

Handbook

Small feet big steps

Coaches' handbook for the Small feet – big steps project



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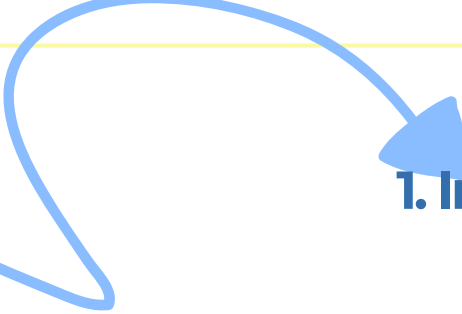


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1. Introduction

The topic of this handbook was chosen out of a need to emphasise what should be the starting point of all work with children in sport and physical activity – a sound motor foundation before sports specialisation. Today, children join organised sports programmes at a very early age, and the transition to elements specific to a particular sport is often made too quickly. A child arrives at their first basketball session and is immediately given a ball, joins a football game straight away, and is directed towards individual athletics disciplines too early. Such an approach may overlook the fact that the child may not yet have sufficiently developed the basic movement patterns, coordination, balance, spatial orientation, reaction speed or body control needed to learn more complex sporting activities effectively and safely.

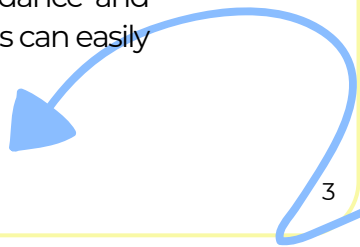
This handbook therefore starts from a simple principle: from the foundations towards greater complexity. Before a child begins learning the specific technical elements of a particular sport, they need opportunities to develop a wide range of fundamental motor skills and abilities. Running, jumping, landing, throwing, catching, rolling, balance, changes of direction and body control are not merely “introductory” activities, but the foundation on which sports technique is later built. Our aim is to convey this message to coaches, teachers, early childhood educators and all professionals working with children around the world. Regardless of the sport, system or country, a child needs a varied and developmentally appropriate movement foundation before specialisation.

Early specialisation may have its place in later stages of development, but it should not replace fundamental motor preparation. A child with a broader base of motor knowledge learns new tasks more easily, adapts to different situations and progresses more effectively towards the specific demands of a particular sport. Through this handbook, we wish to encourage an approach in which sport is not learned “from the top”, but from the foundations. We do not want a child's first contact with sport to focus immediately on results, tactics or specific technique, but on developing the body, movement, safety and motor competence.

Our aim is not to delay participation in sport, but to improve its quality. First, we teach a child how to move, then how to apply what they have learned, and only then how to become an athlete in a particular discipline. In this handbook, you will have the opportunity to read basic theoretical guidelines, become familiar with key concepts and see practical examples of exercises and tasks for developing fundamental motor skills and abilities.

Alongside the handbook, videos will also be available on the STEPS e-learning platform, showing the correct execution of exercises, their variations and ways of using them when working with children.

In this way, we aim to connect theoretical knowledge, practical guidance and visual demonstrations so that coaches, teachers and other professionals can easily apply the content in their everyday work.



2. What are fundamental motor skills

Fundamental motor skills (Fundamental Motor Skills – FMS) are basic, learned movement patterns that form the foundation for participation in physical activities, play and sport. They include different forms of movement, maintaining balance, controlling one's own body and manipulating objects, and their development is important for subsequently learning more complex motor tasks and specific sports techniques. Unlike natural growth and maturation, proficient performance of fundamental motor skills does not develop on its own. Children need time, repetition, appropriate encouragement and structured opportunities to learn through play and movement. This is precisely why adults who work with children – coaches, teachers, early childhood educators and parents – play an important role in creating an environment that encourages safe, varied and developmentally appropriate movement. Well-developed fundamental motor skills enable a child to take part in different forms of physical activity more safely and successfully. They provide a basis for running, jumping, throwing, catching, maintaining balance, changing direction and many other forms of movement encountered in everyday life and sport. At the same time, success in movement can contribute to a child's greater self-confidence, sense of competence and positive attitude towards physical activity. A child who has opportunities to experience different ways of moving, explore their own capabilities and gradually acquire new skills gains firmer foundations for future participation in sport, recreation and an active lifestyle.

We divide fundamental motor skills into three key categories:

- Locomotor skills: Movements that transport the body from one place to another (e.g. running, jumping, hopping).
- Manipulative skills (object control): Movements involving the handling of objects, receiving or applying force to an object (e.g. throwing, catching, kicking, dribbling a ball).
- Stability skills (balance): Movements aimed at maintaining body control and balance while stationary or moving (e.g. standing on one leg, rotations, landings).

Ability, skill and motor knowledge

Although related, the terms motor ability, motor skill and motor knowledge do not mean the same thing.

Motor ability = the body's capacity; it tells us what a child can do.

Motor skill = a learned way of performing a movement; it tells us which movement the child has learned to perform.

Motor knowledge = the ability to apply a learned skill correctly and adapt it to different situations; it shows how successfully a child can use that skill in different situations.

For example, when catching a ball, a child uses coordination, balance and reaction speed – these are motor abilities. Catching the ball itself is a motor skill. When a child learns to judge the ball's trajectory, adjust their body position and successfully catch different passes, we speak of more developed motor knowledge. Distinguishing between motor abilities, motor skills and motor knowledge is important for effective planning and programming of kinesiology-based activities. In this way, the coach can determine more precisely whether a particular difficulty results from insufficiently developed abilities, an insufficiently learned movement pattern or an inability to apply learned motor content under changing conditions.

For example, an unsuccessful attempt to catch a ball does not necessarily mean that the child has not learned the catching technique. The cause may be insufficiently developed coordination, balance, spatial orientation, reaction speed or the ability to judge an object's trajectory.

This understanding enables the coach to choose more appropriate teaching methods, activities, workload and task progression, rather than reducing training to mechanical repetition of the same exercise. The aim of working with children is not merely to acquire an individual motor pattern, but to develop the ability to apply it consistently, efficiently and adaptively under different spatial, temporal and situational conditions. For the coach, this means monitoring not only the outcome of performance, but also the quality of motor control, movement coordination, adaptation to the task and the ability to transfer learning to new situations. This approach enables a more systematic development of motor competence and creates a sound foundation for subsequently learning more complex sports techniques.

3. Fundamental motor skills

Fundamental motor skills are learned patterns that enable participation in different games and physical activities. We classify them as locomotor skills, stability skills and manipulative skills. This classification is useful for planning, although the categories often overlap in actual movement.

Category	Examples	STEPS video
Body movement	Walking, running, hopping, jumping	Running forwards and backwards; two-foot jump
Postural control	Standing, weight transfer, balance	Standing on one leg; walking along a line
Working with objects	Rolling, catching, throwing	Ball exercises

The eleven selected exercises provide a clear starting point, but do not cover the entire movement spectrum. The programme should also include climbing, crawling, sideways movement, turns, different types of jumps, kicks, throwing objects of different sizes, and cooperation and reaction games. Success in a simple exercise allows progression to a more complex one, so these exercises are a good starting point for learning fundamental motor exercises. Walking along a line, for example, precedes a task in which a child simultaneously steps over low obstacles and adjusts their stride length.

