

Even if they aren't sporty, all kids need to throw and catch. How can you help if your child is struggling?

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Throwing and catching skills can then be applied in more complex activities, from basketball to cricket. Credit: [Anete Lusina/Pexels](#), [CC BY](#)

Apart from literacy and numeracy, some of the most important skills

children learn in their primary school years are throwing and catching. These are considered "[fundamental movement skills](#)" because they underpin other, more complicated physical activities.

For many years, researchers have been highlighting concerns about a decline in children's throwing and catching skills.

How can parents help their children develop these important skills?

Why is it so important to be able to throw and catch?

Not every child will go to the Olympics or want to. But it is important they develop fundamental [movement](#) skills (along with ball skills, these include running, skipping and balancing).

These skills are seen as "fundamental" because they are needed to [engage in physical activities](#) effectively and confidently. These also form the [basis of skills](#) in all other sports.

So even if they are not going to be a sporty child or sporty adult, these skills will give kids the essentials they need to remain active and healthy throughout their lives. As [research tells us](#), the foundation for an [active lifestyle](#) is formed in [early childhood](#).

Children need help to learn

By the time a child is [about five](#), they should be able to throw using a coordinated movement of the throwing arm and opposite leg stepping forward. They should be able to catch using their hands only.

A common [misconception](#) is that children learn skills such as throwing and catching automatically. But research both [overseas](#) and in Australia

shows an increasing number of children are not developing adequate basic skills.

For example, a 2014 study on West Australian primary students showed a marked decline in six-year-olds' ability to do an underarm throw and bounce and catch a ball since the 1980s.

To add to concerns, Australian research shows children and [young people](#) are not playing as much sport as they used to. A recent report on [sports participation in Victoria](#) showed [sports participation](#) in children aged 10 to 14 was lower in 2022 than in pre-COVID years. The participation rate peaked at 67% in 2017 before dropping to 57% in 2022.

How can you help your child's throwing and catching skills?

Early education services and schools include fundamental movement skills in their programs. Guidelines note it takes between [240 and 600 minutes](#) of teaching time for a child to become proficient in one fundamental movement skill.

But [research suggests](#) parents can also help their kids at home and you can start building these skills from about the age of two. Here are some tips:

Start simple

When you're helping your child, start with larger balls or balloons and work on overarm throwing, underarm throwing and two-handed passes. These can include chest passes and bounce passes like you see in netball and basketball.

As your child gets older, you can make the balls smaller and distances greater. And you can introduce challenges, such as "show me a different way of throwing or catching."

Have formal and informal sessions

Research [shows](#) it's important for children to get both unstructured play and structured practice to learn these skills.

This gives them specific tips and a chance to experiment and develop their skills.

Vary the activities

Repeatedly practicing the same skill under the same conditions can lead to [rapid gains](#) in skill development. But it does not teach children how to apply this skill.

Research [suggests](#) children should practice skills in a variety of ways.

If a task is unpredictable, it will create a more "game-like" environment so [children](#) are challenged to find solutions.

For example, you could have a game that involves throwing to a target. You could have changing targets (instead of just throwing at the same target over and over).

Keep it fun

While you may be "practicing" or "working" on a skill, try and make it enjoyable. Perhaps it forms part of a trip to the park or it involves a favorite toy. Maybe it involves different equipment or a game where the

ball is a character.

If you have concerns about how your [child](#)'s fundamental movement skills are developing, talk to their teacher, early childhood educator or a pediatrician.

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