Catching

Catching is an important skill in most ball games but is challenging for many young children, as the catcher is not in control of the speed of the oncoming object. The child has to track the object (keep his eye on it) and move his body and hands in response, before catching it.

The ‘avoidance tendency’ is common among younger children who instinctively turn their faces away or close their eyes to avoid being hit. For beginners, start with objects that are bright, light and travel slowly (e.g. scarf, stuffed toy, balloon).

This skill may need to be taught together with throwing skills.
Developmental Phases

Catching

**Initial**
- Both hands are held out straight, palms facing upward.
- Face turns away to avoid oncoming object or reflexive raising of arms and hands to shield head.
- Elbows extend for arms to trap object close to chest by ‘scooping’ it.

**Transition**
- Arms are bent in front of body, palms facing each other, thumbs pointing upward.
- Eyes may close as object travels towards arms.
- Hands make brief contact with object. Arms clasp object close to body due to poor timing.

**Mature**
- Eyes focus on and track the oncoming object.
- Elbows are bent and arms held relaxed at the sides or in front of the body.
- Arms and feet make adjustments according to the flight path of the oncoming object.
- Hands grasp object in a well-timed motion. Arms pull in upon contact with object to absorb its force.

**Approximate Age of Development (in years)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Initial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Transition</td>
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<td>Mature</td>
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<td>5</td>
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<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

97
Teaching Strategies

Catching

What to do if your child...

... is unable to catch?
- Begin with objects that are colourful, soft and light (e.g. scarf).
- Allow your child to play with the object first before dropping it from a height for him to catch.

... turns face away or closes eyes when catching?
- Begin with objects that are colourful, soft and light (e.g. stuffed toys, rolled up towels).
- Allow your child to play with the objects first.
- Start by passing the object before tossing them to your child.

... is slow to react to oncoming objects?
- Cue the throw: “Ready? It’s coming!” before tossing the object to your child.
- Count down with your child before tossing: “five, four, three, two, one, catch!”
- Gradually shorten the interval between cues to quicken your child’s response.

... needs to practise catching small objects?
- Get your child to practise tossing the object upward and catching it.
- Try placing the object on his shoe and have him kick it upward for him to catch.
- Gradually decrease the size of the object.
## Variations in “Can your child catch...?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How the body moves</th>
<th>Force/Effort</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Flow</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• as softly as possible</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• with arms straightened out like a robot</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• with different hand positions</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• quickly/slowly</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• a soft toy you toss after clapping twice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• as many balls as possible in 30 seconds</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• while moving freely in the playing space</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• with one foot in a hoop</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• while running sideways</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Direction/Pathways</th>
<th>Levels/Extensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• without colliding with anyone</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• from different body positions (e.g. seated/ kneeling/standing/running)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• an object coming from the front/side</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• an object coming from above/below</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• an object that has bounced off a wall</td>
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<tr>
<td>• while seated on the floor/chair</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• while jumping up high</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• with hands above his head</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>With whom/What the body moves</th>
<th>Self (body parts)/People</th>
<th>Objects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• when you shout “Ready?”</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a towel he tosses using different parts of his body (e.g. elbow, knee, wrist)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a ball/bean bag you toss while standing near/far</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• a floating scarf</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• a big soft teddy bear</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• a balloon with a rubber/small object stuffed inside</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### COMBINATIONS

- A scarf he tossed with different body parts other than his hands (e.g. elbows, wrists, knees, etc)
- Different objects with a hand/two hands, with arms straightened out while seated, when you shout “Ready?”
Activity 1
Catching

WHAT YOU NEED
- Objects safe for throwing, such as stuffed toy, bean bag or a small pillow

HOW TO PLAY
- Stand a short distance away, facing your child. Toss a small object back and forth between the two of you.
- If no one drops the object after five consecutive tosses, take a step back each and commence tossing again.

BE AWARE
- Help your child understand that his hands should always be on standby. Position his palms to face upward and reach forward for easy catching.
- Train him to respond swiftly to the travelling object. He must not just stand on a spot and wait for the object.
Activity 2
Catching

WHAT YOU NEED
- A ball

HOW TO PLAY
- Have your child sit on the floor, alternating between a kneel-sit and a wide-sit.
  On the kneel-sit, he must toss a ball up. He must then get into the wide-sit position before catching the descending ball.
- Keep encouraging your child to toss the ball a little higher.
- Try other positions and movements.
  Positions and movements
  - Kneel-sit and toss the ball, then quickly stand up before catching the descending ball
  - Stand and toss the ball, then make a turn before catching the descending ball
  - Stand and toss the ball, then clap once before catching the descending ball
  - Gradually increase the number of claps before catching the descending ball. Determine the most number of claps your child can achieve without missing the descending ball

BE AWARE
- Attach cut-out handprints on the ball. This will help your child understand that his fingers must always be kept around the ball for better grip and control of the ball.
Activity 3

Catching

OBJECT CONTROL SKILLS

WHAT YOU NEED

- Recycled bottles from shower gel, shampoo or mineral water
- A ball, small enough to be contained within the body of the bottle

HOW TO PLAY

- Together with your child, cut a recycled bottle in half, and decorate it.
- Have your child hold the bottle and a ball, one in each hand. Your child must toss the ball and catch it with the bottle while staying on the spot.

- Challenge your child by adding another action to this activity.

  Action sequence
  - Walk while tossing and catching the ball
  - Toss the ball, let it bounce once, then catch it

BE AWARE

- Your child must keep his eyes on the ball, and track its motion. This will allow him to anticipate the travel path of the ball, and shift the bottle to catch the ball.

Ensure there are no fragile objects nearby during play.
Activity 4
Catching

WHAT YOU NEED
- A pail or basket
- A soft ball

HOW TO PLAY
- Stand facing a wall, with your child beside you.
- Have your child hold a pail or basket. Bounce a ball against the wall. Your child must catch the ball with the pail or basket.
- Switch roles.

BE AWARE
- Your child must keep his eyes on the ball, and track its motion.
- He must then move swiftly into the oncoming path of the ball to catch it. This will let him practise quick feet movement.

Gradually increase the distance from the wall as your child's throwing and catching skills improve.