When planning a week of training, note which types of movement feature in your programme. If running and jumping are constantly repeated, add object manipulation and postural control. One new task per session may be enough to make the programme more varied without overloading children.

4. Child development between six and twelve years of age

According to Gallahue, Ozmun and Goodway in the book *Understanding Motor Development*, and according to Findak (7), childhood from approximately 6 to 12 years of age is a particularly important period for developing and refining motor abilities and motor knowledge. Both approaches emphasise that sound motor development is based not only on biological maturation, but also on systematic, developmentally appropriate and varied physical exercise. At this age, children should be given many different motor experiences – running, jumping, throwing, catching, maintaining balance, changing direction and speed, and solving different motor tasks. This breadth of activities contributes to the development of coordination, balance, speed, strength, accuracy and other motor abilities, and creates a sound foundation for subsequently learning more complex sports techniques. Work with children of this age should therefore focus primarily on building a broad motor foundation, while sport-specific knowledge and gradual specialisation should build on fundamental movement patterns already acquired.

The coach's role between 6 and 12 years of age

Between 6 and 12 years of age, the coach plays an important role in shaping a child's motor development, because this is when children intensively acquire and refine fundamental movement patterns and lay the foundations for later sport-specific skills. The coach's role is therefore not only to teach the technique of a particular sport, but above all to create a high-quality, safe and developmentally appropriate environment for learning movement. The coach should plan activities that encourage a wide range of motor experiences, including running, jumping, throwing, catching, balance, coordination, changes of direction, rhythm and body control. It is important to build tasks gradually from simpler to more complex ones, and to adapt the demands to the child's chronological and developmental age, individual abilities and previous experience.

It is particularly important that, at this age, the coach does not direct the child exclusively towards sport-specific technique and results too early. The emphasis should be on movement quality, correct execution, variety of activities and the development of motor competence. A child who acquires a broad motor foundation will find it easier to learn more complex technical elements later and adapt them to different situations in sport.

The coach also has an important educational role. Communication, feedback, a sense of success and a motivating atmosphere significantly influence a child's attitude towards physical activity. Training should therefore be sufficiently structured to encourage learning, while retaining elements of play, exploration, challenge and enjoyment in movement.

A good coach at this age does not assess a child solely by the outcome of a task, but observes how movements are performed, motor control, adaptation to changing conditions and progress over time. This lays the foundations not only for future sporting development, but also for the child's long-term active and positive relationship with movement.

Age	Coaching focus	Example instruction
6–8 years	Play, exploration, simple tasks and plenty of repetition	"Look at the line, walk steadily, then try again."
9–10 years	Linking movements and gradually changing conditions	"Jump over the markers and land steadily."
11–12 years	More complex sequences, self-assessment and cooperation	"Choose a distance from which you can hit the target accurately."



5. Classification of fundamental motor skills

1. Locomotor skills

Locomotor skills enable a child to move their body from one place to another. They form the basis of almost all forms of movement in everyday life, play and sport. This category includes walking, running, jumping, hopping, skipping, galloping, sideways movement and dodging.

Locomotor skills are not merely a way of “moving through space”. Through them, a child learns to control the direction, rhythm, pathway and pace of their own movement, and to adapt movement to the environment and other participants. It is therefore important not always to practise the same skills under completely identical conditions.

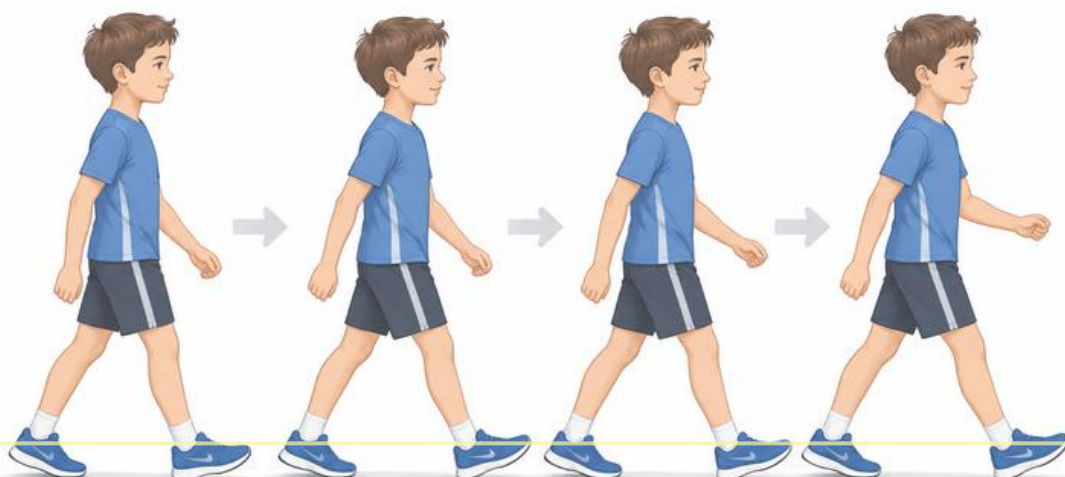
Walking

Walking is one of the basic locomotor patterns that children most commonly acquire at around one year of age. During walking, body weight transfers from one leg to the other, with at least one foot always in contact with the ground. Correct execution involves an upright body position, looking forwards, natural arm action opposite to leg action, and a controlled roll of the foot from the heel towards the forefoot. For children, walking should be viewed not only as an everyday activity, but also as something to learn.

It can be performed:

- along different pathways
- with changes of direction
- on the toes or heels
- over or between obstacles
- at different rhythms
- in pairs or groups.
- along a straight or marked line
- forwards, backwards and sideways

The aim is not to achieve “beautiful walking”, but to develop safe and adaptable performance that the child can use in different situations.

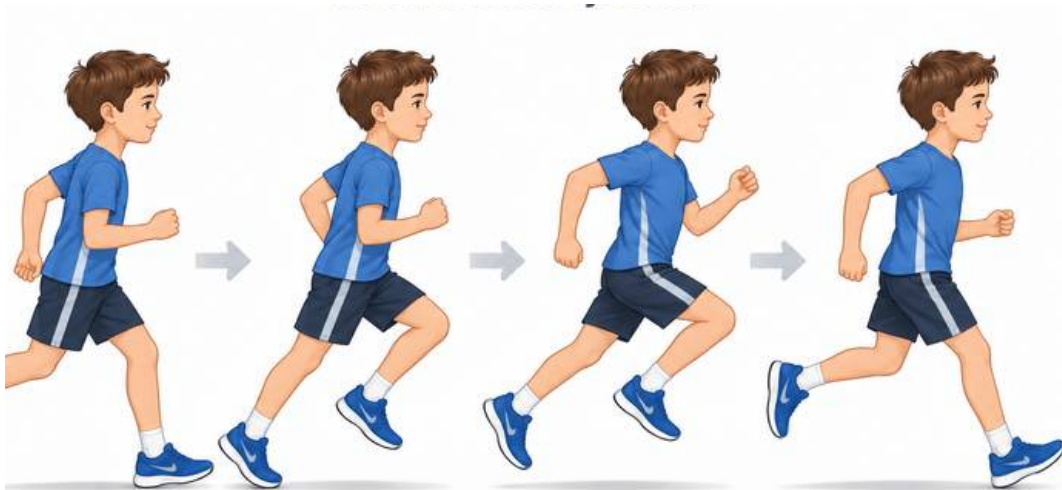


Running

Running differs from walking in having a flight phase, a moment when neither foot is in contact with the ground. With more mature execution, the stride becomes rhythmic and even, the arms move opposite to the legs, and the body naturally adapts to the direction and speed of movement. When teaching running, it is not enough simply to ask a child to “run fast”; it is much more important that the child learns to:

- react to another person or object
- vary the rhythm of movement
- run forwards, diagonally or sideways
- run along different pathways
- change direction
- stop on a signal

Such tasks prepare a child for later sports in which running is almost never straight-line and entirely predictable.



