

Parentally Speaking - December 2007

Do you have any suggestions for helping young kids improve their throwing mechanics?

Throwing is a difficult skill to master. There aren't many children under the age of 8 who truly display perfect throwing mechanics. In fact, throwing is one of the biggest problem areas we see in our camps. The most common mistakes that young players make when throwing are not taking the ball back and out of the glove so that the hand is on top of the ball, dropping the elbow below the shoulder at the release point and not taking the front shoulder and front foot toward the target (opening up too much or stepping away from the target).

When playing catch with your child, watch to see if he or she takes the ball straight from the glove to a point behind him or her that is near or at shoulder level immediately. If the kid just takes the ball straight back, you might want to work with him or her to help elongate the throwing motion. By doing that, many of the throwing issues might take care of themselves. This can be accomplished by having the child take the ball out of the glove then down, out and up (in a circular motion) so that the fingers are on top of the ball as it points directly behind. It is at this point that many young players turn their hands so that they are actually under the ball, which causes them to throw like an old-time, one-arm pitching machine. To get to the release point when the ball is held this way, the hand must come around the ball, which will alter its flight, affecting both velocity and accuracy.

For the best results when throwing, the hand goes from being on top of the ball to behind the ball as the release point is approached. It is at this point that the elbow should be above the shoulder with the front shoulder pointing directly toward the target. If the kid is not keeping his or her hand above the ball, have him or her exaggerate this circular motion out of the glove (he or she can brush his or her hand against the side of the body while taking the ball down to ensure the circle) and then stop him or her at the point where the hand should be on top of the ball. If it's not, go back and make a correction. Do this several times until the child starts to get the feel for it. Be careful when doing this,

though. By stopping the throwing motion, you want the kid to get the feel for the proper arm action and to stop and see what you are talking about firsthand. However, to throw properly with the greatest velocity and accuracy, the throwing motion should be continuous. Make sure he or she isn't stopping during every throw when you are not working on mechanics.

If your child still struggles with these concepts, you can have him or her throw from one knee with the glove-side knee up to concentrate strictly on the circular motion, keeping the hand above the ball until it is about to be released and keeping the elbow above the shoulder. If the elbow drops below the shoulder at the release point, place a batting tee on the throwing side that is set at a height about equal to shoulder level and make sure that the elbow does not hit the tee as the ball is released. These little drills, if done often enough, should train the body to throw the ball properly in practice and game situations.

By Cal Ripken Jr.