TEACHING CATCHING, THROWING AND KICKING SKILLS

Help children learn how to catch, throw and kick a ball.
Publisher’s Note: The publisher and author has made every attempt to make sure that the information in this book is correct and up to date. All physical activities require approval from a child’s pediatrician. The author or the publisher will not be liable for any impairment, damage, accident or loss that may occur from any of the suggested activities in this book.

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### Age Progression of Catching a Ball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Around 2 years to 4 Years Old</strong></td>
<td>Ready position: arms straight out in front and palms are up</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoids the ball by turning the face or putting hands up sometimes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses arms to trap objects close to the chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Around 3 to 3.5 years old children can catch a ball from 5 feet away 1 out of 2 trials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Around 3-6 years old</strong></td>
<td>Ready position: elbows are bent, palms facing each other and thumbs are up</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes eyes may close to avoid the ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands touch ball briefly but arms squeeze ball and hold it towards chest</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>6+ Years old</strong></td>
<td>Ready position: Elbows are bent and arms are relaxed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eyes focus and track ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Body moves to adjust to the ball in flight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands catch ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elbows bend to absorb force of ball</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Around 6 years old, children can catch a ball throwing from 6 feet away 2 out of 3 trials</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Catching a Ball

Keep your eyes on the ball. Bend your elbows. Get your hands ready to catch the ball.

Reach your hands towards the ball.

Catch the ball with your hands only. Bend your elbows slightly to absorb the force of the ball.

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**Tips on Teaching**

**How to Catch a Ball**

**Demonstrate proper catching**  When starting, have the child throw the ball to a person who knows how to catch well. The child should watch closely to observe how to catch correctly. If needed, video the child catching so he/she can observe what part of the task is difficult.

**Stay focused on the ball**  Keep auditory and visual distractions to a minimum. Use a brightly colored ball to increase the contact of the ball to the background to help children focus on the ball.

**Sit to start**  Have the child sit down on the floor. Roll the ball slowly to the child and he/she can practice catching.

**Start off easy**  Try practicing catching skills with items other than a regular ball to start. Items such as balloons, fleece balls, foam balls, scarves and beach balls are easy to catch. Even try wadding up a piece of paper and playing catch.

**Keep it pain free!**  Some children get nervous about learning to catch a ball because they are worried it might hurt if they don’t catch the ball. Again, start off with soft items ie yarn balls, balloons, scarves or beach balls.

**Bigger is better**  Larger balls are easier to catch, move slower and are easier to visually track than smaller balls. Once the child can catch a large ball progress to a smaller ball (ie tennis ball).

**Keep the distance short**  Start by just passing the ball to each other. Take a few steps backwards and try again.

**Use the same verbal direction every time**  You could try “Look” for keep eyes on the ball, “Ready Position” for hands ready to catch and body facing ball and “Catch”. Therefore, every time you practice say “look, ready position and catch”.

**Teach hand position when catching**  If the ball is above the waist, fingers should spread out and be pointing up. If the ball is below the waist, fingers should be spread out and pointing down.

**Bounce it**  Children might find it easier to follow the trajectory of the ball after it is slowly bounced versus tossed directly at them.

**Throw it high**  Give children enough time to visually find and track the ball. Toss it gently with a high trajectory.

**Practice with someone who knows how to throw and catch correctly**  This allows children to have an effective role model to copy and improved accuracy for the throw.

**Provide positive reinforcement**  Praise children when they catch the ball correctly.

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Catching a Ball

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is working on catching a ball. This skill takes many hours of practice. Please practice catching skills with your child and encourage your child to practice this skill on his/her own.

Here are some suggestions when teaching eye hand coordination skills to children:

1. Child will improve from practicing the skill. Some evidence states that it takes between 240 and 600 minutes of instructional time for children to learn a fundamental motor skill. Remind your child that practice will lead to success.

2. Keep in mind that children learn motor skills best with brief, concise instruction and specific, age appropriate feedback. Try to keep your directions to less than one minute when teaching or practicing the skill. Provide practice session immediately following your directions.

3. Encourage independent problem solving. Instead of correcting a child’s form right away perhaps ask a question such as “what could you do differently next time”?

4. Use demonstrations to help the child visualize exactly how to complete the skill. After you demonstrate, immediately ask the child to try catching the ball to check if he/she understood all the components of the skill.