Jumping

Jumping involves taking off from one or both feet and a flight phase followed by a controlled landing. It may be performed for distance, height or a combination of the two. Initially, children often jump stiffly, with little arm swing and an unsteady landing. It is therefore important to teach jumping gradually: first a simple take-off and landing, then jumps over lines and low obstacles, and only later combined and more complex tasks.

When teaching, it is useful to focus attention on:

- preparing the body before take-off
- arm swing
- take-off
- controlling body position in flight
- a soft and stable landing.

A jump is an excellent example of a skill that later becomes an integral part of many sports techniques, but before specialisation, a child needs experience of different forms of jumping.

Hopping

Hopping on one foot is a more complex locomotor skill because it requires repeated take-offs and landings on the same foot while maintaining rhythm and body control. Children should practise hopping on each foot separately, on the spot, forwards, sideways, through marked spaces or in simple rhythmic tasks.

It is important to avoid an early insistence on using only the “dominant” leg. The aim is to develop functional control of both sides of the body.



Skipping

Skipping is a rhythmically more complex form of locomotor movement that combines a step and a hop. It requires coordinated alternation of the legs and maintenance of the correct rhythm. Children often need more time to learn it, so it is useful to break the task down first, for example into:

step – hop – step – hop

Only then are the elements linked into continuous movement.

Skipping is particularly useful because it connects body control, rhythm and alternating sides of the body.



2. Stability skills

Stability skills concern body control in situations in which a child maintains or re-establishes a stable position. They include static and dynamic balance, rotations, stopping, landing, bending, turning and transferring body weight. These skills are often less visible than running or throwing, but form an essential foundation for almost every more complex movement. Before performing a good jump, throw or strike, a child must be able to organise and control their own body position.

When teaching stability skills, the coach should gradually increase task difficulty. It is advisable to start with simple and stable positions, then introduce a narrower base of support, changes of direction, different surfaces, movement, rotations and combinations of several elements. The aim is not merely for a child to “keep their balance”, but to learn to control their body in different positions and situations and adapt movement to the demands of the task. This is precisely why stability skills are an important foundation for subsequently learning more complex sports techniques and participating more safely in physical activity.



Balance

In this context, balance is not trained as an isolated ability, but is learned through specific motor tasks.

Examples include:

- changing body position without losing control
- standing on one leg
- walking along a line or a low bench
- holding different positions
- moving on uneven or varied surfaces
- stopping after movement.



The coach gradually increases difficulty by changing the support, direction and position.

Landing

Landing is an extremely important fundamental skill because it completes a large number of jumps and other movements. A good landing is not merely “getting onto your feet”; it requires controlled acceptance of body weight, stabilising the body and maintaining balance after contact with the ground.

Children should develop:

- landing from low heights
- landing after a forward or sideways jump
- holding the final position.
- landing after a turn
- landing on both feet

A simple instruction is particularly useful: “Land and freeze.” This allows the coach to see immediately whether the child controls the end of the movement.

A good landing is not merely “getting onto your feet”; it requires controlled acceptance of body weight, stabilising the body and maintaining balance after contact with the ground.





Rotations and turns

Rotations involve turning the body around its longitudinal, transverse or sagittal axis. In practical work, these may include:

- turning on the spot
- turning during a jump
- rolling
- rolling over
- changing the direction of the body
- simple gymnastic movements.

In this way, children become aware of their own body position in space and learn to control movement when visual and spatial orientation change rapidly.

Weight transfer

Transferring body weight occurs in almost all more complex skills. A child learns to transfer weight from one leg to the other, from the feet to the hands, between different points of support or through different body positions. Examples may include:

- lunges
- crawling
- moving on all fours
- moving from sitting to standing

The aim is to develop safe body control before introducing more complex sporting demands.

3. Manipulative skills

Manipulative skills, or object-control skills, concern movements in which a child acts on or controls an external object. This is most often a ball, hoop, bag, stick, racket or another piece of equipment. This category includes throwing, catching, rolling, striking with the hand, kicking, dribbling a ball and striking with an object such as a racket or stick. This category includes throwing, catching, rolling, striking with the hand, kicking, dribbling a ball and striking with an object such as a racket or stick.

Throwing means directing an object towards a particular area or target using a coordinated movement of the body.

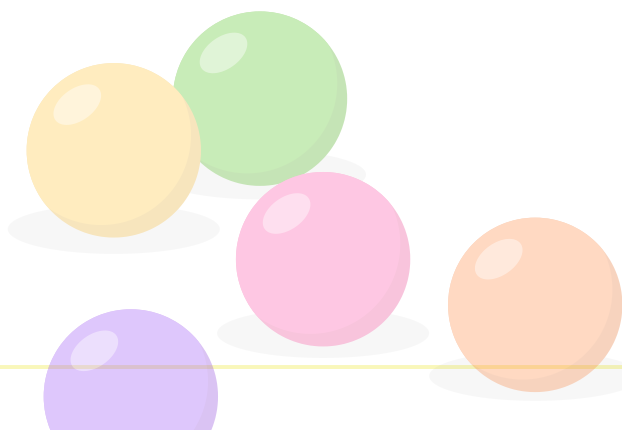
Children should experience different forms:

- throwing at a target
- underarm throwing
- one-handed overarm throwing
- throwing with both hands
- throwing over different distances.
- throwing to a partner

Throwing



Good execution involves the whole body, not just arm movement. However, beginners do not need to be expected to show perfect technique immediately; it is more important to offer many successful throwing experiences.



Catching

Catching involves receiving and controlling an object moving towards the child.

Learning should begin with objects that move more slowly and are easier to track, such as larger soft balls or balloons.

Progression may start with:

- catching an object from very close range
- catching after a bounce
- catching from different heights
- catching while moving
- catching after a change of direction.

The aim is not merely for a child to “catch the ball”, but to learn to judge its trajectory, adopt an appropriate position and adjust their hands to the moment of contact.



Rolling

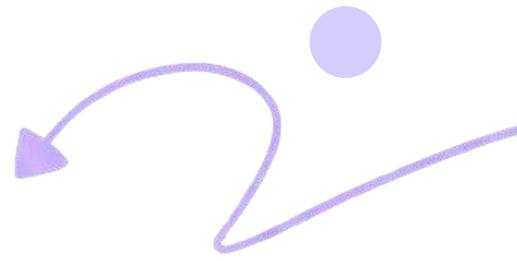
Rolling an object is one of the simpler manipulative skills and a good introduction to understanding direction, force and object control.

