, straighten and step with the plant foot into the circle).

Teach them to move to the ball, demonstrating the crossover step: right over left to go left and left over right to go right.

*Coaching Points:*

- *Footwork, glove on the ground, funnel to the waist.*

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back to the field.

## Next 10 Minutes [Fielding]

Line up half your team at second base and half at shortstop. Place a coach and a catcher about 10-15 feet up each line. The coach on the first base line hits to shortstop, the coach on third base hits to second base. One at a time, each girl receives a ground ball, throws it in and moves to the back of the line. Stress the proper mechanics.

While you're working on fielding, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.

**Batting Tee Drill:** Have the girls kneel - front leg up and back leg down - at the tee about an arm's length away and centered to the body (you need the shortest, lightest bat you can find. If you can't find the right one, use a Wiffle Ball bat). Take one-armed swings from the load position (alternate arms). Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down from a load position to the ball. Focus on keeping the hands inside the ball and extending to contact.

## Next 10-15 Minutes [Fielding Contest]

Pick two even-numbered teams. Line the girls up opposite each other at an appropriate distance so that each one has a partner on the opposing team. Each player on one team has a ball (gloves are optional with this game). On your command, they roll the ball toward their partner. The object is to receive the ball, step through and then roll it back. Each time the ball gets past a player, it's a point for the other team. The team with the most points wins.

## Remaining Time

After the players get some water, gather them together. Review what the girls learned and congratulate them on learning another skill. Alert them to the next scheduled practice and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





## Practice 5: Outfield Defense

Now that you've covered the infield, it's time to move to teaching the basics of outfield play. This, too, is a difficult skill to master because most beginners have probably never judged a ball in the air before.

### First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]

You'll notice the time for the warm-up has increased. That's because we're adding more to the process. Stretch, form your throwing lines and send them on a run (start making them sprint the last 20 yards or so of the run, and warn them not to finish last. There's no penalty, of course, but they don't know that).

Some stretches:

- Sit, with legs extended out flat on the ground in a V position. Lean forward, reach for the toes and pull back on the toes. Hold for a 10 count (have the girls count down from 10). Repeat. This works the hamstrings, calves and lower back.
- Stand straight and bend the right arm with the elbow touching the back of the head. Grab with the left hand and pull toward the left shoulder. Hold for a 10 count, then mimic with the other arm. This stretches the shoulder joint.
- Stand straight and extend the arms straight out. Do trunk rotations from left to right. One to two sets of 10 will suffice. This stretches the oblique muscles.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Review Infield Mechanics]

Review the infield mechanics: set position, fielding position, accepting the ball, step-through and throw. Set up the two lines, at second base and shortstop, and have them field as many ground balls as possible. Constantly stress the proper mechanics. Next, set them at the different positions. Start hitting balls and have them make the throws.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 20 Minutes [Outfield Play]

Outfield drills: Line the players up and instruct about reacting to the ball. The process is, drop step, read, react. With the team in a line, shoulder-to-shoulder, have the girls drop step, turn and run - looking over their left shoulder. Repeat the process having them looking, over their right shoulder. Explain, if the ball is on a certain side of the body, they turn and run looking over that shoulder.

Place a mark in the field and have the girls stand about 20 feet away. Place a cone about halfway and, one at a time, have the girls run around the cone and to the spot (running around the cone teaches them to take an angle to a fly ball). While they are running to the spot, stress the importance of running with the glove down. Running with the glove up causes them to drift and move with the ball, instead of beating it to the spot.

Finally, make sure they're running on their toes. If they're pounding heel first or running flat-footed, the ball will look like it's bouncing up and down.

Begin throwing/hitting fly balls. Start in a stationary spot. Then work the girls from left to right, and right to left. Have them run to the spot and throw the ball to that spot. Then have them work back - looking over one shoulder, then the other. Finally, work on coming in, which is the easiest for the kids.

Important: When doing the 'spot' drills, throw/hit the ball to the same spot each time (the girls will become comfortable more quickly this way). As they become more proficient, you can vary the spots. Finally, employ the blind spot drill. The player steps out with her back to you. You throw/hit the ball and yell, 'Now!' She turns, locates the ball and run to that spot. Stress the importance of calling for the ball. Teach the girls to scream 'Mine!' because 'I got it!' can sometimes sound like 'You got it!' Hold a contest to see who can scream the loudest. Repetition is the key. The more fly balls the girls see, the better they'll get at judging them. Mastering this skill may take a while for them.

Also, work on teaching them to back up. The left fielder backs up every throw to third base, the center fielder backs up every throw to second base and the right fielder backs up every throw to first base. For backing up, teach the girls to line themselves up with the angle of the throw and keep them 15-20 feet behind so they have time to react to the missed throw.

Also, an outfielder leaves no base uncovered. If something is happening in the infield and the third baseman is not covering the bag with a runner on base, it's the left fielder's responsibility to get there. Example: There's a runner on first. The batting team bunts. The third baseman fields the bunt, the shortstop covers second. A smart coach will have the runner continue to third. Who's there to cover? The left fielder. OUT!