5. Progress slowly. Practice one component of the skill at a time.

6. Provide “just right” challenges so that the child does not get frustrated. For example, if a child can successfully catch a large playground ball thrown from 6 feet away advance to a distance of 7 feet away. This will allow for positive reinforcement.

7. Don’t change more than one aspect of the skill as you progress. For catching, keep the ball the same size and increase the distance. Or keep the same distance and introduce a slightly smaller ball. Try to have several balls such as an 8” ball, 6” ball, 4” ball and a tennis ball.

8. When providing feedback, tell the child what he/she is doing correctly. For example “you are doing a great job keeping your eyes focused on the ball” or “you are putting your hands in the correct position”. Offer specific feedback for corrections. For example “keep your elbows bent while you are waiting to catch the ball” instead of “don’t keep your arms straight while waiting to catch the ball”.

Thank you for helping your child learn how to catch a ball.

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Steps to Practice Catching a Ball

Step 1: Sit on the floor with your legs out straight and open. Catch or stop a large ball that is rolled to you.

Step 2: In standing, catch a balloon, beach ball or a soft ball thrown from about 5 feet away and gradually back up.

Step 3: Catch a large ball with two hands that is slowly bounced before the child needs to catch it.

Step 4: Catch a large ball with two hands that is slowly thrown underhand with a high trajectory (high in the air so child has more time to track the ball).

Step 5: Catch a large ball with two hands.

Step 6: Catch a small ball with two hands that is slowly thrown underhand with a high trajectory.

Step 7: Catch a small ball with two hands that is slowly bounced before the child needs to catch it.

Step 8: Catch a small ball with two hands.

Step 10: By yourself, bounce a tennis ball on the floor and catch it with two hands.

Step 11: By yourself, bounce and catch a small tennis ball with one hand.

Step 12: Bounce and catch a tennis ball with a friend.

Step 13: Play catch with a friend.

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10 Ways to Practice Catching By Yourself

1. Toss a balloon up in the air and catch it.

2. Bat a balloon up and down in the air using your hands. How many times can you keep it up in the air without it dropping to the floor?

3. Toss a scarf or small handkerchief in the air and catch it.

4. Try throwing up a playground size ball and catching it and then progress to a tennis ball.

5. Try tossing and catching a ball up in the air standing inside of a hula hoop.

6. Walk forward and toss and catch a balloon, scarf or ball depending upon your abilities.

7. Toss a balloon or ball up in the air, clap your hands and then catch the ball.

8. Bounce a ball on the floor and catch it.

9. Bounce a ball on the floor, clap your hands and catch it.

10. Toss a ball at the wall, let the ball bounce and catch it.

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Data Collection for Catching a Ball

Scoring Criteria:
4 = Performs the skill always  
3 = Performs the skill most of the time  
2 = Performs the skill some of the time  
1 = Rarely performs the skill  
0 = Does not perform the skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
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<th>TOTAL</th>
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<tr>
<td>Eyes focused on the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Elbows are bent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hands are ready to catch</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reaches hands towards the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Catches ball with hands only</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bends elbow slightly to absorb force of the ball</td>
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<td>Catches ball from __________ feet away</td>
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<td>TOTAL SCORE OUT OF 28:</td>
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## Age Progression of Throwing a Ball

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Around 18 months to 4 Years Old** | Faces target directly  
|                    | Does not watch target closely  
|                    | Elbows pushes the ball forward  
|                    | Fingers are spread out when the ball is released  
|                    | Body is straight with none or very little rotation  
|                    | Legs do not move and knees do not bend much |
| **Around 4-6 years old** | Throwing arm brings ball up to head level  
|                    | Slight body rotation  
|                    | Steps forward with the same foot as the throwing arm  
|                    | Arm swings over shoulder with forward body lean when throwing  
|                    | Follow through is forward and down after release |
| **6+ Years old**    | Stands sideways towards the target  
|                    | Eyes focus on the target  
|                    | Throwing arm goes backwards and up over shoulder with elbow close to ear level  
|                    | Steps forward with opposite foot to the throwing arm with weight transferring from the back foot to the front foot  
|                    | Shoulder and hip rotation during the throw  
|                    | Follow through is forward and across the body |
Throwing a Ball

1. Keep your eyes on the target. Stand sideways toward the target. Throwing arm is almost straight.
2. Bring your throwing arm up. Your weight is over your back leg.
3. Bring your throwing arm up higher towards your ear. Start to shift your weight over your front leg.
4. Step forward with the foot opposite the throwing arm. Rotate your body to face forward. Release the ball.
5. Throwing arm continues to move forward to follow through.
6. Throwing arm moves downward and across to opposite hip.