It can be practised through:

- rolling between cones
- aiming at a target
- rolling with the dominant and non-dominant hand.
- rolling to a partner



Dribbling a ball



In hand dribbling, a child learns to coordinate contact with the ball and their own movement. In foot dribbling, they learn to control the ball's distance from the body and adapt touches to the direction of movement. We can practise

- changing direction
- dribbling through obstacles
- switching hands or feet.
- dribbling along a straight line
- dribbling on the spot

Dribbling can be performed with the hand or foot, depending on the task. Striking an object can be performed with the hand, a racket, a stick or other equipment. It requires judging the timing and point of contact between the child and the object.

Progression may be: a stationary object → an object that moves slowly → striking towards a target → striking while moving.



For beginners, it is best to use larger, slower objects and short equipment.

6. How to teach an exercise

The coach first demonstrates the task from a position where children can clearly see the key movement. The instruction is short and describes one or two things: “Look at the target” and “Put the ball on the ground”. After a few attempts, the coach gives specific feedback and allows another attempt.

Step	Coach's action
Demonstrate	Show the complete movement once at normal speed.
Explain	Highlight one key cue for execution.
Allow a try	Allow several attempts with as little waiting as possible.
Adapt	Change the distance, height, ball or pace.
Check	Ask the child what helped them succeed.

Progressing from easier to harder

Change only one requirement at a time. If a child can jump over flat markers steadily, introduce a low obstacle with the same spacing. Once they have mastered the height, change the spacing or direction. A more complex task is not automatically better: use it when the child retains control and enjoys taking part.

Application in training

A useful question after an attempt is: “What did you change that made the ball go between the cones?” The child connects their own action with the outcome. The coach then confirms the observation or demonstrates the next step.



7. Safety and inclusion of children

Before the training session, always check the surface, markers, obstacles and clear space around the stations. For jumping, ensure sufficient spacing between children; for throwing, define the direction and when balls should be collected. A child who experiences pain, dizziness or marked discomfort should stop the task and approach a responsible adult.

Adaptation does not have to mean separating a child from the group. A child can stand on one leg with light support, step over a lower obstacle or use a larger soft ball. The aim remains participation and the development of the same movement pattern.

- Offer a choice of easier and more challenging stations without publicly ranking children.
- Allow enough time to understand and perform the task; repeat the demonstration if necessary.
- Assess success by personal progress, not only by peers' results.
- For individual health restrictions, follow information from parents and guidance from the relevant professionals.

Note: these guidelines for coaches do not replace an individual health assessment.

Participation as part of teaching

Coaches are often short of time and therefore reduce practice time – when precisely the opposite is needed: plenty of practice time, small groups where feasible, equipment available to all children, and avoiding games in which a child is eliminated and waits for a long time. The coach can change the rules, space, equipment and task demands so that children have a genuine opportunity to participate.

Emotional safety must be protected alongside physical safety: a child should be able to try an easier level without being embarrassed in front of peers.



8. Selected basic steps exercises

1. Running forwards (Forward running)

Aim: Coordinate stride rhythm and arm action.

Execution: The child runs along a straight path; the arms are bent and move alternately with the legs, with the gaze directed forwards.

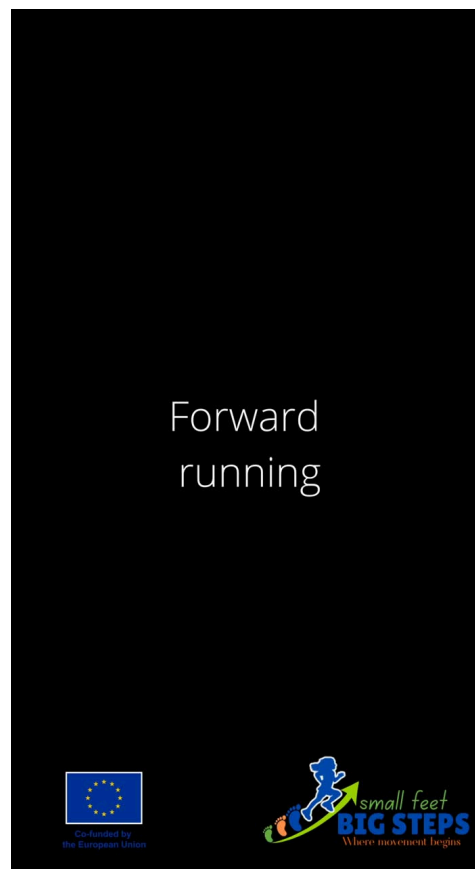
The coach observes: Relaxed shoulders, a clear path and a controlled stop.

Easier version: A short distance at an easy pace.

More challenging version: A change of pace while maintaining coordination.

Instructions for the coach: Ensure a clear path and space to stop. Observe whether the arms move freely and in coordination with the legs.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin with gentle running over a short distance, following a straight line, then gradually vary the pace or length of the path.



Once a child has learned a basic and correct running pattern, a game of tag is the natural next step in developing the skill. Tag adds changes of direction, stopping, acceleration, deceleration and reactions to other participants' movements. In this way, the child applies the learned pattern in a dynamic and unpredictable environment, while play with peers also increases motivation, engagement and enjoyment in movement.

2. Walking and running backwards (Backward walking and running)

Aim: Improve orientation and control when moving backwards.

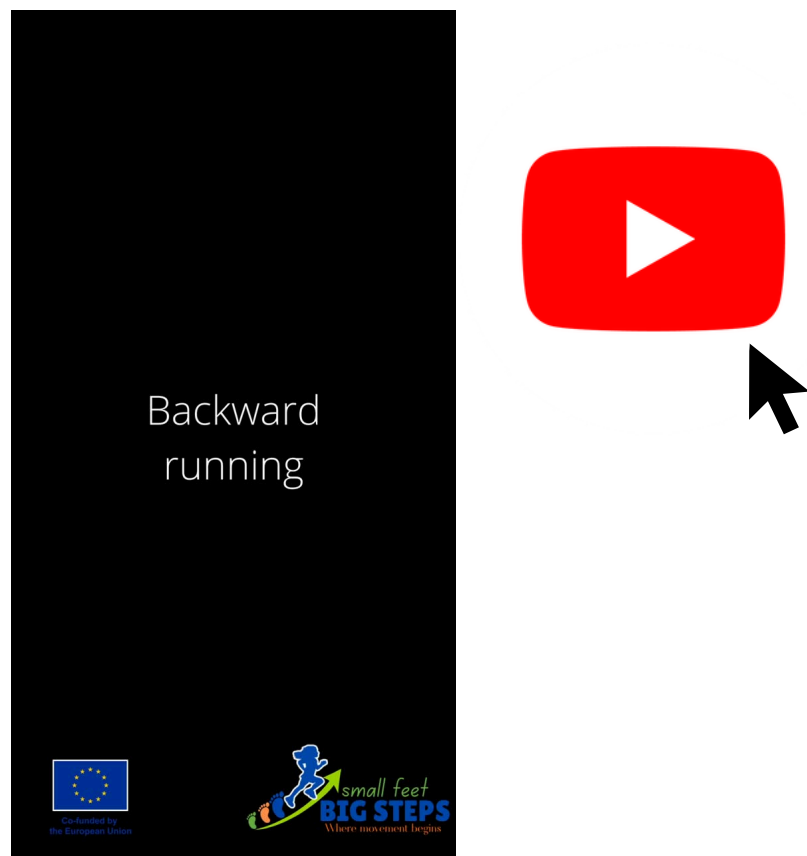
Execution: The child walks backwards with short steps, then gradually moves into a gentle run, occasionally checking the space behind them.