Instruct right fielders to look to throw to first base on any ground ball that comes their way.

Conclude the drills by lining them up in the outfield and throw them fly balls. Tell them that practice can't end until each kid catches the ball in sequence without a drop. Move from one end to the other. If someone drops the ball, start over. If you can't get through the line, have the kids select one person to make the catch.

### *Coaching Point*

- *Drop step, run with the glove down to a spot, call for the ball*

While you're working on outfield play, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.

Two-Tee Batting Drill: Set up two tees, one that would be set at the front of the plate and another at the back of the plate, anywhere from 6 to 10 inches higher than the front tee - depending on the height of the girl. Have the girls step and swing. Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down and to the ball. This will keep them from dipping their shoulder or dropping their hands. If they do, they'll strike the back tee.

## **Remaining Time**

After the players get some water, gather them together. Congratulate the kids for learning another skill. Let everyone know the next practice time. Follow up with an e-mail to the parents, letting them know that you will be teaching sliding at the next practice.



## Practice 6: Sliding



Congratulations, Coach, you've covered all the basics. Now it's time to start adding to what the kids have learned.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching and throwing lines. In addition, you now want to add the ground-ball lines to your routine. Always stress mechanics.

Some stretches:

- Sit, with legs extended out flat on the ground in a V position. Reach and touch the right hand to the outside of the left foot. Mimic the other side. Hold for a 10 count on each side. This stretches the outside of the upper back.
- Stand straight and extend the right arm behind the body. Grab the right wrist with the left hand and pull back and over toward the left side. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other arm. This will stretch the front of the shoulder.
- Stand straight and extend the arms straight out. Do trunk rotations from left to right. One to two sets of 10 will suffice. This stretches the oblique muscles.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Review Outfield Drills]

Review the outfield drills. Running to the spot, with the glove down. Going back on the ball, looking over the correct shoulder. And coming in on the ball. Remember, the more the girls see the ball in the air, the better they'll become at judging the ball.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Sliding]

One of the best tools to use when teaching sliding is a Slip and Slide. If you don't have a Slip and Slide, use an approved sliding mat or lay out a poly tarp and wet it down. Or you can really soak the dirt and let the kids play in the mud (the parents will love you).



The keys to sliding are getting into the slide, not starting too early or too late and keeping your hands out of the way. If you or your coaches can't demonstrate the proper slide, bring in someone who can. Start the slide about 6 to 8 feet from the base (depending on each kid's size and speed). Have them run full speed and just drop into the slide by collapsing the back leg, dropping into a figure-4 position, with the bottom leg tucked under the top leg. The points of contact will be the outer half of the lower leg and the hip (when you move to dirt, make sure the girls wear approved sliders on whichever leg will be their bottom leg). Keep the back relatively straight and have the hands extended to the sky to avoid injury. If they have batting gloves, let them hold them when they slide, so they don't put their hands on the ground.

A key point: Don't let them lay there at the end of the slide. Have them get up and pick up the instruction of the coach. Never be satisfied with one base if the potential is there to take another. If you have time, play 'Rate My Slide,' where each kid slides and the others rate it on a scale of 1-10. Or you can bring a few dozen eggs to practice and have them slide holding the eggs. This forces the kids to concentrate on keeping their hands up and out of the way.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *Enter the slide at the correct time, keep the hands up. Once reaching the base, get up and find the coach.*
- *While you're working on sliding, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.*

Two-Tee Batting Drill: Set up two tees, one that would be set at the front of the plate and another at the back of the plate, anywhere from 6 to 10 inches higher than the front tee - depending on the height of the kid. Have the kids step and swing. Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down and to the ball. This will keep them from dipping their shoulder or dropping their hands. If they do, they'll strike the back tee.

## **Remaining Time**

After the players get some water, gather them together. Congratulate the kids for mastering another skill. Review what they learned. Give the time of the next practice and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 7: Advanced Baserunning

With sliding mastered, it's time to teach the girls some advanced base running.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, if the girls are becoming proficient enough with throwing and catching, you can have them start to pair off into two lines, facing each other, and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each player.

Some stretches:

- Sit in an Indian-sitting position, with legs bent and the soles of the feet touching in front. Gently press the knees toward the ground. This stretches the groin muscles.
- Stand straight, bend a leg behind the body, grab the ankle and pull the heel toward the backside. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other leg. This stretches the quad muscles.
- Stand straight and extend the arms straight out. Do trunk rotations from left to right. One to two sets of 10 will suffice. This stretches the oblique muscles.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Sliding]

Review the basics of the slide. If you didn't progress to sliding in the dirt at the last practice, now's the time. Make sure each player is wearing a slider or long pants. And make sure the ground isn't too hard. Prior to the practice, you need to work the area around each base to make sure it's soft. If the girls struggle sliding in the dirt, you can take them into the grass.

### Next 20 Minutes [Advanced Base Running]

You'll need two cones for this drill. One, midway, about three to four feet outside the direct line between first and second, and the other between second and third. Running around the cones will force them to take the proper angle to the bag.