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Tips on Teaching Throwing a Ball

**Demonstrate proper throwing technique**  When you show the child how to throw, move very slowly so that the child can observe each step closely.

**Don’t assign a partner**  When children are first learning how to throw, instruct them to throw as far as they can and as fast as they can. Don’t focus on hitting a target.

**Keep it simple with only one task**  Only practice throwing without worrying about catching the ball.

**Try throwing different objects**  Let children practice throwing small balls, larger balls, lightweight balls, bean bags, beach balls, etc. This will allow the children to get an understanding of how weight and size affect distance and speed.

**Practice throwing objects that don’t roll very far**  Try throwing balled up socks or bean bags. They won’t go too far and the child can grab it quickly and continue to practice.

**Use visual reminders for foot placement if needed**  If a child is not stepping forward while throwing put a visual reminder on the floor such as a rope, foot marker or piece of tape to indicate where the child should step forward.

**Stay focused on the target**  Keep auditory and visual distractions to a minimum. Use a brightly colored target to increase the contract of the target to the background to help the child focus on the target.

**Use a large target to start**  Try a hula hoop or big laundry basket as a first target. Progress to smaller targets.

**Keep it short to start**  Place the target a short distance away to start, perhaps 5 feet. Slowly move the target back with each successful attempt.

**Use the same verbal directions every time**  You could try “Focus” for keeping your eyes on the target. “Sideways” for standing sideways toward the target. “Arm back” to encourage the throwing arm behind the head. “Follow through” to facilitate the throwing arm moving across the body.

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is working on throwing a ball. This skill takes many hours of practice. Please practice throwing skills with your child and encourage your child to practice this skill on his/her own. Here are some suggestions when teaching eye hand coordination skills to children:

1. Child will improve from practicing the skills. Some evidence states that it takes between 240 and 600 minutes of instructional time for children to learn a fundamental motor skill. Remind your child that practice will lead to success.

2. Keep in mind that children learn motor skills best with brief, concise instruction and specific, age appropriate feedback. Try to keep your directions to less than one minute when teaching or practicing the skill. Provide practice session immediately following your directions.

3. Allow for independent problem solving. Instead of correcting a child’s form right away perhaps ask a question such as “what could you do differently next time”?

4. Use demonstrations to help the child visualize exactly how to complete the skill. After you demonstrate, immediately ask the child to throw a ball to check if he/she understood all the components of the skill.

5. Progress slowly. Practice one component of the skill at a time.

6. Provide “just right” challenges so that the child does not get frustrated. For example, if a child can successfully throw a large playground ball to a target 6 feet away advance to a distance of 7 feet away. This will allow for positive reinforcement.

7. Don’t change more than one aspect of the skill as you progress. For throwing, keep the ball the same size and increase the distance. Or keep the same distance and introduce a slightly smaller ball.

8. When providing feedback, tell the child what he/she is doing correctly. For example, “you are doing a great job keeping your eyes focused on the target” or “you are putting your hands in the correct position”. Offer specific feedback for corrections. For example, “release the ball right past your ear” instead of “stop letting go of the ball too early”.

Thank you for helping your child learn how to throw a ball.

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10 Steps to Practice
Throwing a Ball at a Target

Step 1: Throw large balls as far as you can. Throw large balls as fast as you can.

Step 2: Throw smaller balls as far as you can. Throw smaller balls as fast as you can.

Step 3: Throw a large ball at a large target placed 5 feet away. Use a hula hoop or large laundry basket as a target.

Step 4: Throw a small ball at a large target placed 5 feet away. Use a hula hoop or laundry basket as the target.

Step 5: Throw a large ball at a large target placed 10 feet away.

Step 6: Throw a small ball at a large target placed 10 feet away.

Step 7: Throw a large ball at a large target placed 10 feet away on the wall.

Step 8: Throw a small ball at a large target placed 10 feet away on the wall.