The coach observes: An upright trunk, a safe path and sufficient spacing between children.

Easier version: Walking 5–10 m.

More challenging version: Alternating walking and gentle running.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin with backward walking along a short, clearly marked straight line. If necessary, reduce the distance and pace and use visual floor markers or assistance from a coach moving alongside the child. As the child gains confidence in moving, gradually introduce gentle running, changes of pace or a longer path.



Once a child has learned the correct walking pattern, the skill can be further developed through a game of tag in which all participants move only by walking. In this way, the child maintains correct technique but applies it in a more dynamic situation involving changes of direction, reactions to other participants and adapting movement to the space.

A larger number of children can join the game, and different equipment can provide additional motivation, for example a ball used for “tagging” or a soft sponge used to mark a tagged player by touch. Such variations make the task more interesting while encouraging the use of the learned walking pattern in play and peer interaction.

3. Standing on one leg (Single-leg balance)

Aim: Maintain a stable position on one leg.

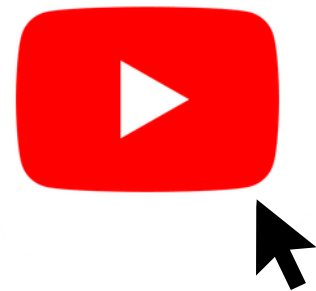
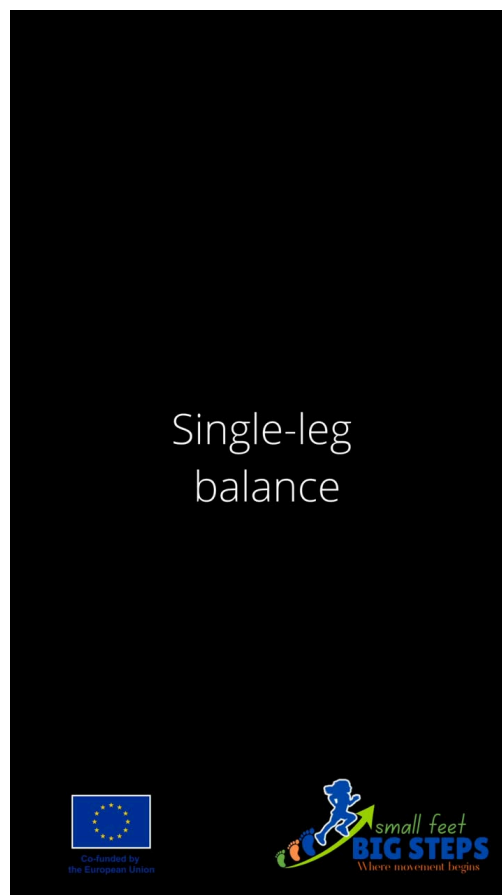
Execution: The child raises one knee in front of the body, stands for a few seconds and changes legs.

The coach observes: An upright trunk and gaze fixed on one point, without forcing the duration.

Easier version: Light hand support.

More challenging version: Holding the position longer without support.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Provide secure hand support and shorten the time the position is held. If necessary, the foot can be placed beside a clearly marked point on the floor to help the child maintain the position. The coach can stand alongside the child and provide minimal physical support. As stability improves, gradually reduce support and increase standing time.



Drawing the outline of a foot on the floor with chalk gives the child a better sense of a stable position while performing the exercise. This visual marker helps them maintain the starting position more easily and notice whether their foot moves outside the intended place. In this way, the child receives clear feedback about their own static stability and control of body position.

4. Walking along a line for balance (Balance walk)

Aim: Control body position while walking with a narrow base.

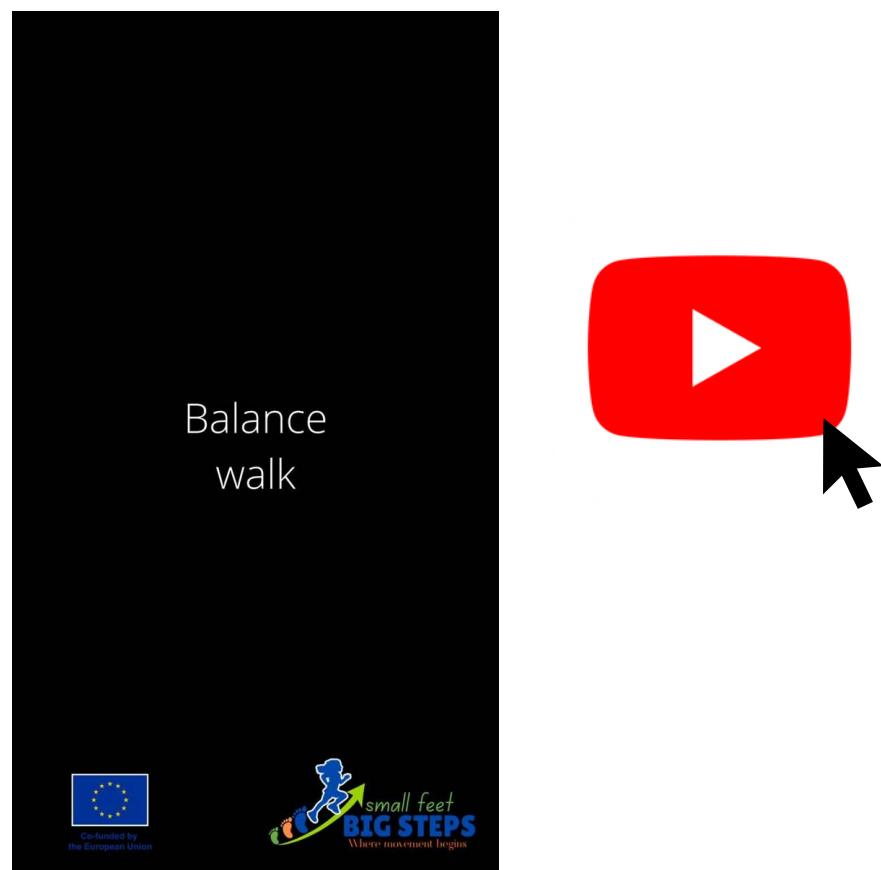
Execution: The child walks along a straight marker, placing one foot in front of the other, extending the arms sideways if necessary.

The coach observes: Steady steps; if balance is lost, the child pauses and continues.

Easier version: Wider spacing between the feet.

More challenging version: Arms by the sides or heel-to-toe walking.

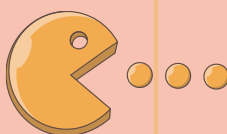
Adaptation for children with disabilities: Use a wider, clearly visible line or strip on the floor and shorten the path. If necessary, provide light hand support, assistance from the coach or walking beside a wall. The child can first practise individual steps with pauses, then gradually link more steps together. As confidence and balance improve, gradually narrow the path and reduce the level of assistance.