The first thing to teach:

How to take the a turn at first base. Think about the shape of a question mark (or a banana). Run down the first-base line. About 12-15 feet from the bag, have them turn out about 3-4 feet (that's all you need) and turn into the bag.

**Next:** Cut the corner of the bag. As they round back into the bag, their left instep should land on the inside corner of the bag. Teach them to cut the corner every time they're taking a turn or taking an extra base.

**How to set on the bag to take a lead:** There are two ways to do this. One, the front foot is on the side of the bag facing second and the back foot is on the other side of the bag in foul territory. When they go, the runner pushes off the front foot. They also can set up with the back foot on the edge of the bag facing second and the front foot a stride toward second. The runner pushes off the back foot.

**When to lead:** Do your league rules allow leading on a pitcher's release or when the ball crosses the plate? Teach whichever applies. Instruct when to run and when not to run: less than two outs and the ball is hit in the air.

**Special notes:** When is a steal not a straight steal? If your league allows the steal of home and you have runners on first and third, and the steal is on for the runner on first, that runner goes hard, as normal, but they need to slow up to see what the defense is doing. Is the defense throwing through? Conceding the base or running a trick play? Incorporate picking up the coaches and sliding into this drill.

#### *Coaching Points*

- *Take proper turns. Cut the corner of the bag. Never give up and run into an out.*

While you're working on baserunning, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.

**Two-Tee Batting Drill:** Set up two tees, one that would be set at the front of the plate and another at the back of the plate, anywhere from 6 to 10 inches higher than the front tee - depending on the height of the kid. Have the kids step and swing. Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down and to the ball. This will keep them from dipping their shoulder or dropping their hands. If they do, they'll strike the back tee.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Remaining Time

Form two teams and have them run individually around the bases. Log the times. The team with the lowest combined time wins.

Congratulate the team for another good practice. Give them the next practice time and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





## Practice 8: Pitchers & Catchers

OK, Coach, if you haven't done it yet, it's time to continue developing catchers and pitchers - if your league isn't T-ball or coach pitch. If your league allows the kids to pitch themselves, hopefully you'll have a couple girls who are taking lessons and can pitch. If not, you'll have to find some. Good luck.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. If the kids struggled with the 'rapid fire' drill used in a previous practice, don't give up, keep working at it. As always, make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups. Remember, you can always go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing the ball to get an effective warm-up.

Some stretches:

- Jumping jacks.
- Stand straight, bend a leg behind the body, grab the ankle and pull the heel toward the backside. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other leg. This stretches the quad muscles.
- Stand straight and extend the right arm behind the body. Grab the right wrist with the left hand and pull back and over toward the left side. Hold for a 10 count. Mimic with the other arm. This will stretch the front of the shoulder.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 15 Minutes [Catchers]

Not every player will want to catch. At the youngest ages, it's important to encourage the girls to try every position. If not, find out who wants to catch and take them aside. Have your coaches take the rest of the girls and run them through situations.

You take the girls who want to catch and show them the following (they'll need to be in catcher's equipment):

- How to set up in relation to the hitter and how to receive the ball: Make sure your catcher keeps her throwing hand behind her to protect the hand.
- How to set up when there's a runner on base: A little higher in the stance, with the throwing-side foot slightly behind.

- How to get in position to throw: Use the 'T' drill. Draw a large T behind what would be the plate. The toes should be in line with the top line of the T. If a runner goes, teach them how to pop up out of their stance, landing on the long line of the T pointing toward second base, in position to throw.
- You also can put them in gear and take a tennis ball and work on blocking balls in the dirt (put them in position, have them drop to their knees with their glove, palm out, between their legs. Have the body bent forward at the waist. Stress the point that the object is to block the ball in front of them, not to catch it).
- Finally, you want vocal catchers. They are the only ones on the field who see everything in front of them. Catchers and shortstops are the captains of your infield.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *The set-up and footwork are keys to catching. Protect the throwing hand.*

## **Remaining Time**

If you have to find pitchers, here's what you do: Line the kids up in front of a wall, or their parents if you don't have a large block wall available. Give each a ball and have them throw against the wall or to their parents. The girls who consistently throw it near the strike zone are now pitchers and you'll be able to work with them. For those who may be interested in pitching, get them information about lessons. Pitching coaches are important if youngsters want to become serious about the position.

Gather the girls together and congratulate them for a job well done. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 9: Situations

With the basic fielding and running skills in place, it's time to start teaching the kids how to think the game.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, if the girls are becoming proficient enough at throwing and catching, you can have them start to pair off into two lines, facing each other, and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl.

Some stretches:

- Stand straight and extend the arms straight out. Do trunk rotations from left to right. One to two sets of 10 will suffice. This stretches the oblique muscles.
- Sit, with legs extended out flat on the ground in a V position. Reach and touch the right hand to the outside of the left foot. Mimic the other side. Hold for a 10 count on each side. This stretches the outside of the upper back.
- Gently press the knees toward the ground. This stretches the groin muscles.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 20 Minutes [Situations, Situations, Situations]

Set up your infield and outfield and have the remainder serve as runners (make sure the runners always wear a helmet). You and your coaches will need to coach the infield, outfield and the baserunners as you call out situations like, 'Nobody on, nobody out, where are we going?' and 'First and second, two outs, where are we going?'