Step 9: Practice throwing a ball to a person who knows how to catch and throw properly.

Step 10: Practice throwing a ball to a friend.
# Data Collection for Throwing a Ball

**Scoring Criteria:**
- 4 = Performs the skill always
- 3 = Performs the skill most of the time
- 2 = Performs the skill some of the time
- 1 = Rarely performs the skill
- 0 = Does not perform the skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student’s Name:</th>
<th>Therapist/Teacher:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyes focused on the target</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stands sideways towards the target</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Weight is back when throwing arm comes up</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steps forward with opposite foot of throwing arm</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rotates hips and shoulders during the throw</td>
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<tr>
<td>Releases the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Throwing arm follows through across body</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball hits target (distance = _______ feet away)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**TOTAL SCORE OUT OF 32:**

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Age Progression of Kicking a Ball

**Around 18 months to 4 Years Old**

Around 18 months, steps on, imitates kicking or kicks a ball

Around 2 years old, kicks a ball three feet

Around 3 years old, kicks a ball six feet

Body is upright with arms at sides or in front for balance

Kicking leg swings backwards before contacting the ball

Forward swing is short and usually kicks ball with the toes or front of the foot

No follow through

**Around 4-6 years old**

Around 4-5 years old, kicks a rolling ball

Around 5-6 years old, kicks a ball in the air

Body is still upright, arms at sides or front for balance

Kicking leg swings backwards before contacting the ball and usually kicks with the toes or front of the foot

During the forward swing, knee is bent and then straightens to contact the ball

**6+ Years old**

Around 6-7 years old, can run and kick a moving ball

Around 6-7 years old, can drop kick a ball 50% of the time

Steps with Non-kicking foot to go next to the ball

Kicking leg swings back and high

The shoelace area of the foot contacts the ball

Arms swing in opposition to the legs to help with balance

Kicking leg follows through and the trunk bends forward slightly

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Kicking a Ball

Keep your eyes on the ball. Put your non-kicking foot near the ball.

Swing your kicking leg back and up.

Swing leg forward and contact the ball with the top of your kicking foot (shoelace area).

The opposite arm of the kicking leg, swings forward and up. Kicking leg follows through after the ball is kicked.
**Tips on Teaching Kicking a Ball**

**Demonstrate proper kicking technique** When you show the child how to kick a ball, move very slowly so that the child can observe each step closely.

**Sit to start if necessary** For some children it can be hard to maintain your balance in standing and kick the ball. Try sitting in a chair and kicking a stationary ball and then a rolling ball.

**Start with a stationary ball** Have the child practice kicking a ball that is not moving to start. Progress to kicking a rolling ball.

**Have fun kicking other objects** Line up recycled milk cartons, shoe boxes and plastic containers. The child can move to each one and kick them down.

**Don’t assign a partner** When children are first learning how to kick, instruct them to kick as far as they can and as fast as they can. Don’t focus on kicking the ball at a target.

**Keep it simple with only one task** Only practice kicking without worrying about aiming at a goal to start.

**Try kicking different objects** Let children practice kicking larger balls, lightweight balls, balloons, beach balls, etc. This will allow the children to get an understanding of how weight and size effect distance and speed.

**Bigger is better** Larger balls are easier to kick because of more surface area and easier to visually track.

**Use visual reminders if needed** Tie a brightly colored ribbon around a child’s shoelaces to indicate where the foot should make contact with ball.

**Use the same verbal directions every time** You could try “Focus” for keeping your eyes on the ball. “Step” for placing non-kicking foot by the ball. “Swing” to encourage the kicking leg to swing backwards and up. “Kick” to make contact with the ball.

**Provide positive reinforcement** Praise children when they kick the ball correctly.

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is working on kicking a ball. This skill takes many hours of practice. Please practice kicking a ball with your child and encourage your child to practice this skill on his/her own. Here are some suggestions when teaching eye-foot coordination skills to children:

1. Child will improve from practicing the skills. Some evidence states that it takes between 240 and 600 minutes of instructional time for children to learn a fundamental motor skill. Remind your child that practice will lead to success.

2. Keep in mind that children learn motor skills best with brief, concise instruction and specific, age appropriate feedback. Try to keep your directions to less than one minute when teaching or practicing the skill. Provide practice session immediately following your directions.