Once a child has learned the correct walking pattern, the skill can be further developed through a game of tag along marked lines, like Pacman. All participants may move only along lines drawn on the playground or existing lines in the sports hall.

The game involves a larger number of children, with one or more players acting as taggers. While moving, children must follow the lines, change direction, stop and adapt their movement to other participants.

In this way, the learned walking pattern is applied in a dynamic and unpredictable situation, while further developing spatial orientation, body control and navigation in space. The game is easy to organise, highly motivating and easily adapted to the number of children and the size of the space.



5. Dynamic walking over obstacles (Dynamic balance walk)

Aim: Transfer weight and adjust step height.

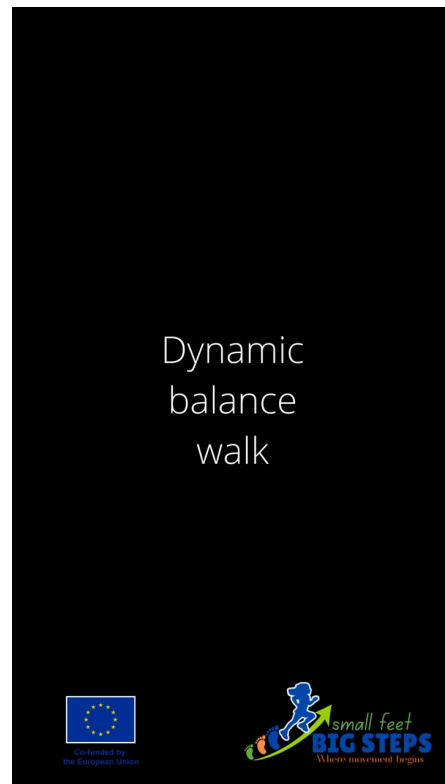
Execution: The child walks over flat markers, then over low obstacles, raising each leg and lowering it with control.

The coach observes: No rushing or catching the feet on obstacles; adjust the height to the child.

Easier version: Flat markers on the ground.

More challenging version: Low obstacles of different heights and varying distances between them.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin with clearly marked straight lines or very low obstacles spaced farther apart. Allow a slower pace, enough time to prepare each step and, if necessary, light support or assistance from the coach. Obstacles should be soft and easy to move to reduce the risk of falling. As the child becomes more confident, gradually increase the number or height of the obstacles, or vary the spacing.



Once a child has learned the correct pattern of walking and jumping over obstacles, training can be further enriched by setting up different obstacles for the child to negotiate while moving. The obstacles may vary in height, width and arrangement, and cones, hoops, low hurdles, floor lines or other safe equipment can be used. The child moves through the course by walking, jumping over obstacles or combining different movement patterns.

In this way, learned skills are applied in a more varied and dynamic environment, and training becomes more interesting and motivating. It is important to increase obstacle difficulty gradually and ensure that the child retains movement control and safe execution in every task.

6. Two-foot jump (Two-foot jump)

Aim: Learn a simultaneous take-off and stable landing on both feet.

Execution: The child bends the knees, jumps on the spot and lands on both feet, bending the knees again.

The coach observes: Take-off from both feet and a steady landing before the next jump.

Easier version: Individual jumps with a pause.

More challenging version: Several linked jumps.

Landing safety instructions: The child should land on both feet simultaneously, with the knees slightly bent and the feet pointing forwards. The knees should follow the direction of the feet and must not move inwards uncontrollably. The landing should be soft and quiet, without landing on fully straightened legs. Before the next jump, the child should regain balance and a stable body position. The surface must be level, dry, non-slip and free of objects that could cause tripping.

Easier version: Individual jumps with a pause between repetitions.

More challenging version: Several linked jumps in succession or jumps over low markers.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin with smaller jumps or practise take-off and landing without emphasising jump height. If necessary, use clearly marked take-off and landing points and provide light support or help from the coach. Pay particular attention to a soft, stable landing before every new attempt. As the child gains confidence, gradually increase the number of linked jumps or the jump distance.



Once the correct two-foot jumping pattern has been learned, place or draw circles at distances into which the child should jump in succession.

7. Hopping on one foot (Hop on one foot)

Aim: Develop take-off and balance on one leg.

Execution: The child performs several hops on the same foot, then changes legs.

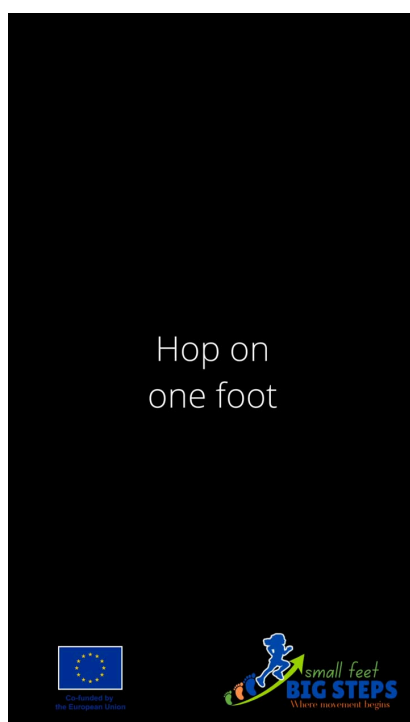
The coach observes: A slightly bent knee on landing, stability and use of both legs.

Landing safety instructions: The child should land softly on the forefoot and midfoot, with the knee slightly bent and following the direction of the foot. Avoid landing on a fully straightened leg and uncontrolled inward movement of the knee. After each hop, the child should maintain balance before continuing the task. The surface must be level, dry and non-slip, with sufficient space between children.

Easier version: One hop, then stopping and regaining balance.

More challenging version: Several linked hops in succession, moving forwards or hopping between clearly marked points.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin with individual, very small hops, with the option of holding a stable support or receiving help from the coach. Use clearly marked take-off and landing points and allow enough time to regain balance after each attempt. If necessary, reduce the number of repetitions and the distance requirement. As the child becomes more confident, gradually reduce assistance and introduce linked hops.



Allow practice with the left and right leg. If the child finds one side harder, reduce the number of attempts or introduce a brief balance hold before the next hop. The aim is to learn control on both sides.

8. Jumping over obstacles (Jump over obstacles)

Aim: Apply a two-foot take-off and landing while judging the obstacle.

Execution: The child jumps over a series of flat markers or low hurdles with both feet; after forward jumps, they can try sideways jumps.

The coach observes: Adjust height and spacing; the landing is stable, with slightly bent knees.

Safety instructions: Use low, soft obstacles that are easy to move. Ensure a level, dry, non-slip surface and sufficient spacing between children. The child should not progress to a higher or more distant obstacle until they can safely perform the previous task level. After each landing, they should regain balance before the next jump.

Easier version: Jumping over flat markers or strips laid on the ground.

More challenging version: Jumping over low obstacles, varying the spacing between obstacles or jumping sideways.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin by stepping over, or making a small two-foot jump over, a wide, clearly visible ground marker. If necessary, reduce the number of obstacles, increase the spacing between them and allow a longer pause between attempts. The coach can demonstrate each movement, use visual markers for take-off and landing points, and provide support for balance if needed. If the child cannot yet jump over an obstacle safely, first practise a two-foot take-off and landing without an obstacle.