Stress to the kids that they need to know the number of outs and where the runners are before every pitch, and that they need to know where they're going before the ball is hit.

For outfielders, have them think two bases ahead on base hits and where they are in relation to the runner. For example, there's a runner on first base and there's a base hit to right. The runner is just rounding second, the outfielder's throw is to third. If the runner is already around second, throw to second to keep the trail runner out of scoring position. Explain which decision is the right decision and encourage them to ask questions. Make sure you alternate your base runners and rotate your fielders to different positions. Repetition is the key. Have them understand that everyone is moving on contact on every play. And stress that they always know where the lead runner is and that's the out we want whenever possible. In addition, never be satisfied with one out. For base runners, never be satisfied with one base or one run.

### *Coaching Tip*

- *Always know the outs and where the runners are. Know where you're going with the ball before it's hit. Never be satisfied with one out.*
- *While you're working on situations, you can have a hitting station going on, where one of the coaches works with the girls on hitting off a batting tee, which is important for getting young hitters to develop good mechanics and to swing level.*

Two-Tee Batting Drill: Set up two tees, one that would be set at the front of the plate and another at the back of the plate, anywhere from 6 to 10 inches higher than the front tee - depending on the height of the kid. Have the kids step and swing. Focus on the hitters bringing the hands straight down and to the ball. This will keep them from dipping their shoulder or dropping their hands. If they do, they'll strike the back tee.

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Remaining Time**

Play a game. You can play waffle ball, kickball or 'wacky ball,' or whatever you want. In wacky ball, everyone bats and throws with their off hand (right-handers throw left-handed, left-handers throw right-handed) and they run the bases in reverse order, starting at third. It's hilarious to watch.

Congratulate the kids for their effort. Tell them the next practice time and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





# Practice 10: Bunting

A close-up photograph of a softball with red laces, resting on a green grassy field.

Now that you're covered fielding skills and have advanced to teaching the kids to think the game, it's time to focus on some offense. The key, keep it simple.

## First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, if the girls are becoming proficient enough at throwing and catching, you can have them start to pair off into two lines, facing each other and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Next 5 Minutes [Review]

This will be a shortened review because you'll continue to work on situations in the future. Just place the girls in position and as base runners, and go over when and where there is a forceout. Outfielders: Runners on second and first, one out, fly ball to you, where are you going? What if we drop it? Then 'What do we do?' and so on.

## Next 15 Minutes [Bunting]

Bunting is a crucial element of the fast-pitch game, especially in the younger age divisions.

**Step 1:** Explain the strike zone.

**Step 2:** Explain the stance (balanced, toes pointing toward the opposite batting box, feet even and outside the shoulders.

**Step 3:** Hip turn, rotate the back hip toward the plate, squishing the bug with the back foot, while extending the bat away from the body - with a slight bend in the elbows. Make a fist with the thumb up and lay the bat - where the barrel starts to widen against the thumb. Do not wrap the fingers around the bat while bunting.

Start with the extended bat at the top of the strike zone. If the pitch is up, the hitter should pull back because it's a ball. If the pitch is down, she should go down with her knees. Make sure the head of the bat is angled slightly upward, to help keep the bat above the ball. All the batter is doing is 'catching' the ball with the bat. As the hitters become more proficient, teach them to give in to their body on contact to deaden the ball.

Next, move to directional bunting. It's the same set-up as above. The only difference is to pull the left hand in slightly (for a right-handed hitter) to angle the top half of the bat toward third base. To bunt toward first base, push the left hand out slightly to angle the head of the bat toward first.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *Don't wrap the fingers around the bat. Keep the bat head above the ball. Catch the ball with the bat.*

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Next 20 Minutes [Bunting Game]**

Use a bunting game: Mark the field as follows: semi-circles from foul line to foul line at about 3 feet and 6 feet. Draw a 3x4 rectangle up both lines above the 6-foot arc. Pick two teams. You pitch. Each girl gets five bunts. Every bunt that lands in the 3-foot arc is worth 1 point. Every bunt that lands within the 3- to 6-foot arc is worth 2 points. Each bunt in the rectangle is worth 3 points. Total the scores. The team with the highest point total wins.

## **Remaining Time**

Gather the girls together and congratulate them for their effort. Tell them the next practice time (or game time, if you're into your season) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



# Practice 11: Hitting

A close-up photograph of a softball with red laces, resting on a green grassy field.

With bunting mastered, it's time to find the next Crystal Bustos.

## First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, the girls should be proficient enough at throwing and catching to do it on their own. Have them pair off into two lines, facing each other and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl. If they struggle with this, you can go back to the two or three lines, with coaches tossing them the ball.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Next 10 Minutes [Review Bunting]

Focus on the stance, hip turn, the angle of the bat and catching the bat with the ball, Also, focus on directional bunting. Remind them how to do it. Call out the direction and pitch the ball. You can do two to three kids at a time, depending on your number of coaches.

## Next 15 Minutes [Hitting]

Stumped about Crystal Bustos? She's a one of the great hitters of U.S. Olympic softball fame. Now's your chance to develop some excellent young hitters.

