



Baseball Canada Long-Term Participant Development



Stage 3: Learn To Train (U12)

These are the skill hungry years! For a child aged approximately 10 to 12, Baseball Canada identifies this as the "Learn to Train" stage. This is arguably the most critical window for developing "fine motor control", it is the age where kids move from just playing the game to actually "learning" the craft of the sport.

What to Plan:

- Formal games with basic standings and on-field officials who teach and guide
- Simple strategies, rules, and situational awareness
- Gradual move from small-sided play (e.g., 6 players) toward full 9-player baseball
- Consistent practice (2–3 baseball sessions weekly) and other sports too!
- Rotation through positions, including infield, outfield, pitching
- Pitching to be introduced safely (often around age 10) through progressive program
- Boys and girls can train together; new players can join at any time

My First Pitch

My First Pitch help ensure that pitching is taught safely and progressively. You will also notice the introduction of on-field officials. Officials serve not only to manage the game, but also to guide learning and reinforce rules in a supportive way.

What is My First Pitch?



What is LTD



How Can Coaches Support

- Encourage sampling, not specialization: Let your players try several sports and activities. This builds a wide range of skills, helps prevent burnout, and keeps activity fun.
- Focus on skills, effort and enjoyment: Celebrate your player's skills development and efforts rather than just results. Keeping things positive and enjoyable will boost their motivation and confidence, especially as they adapt to changes like growth spurts.



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Stage 3: Learn To Train (U12) - Key Skills

1. Throwing and Pitching (The "My First Pitch" Stage) - At this age, the focus shifts from just "tossing" to organized mechanics. Baseball Canada's My First Pitch program is designed specifically for 10-11 year olds.

- **The Four-Seam Grip:** Mastering the "across the seams" grip for maximum control and velocity.
- **Mechanics:** Learning the "Lift, Thrust, and Follow-through." The focus should be on using the whole body (legs and hips) to throw, rather than just the arm, to prevent injury.
- **Pitching from the Stretch:** Teaching kids how to pitch with runners on base.
- **Safety:** Understanding pitch counts. At 11U, the limit is typically around 75-85 pitches per day, with specific rest days required.

2. Hitting Fundamentals - Hitting becomes more "situational" at this stage.

- **The Five-Step Swing:** Breaking the swing down into Stance, Load, Stride, Pivot, and Swing-to-Contact.
- **Strike Zone Discipline:** Learning to distinguish a "ball" from a "strike" and not just swinging at everything.
- **Bunting:** Introducing the Sacrifice Bunt. This is the age where team play begins to matter.
- **Contact over Power:** Encouraging a "level swing" to hit line drives rather than trying to hit home runs.

3. Defensive Skills & Positioning - This is the stage where players should start to understand their "area of responsibility."

- **The "Ready Position":** Creeping forward as the pitcher throws so they are on the balls of their feet.
- **Infield Basics:** Fielding ground balls out in front of the body with two hands (the "Alligator" technique) and the "Underhand Flip" for short-distance tosses.
- **Outfield Basics:** Learning the "Drop Step" (crossing over to run backward) and catching fly balls above the head rather than at the chest.
- **Cutoffs and Relays:** Understanding that an outfielder doesn't always throw to the base; they throw to a "cutoff man" (usually the Shortstop or 2nd Baseman).

4. Base Running

- **Leading Off:** Depending on the league (11U usually doesn't allow leads, but 13U does), kids begin learning how to take a primary and secondary lead.
- **Tagging Up:** Understanding that on a fly ball, you must wait for the catch before advancing.
- **Reading the Ball:** Learning to run hard on a ground ball and "freeze" or "get back" on a line drive.