The course may contain two routes: flat markers and low hurdles. The child chooses the route on which they can land steadily, and the coach guides them towards the next challenge based on their performance. A raised obstacle is appropriate only after a stable landing has been achieved.

9. Rolling a ball towards a target (Rolling a ball)

Aim: Judge the direction and force of the ball's movement along the ground.

Execution: The child bends slightly and rolls the ball towards a cone or the space between two cones.

The coach observes: The ball starts low and stays on the ground; the target is clearly visible.

Easier version: A closer and wider target.

More challenging version: A farther or narrower target.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Place a large, clearly marked target at a short distance and use a larger, lighter or slower ball. The child can perform the task sitting, kneeling or standing, depending on their abilities. If necessary, the coach can help guide the hand or demonstrate the movement. As the child gains confidence, gradually increase the distance and reduce the target size.



For tasks involving a ball, vary its size and softness. Rolling can precede throwing because the child can more easily see the relationship between the direction of the hand and the ball's trajectory. Catching requires judging the incoming ball, so the partner should adapt the pass.

10. Catching a ball (Catching a ball)

Aim: Track the trajectory and adjust hand position.

Execution: The child watches the ball sent by a partner, catches it with both hands and draws it gently towards the body.

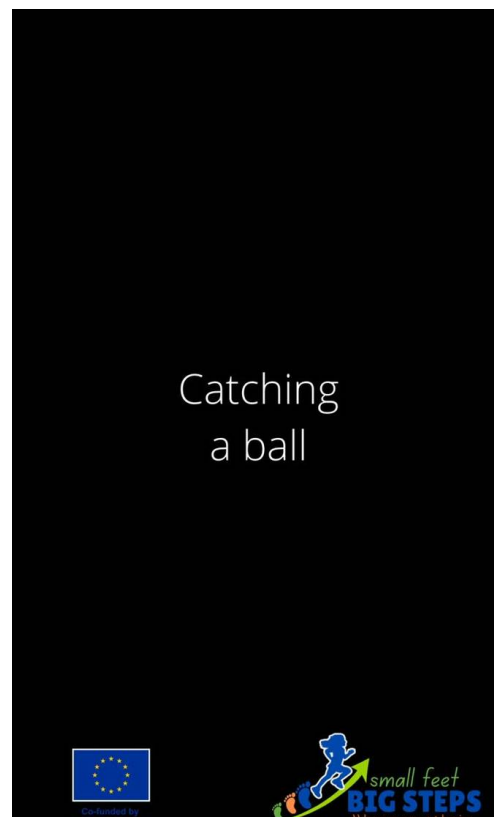
The coach observes: A pass suited to the child's reaction speed; use a soft ball if necessary.

Safety instructions: Passes should be controlled and directed towards the chest, not the face. Ensure sufficient spacing between children and clear space without obstacles. Do not increase passing speed until the child can safely catch the ball at the initial distance.

Easier version: A larger, softer ball, a shorter distance and a slow, predictable pass at chest height.

More challenging version: A greater distance, different ball heights and trajectories, and catching after one bounce.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Begin at a very short distance with a large, soft ball that moves more slowly. If catching the ball in the air is too demanding, it can first be rolled or passed after one bounce. The coach can clearly announce when the pass will be made, demonstrate hand position and use visual markers to show where the child should stand. If necessary, reduce speed and repetitions, and gradually increase the demands only when the child tracks and catches the ball confidently.



For tasks involving a ball, vary its size and softness. Rolling can precede throwing because the child can more easily see the relationship between the direction of the hand and the ball's trajectory. Catching requires judging the incoming ball, so the partner should adapt the pass.

11. Throwing a ball at a target (Ball throwing at target)

Aim: Develop accuracy in directing the ball.

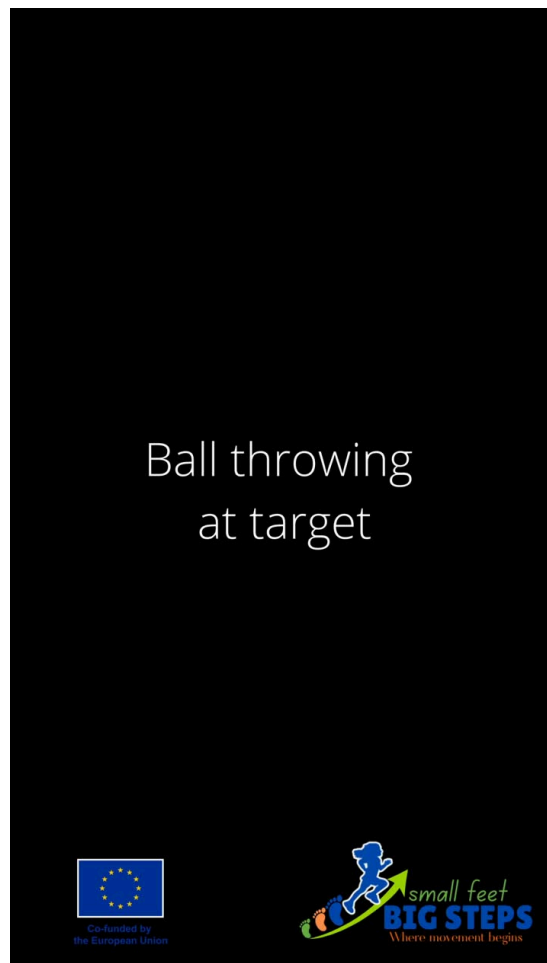
Execution: The child stands behind a marker and throws the ball towards a cone, adjusting the direction and force of the attempt.

The coach observes: A safe throwing direction and awareness of where the ball finishes.

Easier version: A closer or larger target.

More challenging version: A farther or smaller target.

Adaptation for children with disabilities: Use a larger, light, soft ball and place a large, clearly visible target at a shorter distance. The child can throw while sitting, kneeling or standing, depending on their abilities. If necessary, use visual markers for the throwing direction and allow more time to prepare the movement. The coach can demonstrate the task or provide gentle physical assistance to guide the hand. Adapt the distance, target size and throwing method to the child's individual abilities.



9. How to structure a training session

The sample training session lasts approximately 45 minutes. The times are indicative and refer to group organisation, not to a compulsory amount of work for each child. At each session, select a few exercises from different sections rather than all eleven.

Part	Duration	Example
Opening game	7 min	Moving through space and changing direction on a signal
Learning a pattern	10 min	Running forwards and backwards over short distances
Stations	18 min	Balance, two-foot jump, rolling or catching
Application game	7 min	A course with a choice of route and a ball task
Closing activity	3 min	Calming down and discussing one successful attempt

Example of gradual work over four sessions

- Session 1: moving forwards and backwards; balance on the spot.
- Session 2: walking along a line, stepping over markers and two-foot landing.
- Session 3: hopping and low obstacles; rolling a ball.
- Session 4: catching, throwing and a game linking familiar tasks.

Within each group, children can work at different levels of the same station. Organise rotations so that waiting is brief and the coach has time to observe performance.

In a group with different levels of experience, the same course can offer a choice: walking along or beside a line, flat markers or low obstacles, a closer or farther target. The coach explains both options, and children move to another level when their performance is stable.