Hopefully, you have access to a cage with more than one tunnel. If not, you can do this outside. Once again, explain the strike zone and let the kids know the object is to swing at strikes. Start with the grip. The bat should be in the fingers, not back in the palms, hands together with the knocker knuckles lined up. The stance should be balanced with the feet outside the shoulders, knees flexed slightly, hands back about three to six inches above the back shoulder, with the front shoulder tucked to the chin. Now the batter is set to attack the ball.

Teach it as a dance, 1-2-3. One is the stride (keep it short; 3-4 inches is sufficient to affect a weight shift). Two, squish the bug with the back foot. Three, swing (make sure to get the arms extended and rotate the back side hip through the ball).

A trick to teach the proper hip turn: Have the girl stand facing a wall, about arm's-length away. Get in the proper stance - with a bat and swing without hitting the wall. You can't do it without a proper hip turn and keeping your hands inside of what would be the ball. Finish the swing strong by snapping the wrists. The idea is to accelerate the bat head through the ball. The biggest key to hitting is for the batter to keep her eye on the ball. You can't hit what you can't see. When you move them into the box, center them to the plate and make sure they can reach the outer half of the plate with the bat.

*Coaching Point:*

- *See the ball all the way into the bat. Get your arms extended and finish with your hands.*

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Next 15 Minutes [Hitting Stations]**

Set up three stations: a tee station, a soft-toss station and live pitching. Have one coach handle each station. Have the kids rotate through each station. There are a number of different drills you can incorporate into each station. You can use a short, light bat and have them do one-arm swings off the tee (this is good for developing strength and working on extension). You can soft-toss or use the tee with deflated soccer balls (again, a means to build strength and to teach them to use their hands to accelerate the bat head through the ball). The key to you as the pitcher is to throw it where they're swinging. Nothing builds confidence in a kid as a hitter better than contact. That's why it's better for you to pitch to the kids when they're learning to hit than it is for them to hit off a machine.

## **Remaining Time**

It's time to put in your signs. Keep them simple. Tell the kids you're going to give a series of signs. If you touch your chin, that means you want them to bunt the next pitch, if it's in the strike zone. If they're on base and you touch your belt, it means you want them to steal. Emphasize that the sign only applies to the next pitch and they need to step out of the box and look for the signs before each pitch. At the young ages, they only need three signs: bunt, steal and take (which means they don't swing, no matter where the pitch is).

Congratulate the kids for 'crushing' the ball. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





# Practice 12: Situations

Now that you've found the next Crystal Bustos, it's time to see how far and hard they can hit the ball. Have them face live pitching, from you, and to continue to work situations. Remember, repetition is the key to teaching them to think the game.

## First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, the girls should be proficient enough at throwing and catching to do it on their own. Have them pair off into two lines, facing each other, and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl. If they struggle with this, you can go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing them the ball.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Next 20-25 Minutes [Hitting]

For this practice, the usual review becomes the main practice as you move to live hitting with fielders. Place you coaches in the field to instruct as you pitch. Bring three girls in at a time. Each girl gets 10 swings, running out the last one. The girls in the field are to make the plays on every hit ball. The bulk of the plays will be made to first, unless you set up a different situation. Explain clearly and use the batters waiting to hit as runners, if you want to set up a specific situation. Rotate the fielders to different positions for each hitter. As the pitcher, you need to try and throw it where struggling kids are swinging. Always focus on mechanics.

### *Coaching Point*

- *Throw it where they're swinging.*

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

- Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Remaining Time

Play home run derby. Pick two teams and set a plate close enough to an outfield fence so if they hit it well enough it will go out. You can soft toss or pitch, depending on how close to the fence you are and the level of your players. Each girl gets three to five swings, depending on how much time you have. Alternate the players as you go. If you have time, go multiple rounds or let the kids who hit them out show off their home run trots.

Congratulate the kids for another great practice. Tell them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 13: Bunt Defense

As stated from an earlier practice, bunting is a crucial part of the fast-pitch game, especially at the younger ages. If your team can bunt the ball as well as defend it, you have a good chance of being successful.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

The warm-up routine is standard: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. At this point, the girls should be proficient enough at throwing and catching to do it on their own. Have them pair off into two lines, facing each other, and let them throw to themselves. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl. If they struggle with this, you can go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing them the ball.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Hitting]

Review the mechanics of hitting: the grip, stance, stride, hip turn and hand snap. Also, review the mechanics of bunting: stance; turn; placement of the hands; the position and angle of the bat; how to direct the ball; and catching the ball with the bat.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 15-20 Minutes [Bunt Plays]

As with most skills you're teaching to the girls, the key is to keep them simple. You can install just three bunt plays and cover every situation.

**Bunt 1:** The corners (first and third basemen) up, the second baseman covers first, the shortstop covers second. You run this when there's no one on or a runner on first. If there's a runner on first and the batter bunts, and the third baseman doesn't get back, this is when teaching the outfielders to leave no base uncovered (instructed in an earlier practice) comes back to help you.

