

## Fielding Tips

### Fielding a ground ball

In this picture, you can see almost every aspect of good fielding of a ground ball. Baseball is a lot of little things. This is very true when fielding a ground ball and throwing a runner out. Failure to do them all (or at least most at Little League level) results in time wasted and allowing the runner to beat a throw.



Knees bent, butt down, head up - it is very hard to get young kids to do this. The best description is to imagine sitting on a bucket. Keeping your eyes level enables you to watch the ball as it bounces to you. If you bend too much at the waist, your eyes are forced down. The feet need to be fairly far apart to squat down properly. Following are some other key aspects.

### Alligator Hands

One area where precious time is lost is the transition from glove to throwing hand. In addition to helping the ball not bounce out of the glove, the "alligator" hands positions the throwing hand where it needs to be to get the ball out of the glove as quickly as possible.

### Ball in the Pocket

If someone were to roll a ball to you and you are not wearing a glove, you would let it roll between your index and middle fingers and clasp with your thumb. That is exactly how you catch a ground ball wearing a glove. Unfortunately, many players have been taught to catch using very large gloves and tend to catch balls in the webbing, or ends of the fingers. In order to catch the ball in the pocket, your fingers should be point toward the ball, not down at the ground.

### Hands in Front and Low

Your hands should be out in front of you, about as far as the bill of the cap, and below the ball. This is an ideal "ready" position and gets your hands closer to the ball as it approaches.

### Charge the Ball

If a Little League player can run to first base in 3.5 seconds, and you wait 2.5 seconds for a ground ball to arrive, there isn't much time to throw the runner out. Note in the picture, the player is about to field the ball, yet his left foot has not been planted, indicating he was charging right up to the last possible moment.

### Field the Ball in Front

It takes a tremendous amount of time to field a ball off to the glove side of the body, bring it back to the throwing hand, turn, and throw. Lessen the time by keeping your glove out in front of you as you collect the ball and bring it to your throwing hand.

### Staggered Feet

The foot on the throwing side is staggered behind the glove side foot. This helps in stability of the squat, and also positions the body so the player can quickly get to the power position to throw the ball.

### Open Glove

This sounds obvious, but you really need to force the glove open as wide as you can. You have probably seen advanced players pushing down on the fingers of the glove with their throwing hand. By pushing and curling the fingers, the glove widens. Hands tend to hang at your side with the palms toward the thigh. It takes some twisting to turn the palm 90 degrees.

### Watch the Ball into the Glove

The picture is a bit premature to show this, but the player is clearly focused on the ball when it is within 2 feet of him.

## Infielding Tips

Persistent practice and repetitions are the best way to improve any aspect of your game, particularly fielding. There is no substitute for hard work and practice. Keep the following in mind when working on your skills for fielding:

- When scooping balls out of the dirt, try to keep your glove down.
- If you see the ball bounce, raise your glove with the ball
- Provide cushion when scooping the ball so that it doesn't pop out.
- If you are a first baseman, always expect a bad throw so you'll be ready for it.
- Properly positioning prior to the pitcher throwing a pitch - position yourself as far back from the batter as you feel comfortable, but take into consideration how fast the batter will run to first base.
- If you are playing third base when a double play situation arises, and a ground ball is hit toward the third base side, try to wait for the ball to get close enough to you before starting your movement towards second base.
- If a runner on second is looking to steal third, make sure that you keep an eye on him. If he attempts to steal third, wait as long as you can to see if the batter at home plate hits the ball.
- If a runner is rounding third base and heading home, and a ball is hit to the outfield, try to position yourself about 15 feet in from the baseline.

## Throwing Straight

The best thing to do when you are playing catch or throwing to a base is always step toward your target. Accuracy can be more important than a strong arm.

- Work on throwing some long tosses to make your arm stronger.
- Getting on top of the ball, versus to the side, will help straighten your throws.
- Do not let your arm drop to the side if you are throwing over the top.
- Try to hold the ball across the seam.

## Fielding Drills

### Quick Release

This is a great drill for players in T-ball through Coaches Pitch for developing good hands and a quick release.

1. Have players line up across from a partner about 20 feet apart, either standing up or on one knee.
2. Have them make good throws back and forth as many times as they can while the coach counts down from 30 to zero.
3. The player who does not have the ball at zero wins.
4. Kids will need to catch and release the ball quickly.



### Glove Extension

Proper fielding calls for the glove to be extended out in front of the player. Younger players often hold the glove directly below them when awaiting a ground ball. This drill helps promote the required glove extension.

1. Lay a bat on the ground perpendicular to a line of 4-5 players.
2. The first player in line is 6 feet from the bat in a ready position.
3. The coach is 10 feet from the players.
4. The coach calls 'ready' and rolls a ball toward the bat.
5. The first player in line runs up and gets in a proper fielding position directly behind the bat without touching it. To prevent the ball from rolling into the bat, the player must have his glove extended in front of the bat toward the coach.
6. When the player fields the ball, he sprints to the coach and places it at the feet of the coach and takes his place at the end of the line.

### Lateral Movement

Use this drill to improve lateral movement for handling ground balls and line drives. The drill station group competes to see who can keep the most balls from hitting a fence behind them.

1. Find a fence about 20 feet wide and 6 feet high.
2. One at a time, fielders stand in front of the fence while a batter stands about 40 feet away. The batter can be a coach or other player.
3. The batter hits 10 balls to different spots within the fence area (grounders, line drives).
4. The fielder must stop the balls from hitting the fence.
5. Each fielder is hit 10 balls and the fielder who stops the most wins.

### Quick Throws

A great fielding drill is to time players fielding a ground ball and throwing to first base. Have the players start at a specified position on the infield (a good spot is the edge of the outfield grass or near shortstop position) The coach is positioned near the pitcher's mound and rolls a ball directly at the fielder. The fielder charges the ball, fields it and throws to first base. As the coach releases the ball, he starts a stopwatch. The coach stops the stopwatch when the throw is caught by the first baseman.

There is no time announced if the first baseman can't catch the ball. It is very obvious that not charging, fielding the ball in front, using alligator hands, etc. add a lot of time. The players will compete with each other, but they will also compete against themselves to get a better time. The ball is rolled, so it is easy to field, and players that are not the best fielders are usually not discouraged.