10. Monitoring progress

Monitoring helps adapt teaching. Briefly record what the child performs independently, where they need help and what the next meaningful step is. Do not compare results with unverified norms or draw health conclusions from a single attempt.

Date and exercise	Succeeds independently	With help or an easier version	Next step
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Examples of observations

- Balance: holds the position for a few seconds without an extra step.
- Jump: lands steadily and can pause before the next repetition.
- Ball: follows the trajectory with the eyes and adjusts hand position.
- Participation: tries again, chooses a suitable challenge and understands the instruction.
- Repeat a familiar task under similar conditions every few weeks. A brief note and a conversation with the child are often more useful than merely counting successes.

The note “Catches a larger ball with both hands during a slow pass” is more useful than the label “poor at catching”. Such a record tells the coach what has been learned and which condition can be changed next time. Keep children’s data in accordance with the organisation’s rules.



11. Guidance for coaching children with disabilities

In this chapter, we have highlighted the most important adaptations a coach should know when working with children with developmental disabilities. It is important to emphasise that the basic STEPS exercises do not change. Children continue to work through the same fundamental motor activities listed earlier – walking, running, jumping, catching, throwing, rolling, dribbling a ball, maintaining balance, landing, transferring weight and other basic movement patterns.

What changes is the way the coach organises and presents the task. Depending on the child's needs, the space, distance, size and weight of equipment, number of instructions, pace of execution, number of repetitions, visual and verbal cues, and level of assistance can be adapted. The aim is not to separate the child from the activity, but to enable them to learn the same skill in a way suited to them. This approach allows all children to participate in the same fundamental motor activities, with individual adjustments to the conditions of execution. The coach should observe the child, identify where the difficulty arises and adapt the task so that it remains achievable, safe and sufficiently challenging.

The STEPS approach therefore starts from a simple principle: the exercise remains the same, but the route to successful execution may be different for each child. In this way, we create an inclusive environment in which children with developmental disabilities can participate equally, learn and progress through the same fundamental motor skills as other children.



11. Guidance for coaching children with disabilities

A child with coordination and motor planning difficulties

It is useful to:

- demonstrate the movement before execution
- give only one or two instructions at a time
- use floor markers, lines, hoops or cones
- allow more repetitions without time pressure
- keep the same task arrangement until the child gains confidence.

For a child who finds movement sequences difficult to organise, break a complex task into smaller parts

A child with intellectual disabilities

For children with intellectual disabilities, teaching should be clear, repeatable and focused on concrete steps. Tasks need to be broken into smaller parts, with a consistent routine.

“demonstrate → try → repeat”

The coach provides a clear model, the child tries, and the task is then repeated with support. Praise is given for effort and every improvement, without comparison with others. Progress is made in small steps. Once the child has mastered the basic task, introduce only one new variable – for example, a greater distance.

11. Guidance for coaching children with disabilities

A child with reduced balance or body control

If a child has difficulty maintaining a stable position, first increase the base of support and reduce the task's difficulty.

- instead of standing on one leg → standing with the feet apart
- instead of a narrow line → a wide marked path
- instead of a long hold → 2–3 seconds.

For jumping, instead of a standing long jump, use landings in a marked area with a soft landing. Chalk foot outlines on the floor greatly help with correct body positioning and direction.

Difficulty is increased gradually:

wide base → narrower base → one leg → movement → change of direction

A child with attention and concentration difficulties

For children with attention difficulties, it is essential to keep the task short, clear and structured, with an obvious beginning and end. Execution time should be short (approximately 1–2 minutes per activity), with clear visual and verbal instructions. We organise tasks in short sequences with a single goal, without simultaneous instructions. The child needs to see what they are doing and where they are going. For motivation, we use elements of play, colour, rhythm and movement, but with a predictable sequence so that the child feels safe.

A child on the autism spectrum

Activity sequence: show the steps in advance and keep the same order.

Pictures and visual markers: show each step with a picture or pictogram. Training structure: a clear beginning, middle and end.

Demonstration: first show it briefly, then the child tries.

Noise reduction: train in a quiet space.

Gradual introduction of changes: change only one thing at a time.

11. Guidance for coaching children with disabilities

A child with physical or motor disabilities

The activity should be designed to be inclusive and flexible. Adapt the equipment, distance, duration and instructions so that the child can succeed.

Examples of adaptations:

Ways of throwing may include:

- standing
- sitting
- from a wheelchair
- with one or both hands



The aim remains to control the object and direct it towards the target.

- Use lighter, softer or larger objects.
- Reduce the distance to the target.
- Allow more time for execution.
- Provide support from assistants if necessary.
- Adapt body position to the child's abilities.

A child with speech or language comprehension difficulties

For children with speech difficulties, it is important to reduce the amount of verbal instruction and enhance understanding through support.

- Use simple, short sentences.
- Link instructions to movements and demonstration.
- Use pictures, symbols or gestures alongside speech.
- Give instructions step by step.

Example instruction sequence:



Consistency, routines and repetition will help the child understand and participate in the activity with greater confidence.

11. Guidance for coaching children with disabilities

A child with sensory sensitivity

A child with sensory sensitivity may be overwhelmed by stimuli from the environment, so we can provide:

Reduced stimulation: choose a calmer environment with fewer sounds, movements and people.

Softer balls: use softer balls that do not create loud sounds or strong pressure.

Avoiding sudden contact: do not stand too close to the child while they are preparing to receive the ball.

Introducing the equipment: show the ball before the activity so that the child can prepare mentally.

Short breaks: allow a break when the child shows signs of overload.



Example: We use a softer, lighter ball and allow rolling instead of throwing to reduce sensory overload.



CONCLUSION

The STEPS handbook is intended as a starting point for high-quality, developmentally appropriate work with children entering the world of sport. Its purpose is not to provide a ready-made recipe for every training session or to replace programmes specific to individual sports, but to give coaches, teachers and other professionals a clear foundation on which further work can be built safely and meaningfully.

Before learning more complex sports techniques, tactics and the specific demands of a particular sport, a child needs to develop a broad base of fundamental motor skills. Walking, running, jumping, catching, throwing, rolling, dribbling objects, maintaining balance, landing, changing direction and controlling one's own body are the basic patterns on which more complex sporting activities are later built.

This is precisely why STEPS follows the principles of progressing from simple to complex, from general to specific, and from foundations to sports specialisation. A child with well-developed basic movement patterns learns new tasks more easily, moves more safely, adapts better to different situations and is better prepared for the demands of the sport they will later choose.

This handbook therefore does not represent the end of the learning process, but its beginning. Its exercises and guidelines should serve as a foundation from which the coach can develop further activities, adapt them to children's age, experience and needs, and gradually introduce more complex motor and sports tasks.

It is particularly important to keep the child at the centre of the process. The aim is not to produce a specialised athlete as early as possible, but to enable every child to develop motor competence, confidence and a positive attitude towards physical activity through play, exploration, repetition and varied movement.

A good start can have a long-term impact. The more stable the motor foundation, the greater the likelihood that the child will later find it easier to learn sports technique, participate more successfully in different activities and maintain the habit of movement throughout life.



STEPS is therefore the first step – not towards earlier specialisation, but towards better child development. It is up to coaches, teachers and other professionals to build everything that follows on this foundation carefully, gradually and responsibly.

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