**Bunt 2:** Corners up, the second baseman covers first, the shortstop covers third and the center fielder covers second (don't worry about the outfielder covering second and not having a backup). The initial throw will go to third to get the lead runner or to first in order to make sure you get an out.

**Bunt 3:** This is the 'slap defense.' In this alignment, the third baseman is still up and the first baseman is back covering the bag. The second baseman moves up in the hole between the pitcher and the first-base line. The shortstop covers second, unless there's a runner on second or third and then she covers third. You will need to let her know which base to cover.

Rotate the kids into all the positions, utilizing base runners until the kids have it mastered.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *With bunt 2, teach whoever is catching to make the call to which base to throw based on the position of the runner. Remember in every situation, everyone is moving on contact.*

## **Remaining Time**

Congratulate the kids for another great practice. Tell them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





## Practice 14: Special Plays

Congratulations, Coach, you've done a good job of teaching your kids the fundamentals. Now it's time to introduce a little trickery to your team.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. If the kids have become proficient enough at throwing and catching on their own, it's time to add a little 'rapid fire' drill to the warm-up. You can try this after their arms are loose:

Have the kids on one side of the line hold the balls. On your command, they throw and catch as quickly as they can for a minute. The key is to quicken their transition from glove to hand. Get the throwing hand near the glove and focus on their footwork. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl. If they struggle with this, you can go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing them the ball.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Bunt Plays]

Review bunt plays 1, 2 and 3 from the previous practice. Rotate all the kids through all the positions.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 20 Minutes [Special Plays]

OK, it's time to introduce a little trickery into the game. Assign colors or numbers to the trick plays because that will make it easy for the kids to remember.

**First Trick Play:** Let's call it 'pink': There's a runner on third base with less than two outs. You set the kids up for Bunt 2. The batter bunts the ball to the third baseman, pitcher or catcher. The player fielding the bunt picks up the ball, 'checks' the runner (that means they look the runner back, but only for an instant, because you want them to think you're going to first). The fielder turns to first base, steps and

fakes the throw. Teach the girls to 'sell' the fake throw. As their arm comes down, they spin (toward their glove-hand side) around, hopefully, to find the runner with their head down heading home or hung up between third and home. A simple throw and tag ends the play.

**Second Trick Play:** Actually, here are three variations to this play. There's runners on first and third with less than two outs, and you know the runner on first is stealing. As the catcher receives the ball, the shortstop cuts over and in behind the pitcher who ducks out of the way, The catcher jumps up and throws the ball to the shortstop. If the runner breaks for home, the shortstop throws her out at the plate. We'll call that Play Number 6, because it corresponds to the shortstop's number. You also can run the play with the second baseman, instead of the shortstop. That can be Play Number 4 (the second baseman's number). Then there's Play Number 5. As the catcher receives the ball, the shortstop cuts over and in behind the pitcher, just like Play Number 1. The catcher jumps up, fakes the throw to the shortstop, turns and fires the ball to the third baseman, who has positioned herself behind the runner. Hopefully, you catch the runner napping (Play 5 corresponds to the third baseman's number).

At the younger ages, you may never use these plays, but it's good to have them in your arsenal and it's enjoyable to start teaching kids how to really play the game.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *Only implement what applies to your league or tournament.*

## Remaining Time

Congratulate the kids for adding a little trickery to their arsenal. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 15: Cut-Offs

Coach, you have most of the fundamentals out of the way. Today it's time to focus on outfield relays and cutoffs.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. If the girls struggled with the 'rapid fire' drill mentioned in an earlier lesson, don't give up; keep working at it. They'll get it eventually. As always, make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups. Remember, you can always go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing the ball to get an effective warm-up.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Special Plays]

Review the special 'pink' play that you can use with a runner on third base and less than two outs. Also, review how to defend the steal when the opponent has runners on first and third with less than two outs. Remember, there are three simple variations you can run for this: Play 4, Play 5 and Play 6. The numbers correspond to the positions on the field and indicate their involvement.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10-15 Minutes [Outfield Relays and Cut-offs]

Outfield cutoffs and how you run them depends on the arm strength of the kids and how many outfielders you're allowed to use. It's pretty simple, the shortstop takes all the cuts to the left of second base and the second baseman takes everything to the right. If there's any doubt - like a ball to dead center field, the shortstop takes charge and will go for the cut. On a ball to the gap in left-center, if the throw is going to third, the shortstop goes out about halfway between the fielder and the base. The third baseman is responsible for lining up the cutoff with the bag. She does this by telling her, 'left, left, left' or 'right, right, right.' The key for the person taking the cut is to position herself to receive the throw on her glove-hand side. That way, it's only a half turn to be in position to throw. If she takes the throw on the opposite side of the body, she has to turn completely around in order to throw.

If you're running a double cut, one outfielder chases the ball. Another outfielder slides in halfway between the ball and the shortstop or second baseman, who have gone out for the cut. On balls to right field, the shortstop serves as a cutoff option around the middle of the infield. It is the responsibility of the player playing the bag where the throw is going to let the cutoff know whether to cut and hold, or to cut 2 (cut and throw to second base) or cut 3 (cut and throw to third. ) In reality, you as the coach will make this call, but the girls need to understand this responsibility.

