

- 1) know the names of the defensive positions
- 2) how to throw (step towards target with opposite foot of throwing hand)
- 3) proper ready fielding position
- 4) how to hold the glove and bare hand (2 hands) to catch - track ball. catch in front. give with the ball(don't stab at it)
- 5) how to properly hold a bat and swing
- 6) what to do after the ball has been hit (batter and runner)
- 7) when and why to run to the next base (ground ball vs. fly ball)
- 8) where to throw the ball when fielded
- 9) where are the bases and what are their names
- 10) which way to run the bases (run past first base on ground ball)
- 11) where are the positions and their names
- 12) how many outs in an inning and how to make an out (force out. fly out tag out)

Skill Expectations: 7 and 8 year olds

Age 7 (coach pitch):

Can hit one out of four overhand pitches from a coach

Shows lower body movement (weight shift or step) with the swing

Can field a ground ball showing proper technique

Can understand and practice the concepts of catching a ball above or below the waist (thumb to thumb, pinky to pinky)

Knows infield and outfield positions by name

Will listen to the directions of base coaches (run through, make a turn, go to second, etc.)

Assumes "baseball ready" stance on every pitch (ha!)

Can throw the ball using the "scarecrow" technique keeping the elbow above the shoulder during acceleration. No more of the tee-ball push that looks like a shot-put throw

Age 8 (combination kid. coach pitch):

Should be able to throw the ball from second base to first base in the air but not always accurately

Should be able to catch balls thrown to them with 50% success, high or low

Should be able to catch pop ups in the infield if right at them

Should understand the count, four balls and three strikes

Should understand basic baserunning concepts no longer playing station to station

Should hit at least 50% of pitches from the coach

Should lose inappropriate fear of the baseball, especially when facing other kids pitching

Should understand the basics of when to tag the runner and when there is a force out (forget 3-6-3 double plays when F3 tags first base before making the throw)

Should understand stealing on passed balls

Should hit for a .200 average off of kid pitching (watch the ones just looking for walks though)

The basics of the baseball swing should be well established including lower body movement, hip pivot, and follow through

Pitchers should be able to throw strikes 20% of the time. Velocity is not a factor. The player should also be developing the basics of a pitching motion from the stretch

Catchers should be able to catch strikes with the glove almost 100% of the time (at least hitting the glove). They should also be able to block some pitches in the dirt immediately in front of them. No expectation for throwing out baserunners except to hustle to passed balls

Problems to identify include, excessive fear of the ball, backing out of the batter's box, ducking throws, still waving the bat at the ball like a tennis racket, no follow through, inattentiveness (is this a word, Bean?:), poor fielding technique on ground balls, and underhand catches for pop ups

I think these things are for the "average" player. More advanced players may be able to do more things. BTW, I don't think I have seen many players who could do all of these things at each age

What we look for is the ability to do most of them and the understanding, if not proficiency, of the others

Fundamentals and keep it fun... for everybody. At this age they are just starting out so our goal as coaches should be to plant a seed that hopefully will grow into a deep passion and love for the game of baseball. If that's the only thing you do then you've done a great job. As far as skills are concerned, the things I see that need to be taught are...

1. Throwing technique. Most 7 & 8 yr olds severely shortarm the ball. Emphasize "reaching back" when you are teaching them to throw. I also use a method that I call "The right left throw" or (Left right throw for southpaws). Start with a short jab step with the right foot, SEPARATE and REACH BACK while striding forward with the left foot, and then THROW. What I like about this drill is that it gets the feet moving so that they learn to use the whole body to throw with instead of just the arm. Another common throwing mistake I see is failure to get the elbow elevated to shoulder height. It looks like they are pushing the ball instead of throwing it. Use the photographs on baseball cards to show the kids that getting the elbow up are not just something that you've dreamed up. A picture is worth a thousand words.
 2. Baserunning. For some reason, by nature, most 7 & 8 yr olds will not run hard all the way THROUGH first base. "Why is it that most of you guys slow down to a stop when you reach first base?" "It's because most of them don't know that you can over run first base". You can't take anything for granted. Don't assume that they already know even the most basic things about the game. Use a stopwatch to time them from home to first. Call out their times. They will see for themselves that their time will be much better if they "keep bookin all the way through the base". Also time them all the way around the bases. A good time to do this is immediately after a game because the real bases are already set out. In just 10 minutes everybody will have gone around 4 or 5 times.
 3. Fielding. Most 7&8 yr olds won't receive a ball that is above their navel with the fingers pointing up. For some reason this is a tough one for a lot of kids to learn. Try having them remove their glove and catch a tennis ball tossed at their face. Most of them will instinctively catch it with their fingers pointing up. Put the glove back on and see what happens. Usually they go back to the old way of doing it. It could be that their arms aren't strong enough to turn the glove over (make sure that they are not using Dad's softball glove). Like I said, this one takes some time for them to learn. I tell them, straight up, "Your not ready to go to the next level until you learn to catch a with your fingers pointing up". This seems to light a fire in them and motivates them to learn to do it right.
- DRILL: Use 2 hula-hoops on a fence as a target to throw at. Then start making games. Who can hit inside the target the most out of 10 throws? Make the distant a little farther. Then start races, split the team in two and let each kid try to hit the target, then the next in line tries and so on and so on for a given time limit. The fact that they are racing against another team puts a little more pressure on. Start off with 10 throws from 30 ft. They throw from behind the line but can cross over the line to catch the ball. 1 point for hitting the pitch back, 2 points for catching the rebound in the air (possible 3 point play). Eventually, (several practices later) you replace the hula-hoops with a player to catch the throw. Most catches in 3, 5, or more minutes wins that round. (Usually losing team demands a second try) (I like to leave the hula-hoops on the fence and have a player stand in front of it like a first baseman.) You rotate the players after each attempt. That way they are running throwing and catching all in one fun drill.