2020 HFLM Youth Baseball Practice at Home Guide

Honeoye Falls – Lima - Mendon NY Youth Baseball

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our spring 2020 baseball season has been interrupted and changed. While we are trying to salvage a season for some levels, there will be less opportunity for team practices and games. This guide provides drills and details on skill development for **practicing at home**. This time at home can provide your child many quality baseball reps. The cliché is that baseball players are made in the backyard…now is our chance to take advantage. However, make sure to keep it FUN so that your child wants to practice all summer and into the fall.

This document contains recommendations for backyard drills for different ages, drill descriptions, details on skill development and technique, and an equipment list. Much of this content comes from our coaching handbook which has many more drills and guidance for coaching ages 4-13. You can find the 2019 HFLMYB Coaches Clinic Handbook on our website.

Some of the drills have short explanation videos on our HFLM YouthBaseball YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVkO9BtfrgVA_MPVgqnEzrA

Philosophy for Practicing at Home

1. Make it fun (keep it moving…don't over-coach)
2. Separate catching and throwing practice as much as possible
3. Mix in some hitting practice…wiffleball games count!
4. Keep equipment handy…make it super easy to get in 10 minutes of backyard practice

Top-Five Practice at Home Drills/Activities

There are more drills listed below, but these are the best for most kids for the backyard. Drills are described in more detail later in this document.

Ages 4-8 – Top-Five at Home Drills

Area	Drill	Notes
Fielding / Catching	Knock It Down	Great for confidence. Use tennis balls. See description below. https://youtu.be/XiBczdrHLv4
Fielding / Catching	Play catch with an adult	Child to child catch is not fun or productive (see below) https://youtu.be/JiJqr6pKShw
Throwing	Throw 10 in a row	Distance before accuracy. Throw to adult or sideways garbage can
Throwing	Clean out the garage	Fun! See description below. Use tennis balls or wiffleballs
Hitting	Dart pitch (Adult pitcher down on one knee…toss it like a dart)	Wiffleballs or pickleballs. Similar to front flips for older players. https://youtu.be/snFFKSxdyBk

Ages 9-13 - Top-Five at Home Drills

Area	Drill	Notes
Fielding / Catching	Play catch with an adult	Child to child catch is not fun or productive (see below). Throw grounders and pop-flies too.
Fielding / Catching	Wide Receiver	Fly ball drill while on the move. Good cardio too! https://youtu.be/YChsMuXa9Yc https://youtu.be/lIOnPUjKtPc
Throwing	Throw 10 in a row	Distance before accuracy. Throw to adult or sideways garbage can
Throwing	Long toss	Long arching throws to build fluid mechanics.Two-step throw: https://youtu.be/o9-lMyIy2yY
Hitting	Wiffle-ball batting practice	Pitch overhand on one knee; Use a bucket of wiffle balls or pickleballs. https://youtu.be/snFFKSxdyBk

Drills

Fielding / Catching Drills

(T=Tball (6U), I=Intermediate(8U), M=Minors/Majors(12U,10U)

1,2, or 3 players and a parent play catch [T,I,M]

- Players fan out
- Coach throws grounders and line drives and flies to each player
- Keep it moving…more than one ball?
- Make it random
- Award points? (2 points for catch, 1 point for good throw, earn fly balls?)

Knock it Down [T,I]

- Short video demonstration: https://youtu.be/XiBczdrHLv4
- Great for Kids who are afraid of the ball or who cannot catch very well (yet)
- Teaches fingers-up technique
- Use tennis balls or wiffle balls (grab a bunch…rapid fire more fun and more reps)
- Coach tosses balls at player's chest (dart throw…not underhand toss)
- Player uses back of glove (with fingers up) to knock balls away
- Great confidence builder and breaks the "always-catching-with-palm-up" bad habit ("basket catch")

Wide receiver [I,M]

- Short video demonstration: https://youtu.be/YChsMuXa9Yc
- Start next to parent
- Player runs away like football wide receiver (or sometimes V-cuts back and forth)
- Run on toes, catch ball at high point (discourage the basket catches)
- Bring ball back to start (no throwing)
- Vary the height and location of the throws
- Fun drill…keep it moving

Throwing Drills

(T=Tball (6U), I=Intermediate(8U), M=Minors/Majors(12U,10U)

For ages 4-10, the best throwing practice does NOT come by throwing to a teammate. Problems catching will inhibit throwing progress. (Also…all the missed catches are not fun and takes too long)

Throw 10 in a row [T,I]

- 1 coach, 1 player, 10 balls
- 10-15 yards separation
- Player throws 10 in a row to coach (coach does not throw balls back)
- Count number player gets to coach in the air…strive for improvement from set to set

Clean out the garage (T)

- Use squishy balls, tennis balls, or wiffleballs (safety)
- Player(s) one side of a line, player(s) or parents on the other side
- 10-15 balls on one side of the line (spread out) and 10-15 balls on the other

- On “GO” both teams pick up balls and throw them to other side…winner if one team can get all balls to other side
- Police the middle…don’t let kids get to close…maybe enforce a “no-man’s-land” area
- Kids figure out they should be quick and throw it long…good…let them compete

Long toss [I, M]

- Make sure warmed up first
- Players separated by 30-40 yards (or just out of their normal range)
- Long, loopy throws. (In fact, less stress on the arm if they are slightly out of range because they won’t over-do it…they’ll be more relaxed throwing skidders, than trying to gun it all the way there)
- Encourages body…legs, torso, arm. This is how you correct the pushing motion.
- Develops fluid throwing motion
- Take steps toward target after release…not launching from back leg
- Good 2-step throwing drill (see above for 2-step throw technique). Video: https://youtu.be/o9-lMyIy2yY