On cuts to home plate, you can use the pitcher or first baseman as an option in the middle of the diamond. The pitcher is convenient because she's already there. However, if you use the pitcher as a cut, your first baseman will need to back up all plays at home and you lose any backup at third. The use of the first baseman as your cut for home allows the pitcher to backup home and or third.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *Line up the cutoff. Position cutoff to catch the ball on their glove side.*

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Remaining Time [Throwing Contest]**

Create two teams and line them up with a good distance between each player. The ball starts at the end of one line. On your command, the players throw to the next person in line, who receives the throw (on her glove-hand side), turns and throws to the next person until they reach the last person in line. Run it again, this time going up and back. Remember to rotate the girls to different spots in their line. Run it again - this time as a timed event. The team with the quickest time wins.

Finish practice by congratulating the kids for their effort on learning another skill. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.





## Practice 16: Rundowns

Congratulations, Coach, your kids are progressing nicely by this point, turning into accomplished softball players.

### First 15-20 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. If the kids struggled with the 'rapid fire' drill mentioned in an earlier lesson, don't give up, keep working at it. They'll get it eventually. As always, make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups. Remember, you can always go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing the ball to get an effective warm-up.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Review Outfield Cut-offs and Relay Plays]

Review your outfield cut-off and relay plays. Work from right field to left field and work from each position to each base. Make sure the kids are vocal. Make sure the cuts are lined up and that they receive the ball in the correct position.

### Next 15 Minutes [Rundowns]

Keep in mind that rundowns happen a lot at younger ages because both the runners and fielders are prone to mistakes. Usually in a rundown, chaos reigns, in part because many teams neglect to work on them and the kids aren't sure what to do.

It's really quite simple. For the fielders: Rule Number 1: Don't panic. Rule Number 2: Always start the rundown by trying to send the runner back from where she came. Rule Number 3: Stay inside of the runner, so you never have to throw over the runner. Rule Number 4: Follow your throw. That way you'll never be caught out of position, possibly obstructing the runner. A key point: The less throws the better.

Here's how it works: The pitcher turns and sees the runner caught off third base. She takes an angle to run her back to third. At the proper time, she flips the ball to the third baseman. She continues to run past third and gets in line behind the shortstop, who has moved over to cover third. Teach the girls to hold the ball in the throwing hand and pump fake a throw to freeze the runner. Of course, when they go to tag the runner, it's best to place the ball in the glove and tag with both hands. If the third baseman has to toss the ball to the catcher, she does and then continues down to get in line behind the first

baseman, who's moved down to back up the catcher, who is now running the girl back to third.

*Coaching Point*

- *Follow your throws. Use the pump fake.*

## **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Remaining Time**

Crown a rundown champion. You can do this between any two bases you want and you can involve all the kids. Have each girl take a turn as the runner. Stress the importance of staying alive. Decide who stays alive the longest and crown your champion.

Gather the girls together and congratulate them for their efforts. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow-up with an e-mail to the parents.



# Practice 17: Live Hitting

A close-up photograph of a softball with red laces, resting on a green grassy field.

Coach, now it's time to put the catchers and pitchers to work.

## First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups. Remember, you can always go back to the two or three lines with coaches tossing the ball to get an effective warm-up.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Next 10 Minutes [Review Rundowns]

Run through the four key points of the rundown and quickly run through a few.

## Next 15 Minutes [Live Hitting]

Put a catcher behind the plate and a pitcher on the mound. Leave three girls in to hit and put the rest in the field. Place a coach at home plate with a number of balls and another in the circle with the pitcher and a bucket of balls. Have the pitcher pitch four balls (if the catcher doesn't catch it, leave it and have the coach in the circle hand the pitcher another). After four tosses without contact, have the coach pitch up to four balls. On contact, the batter runs and the kids in the field make the play. In order to keep everyone involved and on their toes, the coach at home plate can throw a ball into play as if it was hit and have the fielders make plays. Rotate your catchers and pitchers every fourth batter and keep rotating the kids.

### *Coaching Point*

- *Stress patience to the hitters, but to swing at strikes.*

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Remaining Time [Resume Live Hitting]**

Resume live hitting in the same set-up as above.

Gather the girls together and congratulate the kids for a job well done. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 18: Infield Pop-Ups

Congratulations, Coach, by now the team should look like a well-oiled machine.

### First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 20 Minutes [Infield Pop-ups]

The mechanics for catching a pop-up are the same as the ones the girls have learned and have been using to catch a fly ball: get to the spot, position your body behind the ball and let the ball come down to you. The difference is the trajectory of the ball. Fly balls come down on more of an angle. Pop-ups have a tendency to come down in more of a straight line, sometimes moving back toward home plate. The danger with pop-ups is the number of people in a close area chasing the ball.

