

## **Developing Ball Skills – Kicking**

### ***What is age appropriate?***

- 3 years: Kicks ball at least 6 feet.
- 4 years: Kicks ball 6-11 feet while extending leg back to kick (not walking into ball)
- 6 years: Kicks ball 12 feet so it travels in the air with opposing arm/leg movements.

### ***Strategies:***

- *Start at a close distance:* Encourage your child to kick the ball to a nearby target (5-6 feet). As he/she improves and gets stronger, move the target farther away to encourage him/her to kick the ball harder.
- *Start with lighter balls:* Begin to work on kicking skills with lighter rubber balls (8-10 inches in diameter) versus a soccer ball as it takes more force to kick a soccer ball the same distance as a ball that will bounce off your child's foot. Using a rubber air filled ball will allow your child to feel more successful.
- *Use cause and effect games for engagement:* Kick a ball to knock over bowling pins, a stack of blocks, or cups of water. Practice kicking water balloons that are filled pretty full so they burst when kicked.
- *Practice passing:* Start at a closer distance to pass to a partner. For your child to be successful passing to a partner, it is important that he/she is able to engage in the game and with the person he/she is passing to. If engagement in an activity is still difficult, it may be more appropriate to use other targets that may provide a cause and effect reward (see above).
- *Work on balance:* If your child has difficulty maintaining balance on one foot, he/she may also have difficulty kicking a ball a good distance because a child must stand on one leg for a longer period to wind up and kick a ball harder. Practice activities such as:
  - Walking on a balance beam/line
  - Pretending to be a stork (hands on hips for wings, lift one leg up)
  - Hopping on one foot (with hand held support if needed)
  - Stopping a rolling ball with one foot (by placing foot on the ball – specifically, the foot your child would kick with)
  - Standing on one foot and picking up marbles with toes to place them in a bucket.
  - Standing on one foot and knocking over a tower of blocks or bowling pins.

❖ **Note on Motor Planning and Coordination Difficulties** - Gross motor activities, such as ball skills will be difficult for a child with motor planning and coordination difficulties. It is important to keep the activities simple and to the point (ie. working on a single skill at a time, such as the underhand throw or catching, etc). Adding more people and/or more rules to the activity will make being successful with these skills more difficult and frustrating for your child. Once a skill is mastered in the most basic context (ie. Throwing/kicking a ball to a target/adult), other factors can be added in (such as passing a ball back and forth with 1-2 peers). Ball games such as soccer and basketball will likely be very difficult for these children even when the skills are mastered in a controlled environment, so it is important not to place your child in a program like this too soon.