Hitting Drills

(T=Tball (6U), I=Intermediate(8U), M=Minors/Majors(12U,10U)

Wiffle Ball Hitting [I, M]

- Short video demonstration: https://youtu.be/snFFKSxdyBk
- Good for eye-hand, balance, and smooth swing
- Arrange one or two batters about 15-20 feet away from coach-pitcher and 15-20 feet from each other
- If two hitters, alternate pitching them a wiffle ball overhand
- Get other players to pick up balls that are hit (don’t put someone behind batter…safety)
- Great pre-game batting practice when there is no batting cage (or if cage is too busy)
- Best if you have a bucket of balls (12-24)…more reps, more fun

Dart pitch / Front Flips (wiffle balls or L-screen) [T,I,M]

- Short video demonstration: https://youtu.be/snFFKSxdyBk
- Coach sits on bucket behind L-screen (real baseballs) or on knee with wiffle balls…15-20 feet away from batter
- Coach throws balls with short dart-like motion (no arch)
- Give hitter time to reset between every pitch
- For advanced hitters, vary the location and speed (especially those crushing everything). We want them to time the ball…not time the pitcher.
- Modern MLB batting practice is now 30ft from plate (halfway to mound)…half-speed pitches at half-the distance is the same reaction time. So…for little leaguers…half the distance and from sitting or kneeling position (so you are not towering over them).

Skill Development and Technique

Throwing Development and Technique

1. Distance before accuracy
    a. Accuracy will come after distance
    b. Let them throw far and DO NOT get on your player for missing a target
    c. Overemphasizing accuracy at a young age leads to the noodle/push throwing motion
2. Separate throwing and catching drills (ages 4-10)
    a. Do NOT have younger players play catch with another young player. Reasons: 1) It is not fun because they are not accurate, and they cannot catch well 2) They WILL NOT get better…they will not throw hard if their partner is a poor catcher.
    b. Many younger players can **throw** distances longer than they can **catch**. Let them throw far – that's how they will become fluid throwers. Do catching practice separately.
    c. Make it fun…bring 5-10 balls into your yard. Let them throw all 10 to you (or another target) in a row.
3. Two-step throwing technique
    a. Gets body and torso activated
    b. Start facing target, small step forward with throwing side foot, step toward target with glove-side foot while rotating body, arm up, legs and torso rotate, arm follows through with throw
    c. More athletic and fluid throwing motion (we are no longer teaching the sideways starting position)
    d. Short video demonstration: https://youtu.be/o9-lMyIy2yY

Catching Development and Technique

1. Practice with Fingers up (thumb to thumb)
    a. Move kids away from the "Basket catch" method (fingers down)
    b. Builds confidence if you can catch fingers-up
    c. See "Knock it down drill" for good way to learn
2. Grounders
    a. Charge it ("go get it")
    b. Feet wide, butt down, alligator hands, pop hands out on catch (not a scoop up)
3. Catch within circle around chest and head (if possible). Teach kids to move body to catch the ball near torso. ("move your feet")
4. Ball above waist: fingers up, bare hand covers ball from behind/under glove. Video demonstration: https://youtu.be/JiJqr6pKShw
5. Ball below waist: fingers down, bare hand covers ball from above the glove
6. Do not run with glove in the air to catch a ball on the run. Run to the spot, get there, then put glove up at the last second. Video demonstration: https://youtu.be/lIOnPUjKtPc

Hitting Development and Technique

1. Grip
    a. Most non-level swings are caused by grip issues
    b. Hold bat in fingers, NOT back in palms
    c. Do NOT grip bat super tight…it should be somewhat loose in your fingers
2. Stance
    a. Wide stance (for ages 4-8, I tell them "hands together, feet apart")
    b. Athletic and bouncy…they should be able to jump while in their stance
3. Swing
    a. Small stride
    b. Weight stays between your feet…firm front leg
    c. Palm up/palm down (Google it)
    d. Ages 4-8: Swing hard…we want to develop an athletic, fluid motion
4. Common Flaws
    a. Grip too tight which leads to non-level swing
    b. Head moving vertically too much. Eyes should stay at same level through swing. If head moves down, the eyes move down, and it is hard to see the ball all the way in.
    c. Short Video Explanation: https://youtu.be/cjIusjPUbyU

Resources and Links

https://www.littleleague.org/university/

https://protips.dickssportinggoods.com/sports-and-activities/baseball

https://www.youtube.com/user/DugoutTheMascot/videos

Equipment List

A non-comprehensive list of equipment for practicing at home

Essential Equipment List

1. Baseballs (about 10 per child is best)
    a. Age 4-6: Soft Baseballs (e.g. Easton Incrediballs)
    b. Age 7-8: RIF 5L Baseballs ("RIF" = Reduced Injury Factor; less hard than a standard baseball)
    c. Age 9-13: Standard baseballs
2. Baseball Glove
3. Baseball Bat
4. Tennis Balls (10 per child) – For ages 4-9.
5. Bucket (for easy ball storage and delivery to the back yard)

Advanced Equipment List

1. Plastic Training balls (wiffle balls or pickleballs)
2. Batting Tee
3. Throw down bases
4. Hitting net (can be expensive, but good for ages 9-13).

Equipment Examples

Easton Incrediball (great for ages 4-7…soft)

RIF 5L Baseball (Ages 7-8 but a great training ball for older kids too…same size and weight, just a little bit softer)

Pickleball (great for backyard and pre-game batting practice)

Low Cost Batting Tee

High Cost Batting Tee (AKA “Tanner Tee” – for older/serious players)

Baseball Practice Net (Great for hitting and throwing drills)