You, as a coach, need to institute and teach a yield system. Your shortstop is in charge and everyone yields to her. The pitcher yields to everyone and the first baseman yields to the second baseman. Your infielders yield to the outfielders. Begin teaching your infielders that there are no limits as to how far into the grass they can run chasing a ball. They are to go until they hear an outfielder call them off. Have a coach stand at home plate and throw pop-ups. Have the girls call for the ball and demonstrate the proper yield principles.

#### *Coaching Point*

- *Yield to the person calling for the ball.*

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.



## **Next 10 Minutes [More Pop-ups]**

Have the kids stand behind you, each with a ball. One at a time they step up, hand you the ball and run out and to your right, looking over their right shoulder. You throw a pop-up, they run under it and catch it. Next time through the line, they run to your left. Next time through, teach them how to backpedal.

## **Remaining Time**

Organize a game of waffle ball, kickball or 'wacky' ball (explained in Practice 9), or any other game you can think of and have some fun.

Gather the girls together and congratulate the kids for a job well done. Give them the next practice time (or game time) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 19: Improve on Weaknesses

Coach, considering you're in season, you should use practice to address the deficiencies from the previous games or practices. This is an optional plan that you can use at any time to address the issues that need to be fixed. Whatever you do, never single out a specific player. You win as a team and you lose as a team.

### **First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]**

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girl during warm-ups. If you have time, you can add the pop-up drill to your warm-up routine.

### **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### **Next 5 Minutes [Review What Went Right and Wrong During a Game]**

Sit down with the girls and review what went right and what went wrong during the previous game. Perhaps you struggled to catch fly balls in the outfield. Maybe the infielders were unsure where to throw the ball. Perhaps you struggled to field the bunt. End the conversation on a positive note and let them know how much they've progressed since they started.

### **Next 20 Minutes [Work on Correcting Mistakes]**

Decide what issues need the most attention and focus on them. Spend as much time as you need to fix the problems. If defending the bunt and baserunning were your issues, then spend 10 minutes on defending the bunt and another 10 on baserunning. Review the drills from previous lessons until the kids execute them flawlessly. Once you're satisfied with the execution, move on. If you have a multitude of issues address the major ones first and work on the others at a later practice.

### **Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]**

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## **Remaining Time [Situations, Situations, Situations]**

Considering the girls are facing competition, thinking the game is a key to success. There is no better teacher than repetition because there's so much to remember, depending on the situation. You can review all the fundamentals of defense and baserunning, including sliding during situation drills. Remember, stress to the girls that before every pitch they always should know the number of outs and the positioning of the baserunners. The lead runner is the key and the girls always need to be aware of her. Everyone is moving on contact because everyone has responsibilities on every play. Never, ever be satisfied with one out, one base or one run.

Gather the girls together and congratulate them for their efforts, during the games and practice. Give them the time of the next practice (or game) and follow up with an e-mail to the parents.



## Practice 20: Situations

During the season, the goal of practices is to refine the fundamentals that are in place. Every practice you hold should include some time for work on situations. Bunt plays, special plays, any that apply should be covered. As the girls continue to progress, you can add more things, like a back-hand drill, the find-the-fence drill and how to push bunt or slap hit from both sides of the plate.

Congratulations on committing the time to teach the girls the right way to play the game. As a coach, there's nothing greater than to have one of your kids come up to you in later years to tell you she made her middle school or high school team and thank you for teaching her how to play softball.

### First 15 Minutes [Warm-up]

Use the standard warm-up routine: stretching, moderate jog to a finishing sprint. Then, catching, throwing and ground-ball lines. Always stress mechanics. Make sure you leave plenty of room between each girls during warm-ups. If you have time, you can add the pop-up drill to your warm-up routine.

### Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

### Next 10 Minutes [Split Them Into Groups]

Split up the girls, you take the infielders and have your assistant coaches work with the outfielders. You will hit grounder after grounder and have them throw to different bases, increasingly expanding their range. Work with your middle infielders on taking throws at the back of the bag to protect themselves from oncoming base runners. Teach them how to put a tag on a runner. Teach your first basemen how to straddle the bag and shift their feet to properly stretch for a throw.

### Next 10 Minutes: [Work on Situations as a Team]

Bring the groups together and work on situations as a team. Review every skill and special play. Work on your outfield cuts and relays. During this time, you begin to teach your base runners how to read the ball in the air. Or you can teach your outfielders how to crow-hop to get off a good strong accurate throw.

In additional practices, you can take this time to work on live hitting, or hitting stations or just bunting or slapping. The goal is to add more than previous practice, building the girls into better players and people.

## Next 2 Minutes [Water Break]

Keep your players hydrated with a water break. But have them hustle back on the field.

## Remaining Practice [Water Break]

If possible, always end with a softball-related game. I've offered some in previous lessons. Here's another one, similar to the Baserunning Relay you used in the first practice:

**Softball relay:** Create two teams. Place a teammate on each base, about six feet off the base in the baseline. The girl at home is holding a softball. On your command, she races to first, takes a proper turn - cutting the corner of the bag - and hands the ball to her teammate. She races around second and hands the ball to her teammate, who races around third and hands the ball off to the girl, who races home. The quickest combined time wins (you may have to run it twice to involve everyone). For good measure, you can start having the losing team run a lap. That makes it a little more interesting.