Basketball Drills for Kids 6-8 Years Old: 6 Fun Games

6U | Drills | Coach Nick & the YSC Coaching Team

A first-grader walks into your gym, basketball tucked under one arm, sneakers untied, completely unaware there is a practice plan on your clipboard. You call everyone to the center circle and within 45 seconds, three kids are spinning on the floor, one is trying to dribble on another player's head, and the rest are staring at the gym lights.

Welcome to 6-8U basketball. We love it.

The short answer: the best basketball drills for kids this age are movement games first, skill drills second. At 6-8, players' bodies are still building the coordination and balance they need to execute basketball skills. Drills that look like games — where they are running, reacting, and competing — teach the neurological wiring that makes real skill stick. Keep each activity under five minutes. Keep it loud. Keep it moving.

Here are six drills we use every season with our youngest players. Each one has a movement-development purpose underneath the basketball skill.

Why 6-8 Year Olds Need Different Drills

Most youth basketball content treats 6-year-olds like smaller 12-year-olds. It does not work. At this age, players are still developing body literacy — the ability to know where their limbs are in space without looking. That is why a first-grader cannot look up while dribbling: their brain is genuinely busy processing both tasks at once.

Research from ProSkills Basketball on youth shooting development makes this point well: deliberate reps work, but only when the player is engaged enough to execute with intent. Lose their attention, lose the learning. The drills below are designed around that reality. We build coordination *through* basketball, not around it.

If you are still figuring out how to structure the overall session, our youth basketball practice plan for beginners gives you the full 60-minute framework to slot these drills into.

Drill 1: Dribble Tag (Warm-Up + Ball Control)

Time: 5 minutes

This is the first drill we run at every practice. It doubles as warm-up and ball-handling work — and the kids ask for it by name after the first week.

> **Setup:** Every player has a ball and dribbles anywhere in the half-court. Two players are "it" — they must dribble while trying to tag others. If tagged, you freeze with your ball held overhead. Another player can unfreeze you by crawling under your arms.

> **Coaching cue:** "Eyes up — find where 'it' is before they find you." This is the only cue we give. The game demands the rest automatically.

> **Why it works:** Kids learn to dribble without looking at the ball because the game penalizes looking down. Change of direction, spatial awareness, and ball control all develop inside the game context without a single formal instruction on any of them.

Drill 2: Stationary Pound Dribble (Ball Handling Form)

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After Dribble Tag, we slow down for a focused form block. This is the only drill in the session that is not a game — keep it tight.

Step 1 — Stance (30 seconds): Feet shoulder-width, knees slightly bent, ball at waist height. Tell them: "You're a rocket ship on the launch pad — knees bent, ready to fire."

Step 2 — Pound Dribble (90 seconds): Push the ball hard into the floor using fingertips, not the palm. Count 20 pounds with dominant hand, then switch. Coaching cue: "Push it DOWN, not forward — your fingers do the work." Correct palm-slappers by gently tapping their fingertips to show hand shape.

Step 3 — Eyes Up (60 seconds): Once they have a rhythm, ask them to look at a spot on the wall and keep dribbling. Celebrate every kid who manages 5 or more seconds. Coaching cue: "Point your nose at me and keep that ball bouncing."

Drill 3: Partner Chest Pass Relay (Passing)

Time: 4 minutes

Passing is the most-neglected skill at 6-8U because it requires two kids cooperating at the same time — harder than it sounds. We make it a competition.

Setup: Pairs stand 8-10 feet apart. On the whistle, they chest pass back and forth, counting each successful catch. After 90 seconds, pairs report their count. Round 2: can they beat it?

Coaching cue: "Show me your thumbs after you release — thumbs pointing down at the floor means you threw it right." This gives kids something concrete to self-check without you correcting every pass individually.

I had a 7-year-old named Brennan last fall who could not throw a catchable pass for the first three practices — launching it at the ceiling every time, classic overaim. What worked: we had him step directly toward his partner before releasing. One practice of that single cue, and it clicked. He finished the season as one of our more reliable passers.

Drill 4: Two-Line Layup Walk-Through (Finishing)

Time: 5 minutes

Layups are frustrating at this age because the footwork is genuinely complex. We slow it all the way down.

Step 1 — Walk the footwork, no ball (2 minutes): Two lines on either side of the key. Players walk — not jog — through the layup approach. Call each foot as they plant: "left, right, up" for right-handed layups. No ball yet, just feet. Coaching cue: "The foot that matches your shooting hand goes last before you jump."

Step 2 — Add the ball (3 minutes): Same walk-through, now with the ball. Players catch a soft toss from you at the free-throw line extended, take the two walk-steps, and lay the ball up off the backboard. Coaching cue: "Aim at the square painted on the backboard, not the rim — and hold your hand up after you release."

For 6-year-olds specifically: Skip the footwork instruction entirely. Have them stand 3 feet from the basket and toss the ball underhand off the board. Kids at this age need the experience of making baskets more than they need correct layup mechanics. Build the success habit first.

Drill 5: 1-on-1 Keep Away (Defense + Agility)

Time: 4 minutes

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This one is a favorite because it builds defensive footwork and coordination simultaneously — and the kids think it is just a fun game. If you do any athletic development work with your players outside of practice, pairing these defensive footwork habits with agility ladder progressions builds lateral quickness that carries across everything they do on the court.

> **Setup:** Players pair up. One has a ball, one plays defense. The ball-handler must stay in a 10x10 box marked with cones. The defender tries to knock the ball away or force the dribbler out of bounds. Run 30-second rounds, then switch roles.

> **Coaching cue for defenders:** "Mirror their belly button — wherever it goes, you go." This teaches the lateral shuffle and reactive footwork that you cannot drill directly at this age. The competition instinct does the teaching for you.

Drill 6: Around the World Shooting Game (Shooting + Fun)

Time: 5 minutes

We always end with a game that lets players score and feel success. Move the spots in close — 8 feet from the basket for 6-7 year olds, 10 feet for 8-year-olds.

> **Setup:** Mark 5-6 spots around the lane with cones, closer than standard spacing. Players rotate through each spot trying to make one from each. Make it, advance. Miss, shoot again. Count full rotations completed in 5 minutes.

> **Coaching cue:** "Elbow under the ball, eyes on the rim, follow through and hold your finish — freeze like a statue until it hits." Watching 7-year-olds hold their freeze is genuinely funny, but it locks in shooting form better than any technical breakdown ever does.

> **A note on hoop height:** If your gym uses standard 10-foot hoops, lower your expectations on form. Kids compensating for height they physically cannot reach build mechanical habits that take years to unlearn. Advocate for adjustable hoops in your league if you can — it makes a real difference at this age.

Putting These Together in a Practice

Here is how we sequence this block at the start of a session:

1. Dribble Tag — 5 min
2. Pound Dribble — 3 min
3. Chest Pass Relay — 4 min
4. Layup Walk-Through — 5 min
5. Keep Away — 4 min
6. Around the World — 5 min

That is 26 minutes of focused skill work. For 6-8U, that is close to the maximum before quality drops. Follow it with a small-sided scrimmage and you have a complete 50-minute session. Breakthrough Basketball's sample practice framework reinforces what we have found in our own gym: capping individual activities at 5-10 minutes and using a skill-then-game format keeps this age group fully engaged through the whole practice. Our youth basketball practice plan for beginners builds out the full session structure including the scrimmage segment and cooldown.

If this is your first season coaching 6-8U, our guide on how to coach youth basketball for the first time covers the mindset and expectation-setting that makes these drills actually land.

The One Thing to Remember

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literacy without knowing it. The six drills above are designed to deliver both.

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