3. Allow for independent problem solving. Instead of correcting a child’s form right away perhaps ask a question such as “what could you do differently next time”?

4. Use demonstrations to help the child visualize exactly how to complete the skill. After you demonstrate, immediately ask the child to kick a ball to check if he/she understood all the components of the skill.

5. Progress slowly. Practice one component of the skill at a time.

6. Provide “just right” challenges so that the child does not get frustrated. For example, if a child can successfully kick a stationary large playground ball 10 feet progress to kicking a slow moving, large playground ball. This will allow for positive reinforcement.

7. Don’t change more than one aspect of the skill as you progress. For kicking, keep the ball the same size and the speed of the ball. Or keep the same speed of the moving ball and introduce a slightly smaller ball.

8. When providing feedback, tell the child what he/she is doing correctly. For example, “you are doing great job keeping your eyes focused on the target” or “you are putting your feet in the correct position”. Offer specific feedback for corrections. For example, “swing your leg back and up” instead of “kick the ball harder”.

Thank you for helping your child learn how to kick a ball.

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10 Steps to Practice
Kicking a Ball

Step 1: Kick large, stationary (not moving) balls as far as you can. Kick large, stationary balls as fast as you can. Kick some smaller, stationary balls as far as you can. Kick some smaller, stationary balls as fast as you can.

Step 2: Sitting down in a chair, kick a large ball rolled to you as far as you can. Kick a smaller ball rolled to you as far as you can.

Step 3: Standing up, kick a large ball that is rolled to you as far as you can. Kick a smaller ball that is rolled to you as far as you can.

Step 4: Standing up, kick a large ball that is rolled to you at a target 5 feet away. Kick a smaller ball that is rolled to you at a target 5 feet away.

Step 5: Kick a large ball stationary (not moving) up into the air. Kick a smaller ball up into the air.

Step 6: Kick a large, moving ball up into the air. Kick a smaller, moving ball up into the air.

Step 7: Run up about 5 feet and kick a stationary ball.

Step 8: Run up about 5 feet and kick a ball that is moving towards you.

Step 9: Kick and ball back and forth with a friend.

Step 10: Gently toss a larger ball into the air and kick it before the ball hits the ground.

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**5 Fun Activities to Play When Kicking a Ball**

**Balloon Kicking**
Blow up a 9-12 inch balloon. Tie a string around it. Hang the balloon from the ceiling or door jam. Practice kicking the balloon with either foot.

**Kick the Can**
Gather some clean, recycled cans, 2 liter bottles, laundry detergent bottles and shoeboxes. Place them around your backyard. Set a timer and see how quickly you can run up to each object and kick it down. Reset all the recycled objects and try to beat your time.

**Bowling – Kicking Style**
Use recycled 2 liters bottles and set them up like bowling pins. Instead of rolling a ball at the pins, kick the ball.

**Kick and Stop**
If outdoors, draw a large circle with sidewalk chalk on the ground. If indoors, use painter’s tape to create a box on the floor (at least 2 feet by 2 feet). Make a starting line about 5-10 feet away from the target. Try and kick the ball with the correct force and speed so that it will stop rolling within the target zone. Score 1 point for every ball that stops in the target zone. First player to 5 points is the winner!

**Kicking Golf**
Head outdoors to a park or a large yard. Create a “golf course” by choosing a few targets (i.e. certain trees) in the yard. The goal is to kick the ball and hit the target with the fewest kicks possible. Move from target to target. Keep score just like golf. The lowest score is the winner!
Data Collection for Kicking a Stationary Ball

Scoring Criteria:
4 = Performs the skill always
3 = Performs the skill most of the time
2 = Performs the skill some of the time
1 = Rarely performs the skill
0 = Does not perform the skill

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASK</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eyes focused on the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Places non-kicking foot next to the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kicking leg swings back and high</td>
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<tr>
<td>The shoelace area of the foot contacts the ball</td>
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<tr>
<td>Arms swing in opposition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kicking leg follows through</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kicks the ball _______ feet away with less than a 20 degree deviation</td>
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TOTAL SCORE OUT OF 28:

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Data Collection for
Kicking a Moving Ball

Scoring Criteria:
4 = Performs the skill always
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TOTAL SCORE OUT OF 28:

Student’s Name: [Blank]
Therapist/Teacher: [Blank]
Date: [Blank]

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References

