

SECTION

INTRODUCTION TO LEARN TO PLAY

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WHY LEARN TO PLAY (LTP)?

The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** is a revolutionary way of introducing the sport of Softball to children. Activities are included which foster the involvement of **ALL** players, including players with high and low skill levels. The child will experience excitement, enjoyment and success. Activities and lead-up games are patterned after informal playground games that promise an hour of **FUN** and **LOTS OF ACTION**. Participants will go home at the end of the night happy and tired, while improving their fitness level.

Research has shown that out of a possible 20 reasons for youth participation in sport, the top four are:

- ① To have **FUN**
- ② To stay in shape
- ③ To get exercise
- ④ To improve skills

Children ranked “challenge of competition” as #10 and “to win” as #12 clearly indicating that competition should not be the focus of programs for young children.

The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** replaces the old game of T-Ball and promises an hour of **FUN**, games and activity....set up to develop the players’ individual softball skills and build self-confidence. The following chart compares the characteristics of the game of T-Ball (which is currently used to introduce children to softball) and the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**:

T-Ball Characteristics:	Vs.	Learn to Play Characteristics:
① Competition is the emphasis		FUN is the emphasis
② Low number of repetitions of skills		High number of repetitions of skills
③ Less skilled players receive little opportunity to improve		Progressions to suit the skill level of the player
④ More aggressive/skilled players dominate game		Drills that offer a high success rate for every child
⑤ Players are standing in the field leading to boredom and low activity		Action packed lesson plans leading to high activity for players
⑥ Volunteer coaches are given no direction or resources		Volunteer coaches are given prepared lesson plans with easy to follow instructions and progressions for teaching basic skills

The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** provides 5–8 year olds with maximum opportunity to practice the progressions necessary to successfully take part in the (adult) game of Softball with a reasonable amount of skill.

Traditionally, at the 5–8 year old level, coaches are Moms and Dads with little or no coaching experience. This program is designed to make it easy to implement for the volunteer coach. It includes prepared lesson plans, easy to follow instructions, a letter to give to parents about the program, progressions for teaching basic skills, and lead up games designed to simulate the real game of Softball.

The **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** is designed to be a young person’s introduction to the sport of Softball. The emphasis is on **FUN, ACTION**, and a **POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE**, with a gradual introduction to non-stressful competition. The kids will have FUN, and they will want to come back for more!

WHAT’S IN THIS MANUAL

The following is a review of the content of this manual and what the purpose is for each section of the manual:

INTRODUCTION

Why Learn to Play?

- explains the philosophy of the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**
- outlines the differences between T-Ball and the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**

What’s in the Manual

- outlines the content of the manual and how it’s organized

CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

- explains how children learn and develop

Characteristics of Children

- outlines the characteristics of children and suggests ways to incorporate these characteristics into the planning of children’s activities

Age Appropriate Skills by Age

- outlines what skills should be emphasized at each age group

NOTES TO COACHES

Introduction

- ▶ explains how the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** is organized

Program Design

- ▶ explains how the program is designed (length of season, length of a session, number of players, number of helpers, facilities, the lesson plans and how to end the season)
- ▶ this will be different in each level

Tips for Coaches

- ▶ provides tips to the coach on how to have a successful season

Ideas for Establishing Positive Behaviour

- ▶ describes ideas for behaviour expectations that a Coach may wish to employ throughout the season

Group Selection

- ▶ provides ideas for forming groups of players

Organizational Signals

- ▶ provides hand signals that will assist the Coach in quickly organizing their players during a session

Equipment List

- ▶ provides a list of all required equipment needed to run the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**
- ▶ much of the equipment can be hand made (i.e. batting T's; carpet bases; sticks with a hanging ball; cut off broom handles for bats, tennis balls cut in half for markers, etc.)
- ▶ using a softer type ball (i.e. safety balls) is extremely important to give the players confidence when performing the skills in the lesson plans (i.e. catching fly balls)
- ▶ whiffle balls are the only other equipment that might have to be purchased that wouldn't normally be part of a team's equipment

Letter to Parents

- ▶ provides an overview of the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM** for parents that can be handed out to parents at a Parent Meeting or at the first session

LESSON PLANS

- ▶ an index of all the activities that are included in the manual is provided before Lesson 1
- ▶ provides 18 lesson plans to take a Coach through a Softball Season

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EXTRA LEAD UP GAMES

- ▶ provides additional games to be used as Lead Up Games in the Lesson Plans

BASIC SKILLS CHECKLISTS

- ▶ provides a checklist of the key teaching points for all the Softball skills taught in the **LEARN TO PLAY PROGRAM**
- ▶ can be used as quick reference to ensure coaches are covering the key points of each skill or a report card for the player

SOFTBALL SKILLS

- ▶ provides the Coach with key teaching cues for all Softball skills and progressions to aid instruction

END OF SEASON

- ▶ provides ideas for ways to wrap up the Softball season