

Youth Baseball Infield Drills: Real Fielder Progressions

7U-14U

Drills

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Three seasons ago I had a 10-year-old shortstop who had gorgeous hands — when the ball came right to him. The moment I hit anything more than two steps to his left, he'd arrive late, reach across his body, and bobble it. The problem wasn't his technique. It was his first step. We spent four straight practices doing nothing but lateral shuffle work before we touched another ground ball. By the end of that season he was one of the steadiest middle infielders in our program.

That experience is the lens we bring to every infield drill session: athleticism first, mechanics second.

The direct answer on youth baseball infield drills: Build every session around five core reps — pre-pitch load, lateral ground balls, straight-on ground balls, four corners, and short-hop receiving. Run them in that order, adjust complexity to your age group, and you'll develop fielders who can actually reach the ball — not just kids who've caught hundreds of straight-at-them grounders in practice.

Footwork Is the First Problem

Most infield drill guides lead with hand position and the alligator catch — top hand over the glove to trap the ball. That's real technique, but it's the second problem. If a player can't get to the ball, it doesn't matter how their hands are set.

Something we've taken from movement development coaches across sports — and it applies as much to fielders as to pitchers — is that you assess movement before you prescribe drills. Can your players shuffle laterally and decelerate into a fielding position without stumbling forward? Can they load their hips low and hold that position? If not, those are the actual things to work on first. Root causes beat surface symptoms every time.

We pair infield sessions with general athletic movement work. Our piece on speed and agility drills for young athletes covers the lateral and deceleration patterns that carry directly onto the infield — worth reading alongside this one.

Start Every Session: The Two-Minute Movement Check

Before the first grounder of any practice, we run a quick read on where each player is athletically. It takes two minutes and shapes how we deploy players across stations.

Three things we check:

1. Pre-pitch ready stance — weight on the balls of the feet, knees soft, glove out front (not hands on knees)
2. Lateral shuffle — two steps left, two steps right, no crossing of feet
3. Creep step — as a simulated pitch is thrown, player takes a small forward weight transfer before reacting

If a player can't do all three cleanly, we keep them in the basic rolled-grounder stations and don't push to throwing or double-play work. This isn't about holding anyone back — it's about building the right patterns before adding speed and consequence.

The 7-Station Infield Drill Progression

Run these in order. A focused 25-minute infield block can hit Stations 1–5; a 40-minute block gets all seven. Adjust station time based on your group — younger players need shorter reps with more resets.

Station 1 — Pre-Pitch Athletic Stance (5 min) Players hold their position as coach mimics a pitcher's wind-up. On the imaginary pitch, each player takes a small creep step forward and shuffles one step in each direction before resetting. No ball

pure movement pattern. Coaching cue: "Feel your heels come off the pitch — if your heels are down, you're already late."

Station 2 — Rolled Ground Balls, Straight On (10 min) Coach kneels 20-25 feet out and rolls grounders at varied speeds — some slow, some sharp. Players field with two hands, glove below the ball, bare hand alongside. Field and reset; no throws until players are comfortable. Coaching cue: "Set the glove at the ball, not at your feet — see the ball all the way into the glove." For 7U-9U players, remove the bare-hand contact step entirely. Build the habit of getting the glove down early before adding complexity.

Station 3 — Lateral Shuffle to Ground Ball (10 min) Place two cones 6 feet to either side of the player. Coach rolls wide to either cone; player shuffles to it, plants the outside foot, fields the ball, and shuffles back to center. The ball should arrive as the player is decelerating — not while they're still sliding laterally. Add a throw to first once the movement pattern is clean. Coaching cue: "Outside foot plants, then glove goes down — don't reach for the ball while you're still drifting." This is the drill that fixed my struggling shortstop. We run it at every age level from 8U through high school.

Station 4 — Four Corners / Throw Around the Horn (8 min) Players at all four corners throw in a set pattern: home to third, third to second, second to first, first to home, then reverse. Start slow — accuracy first, arm strength second. For younger groups, use a softer training ball to reduce fear of errant throws. Coaching cue: "Step toward your target before you throw — your feet point where the ball goes."

A set of agility cones is useful for marking base positions when you're running Station 3 or Station 4 off-field or in a gym — theranchsports.com carries them with 10% off and no sales tax.

Station 5 — Slow Roller Charge (8 min) Coach rolls a dying ball toward the third-base line or up the first-base line. Player charges hard, fields on the run, and makes a throw to first (or a shovel pass for close plays). Priority skill for corner infielders — run it every practice once players can throw consistently. Coaching cue: "Field the ball off your throwing-side hip on a charge — it cuts your transfer time in half and the throw comes out naturally."

Station 6 — Short-Hop Receiving at First Base (8 min) Rotate all players through this, not just your first baseman. Coach throws short hops into the receiver's glove. Player stretches and catches the ball off the bounce — doesn't swipe at it. Coaching cue: "Let the ball come to the glove after it bounces — chase it and you'll fight it. Soft hands means you wait, not that you grab." This drill gets skipped at younger ages and coaches regret it by 10U when throws get worse, not better.

Station 7 — Double Play Footwork (12U and up, 10 min) Middle infielders only. Run the footwork dry — no ball — for 10 reps each before adding throws. Second baseman receives from shortstop, steps right-left across the bag, throws to first. Shortstop receiving: glove-side foot steps through the bag, throw follows. Coaching cue: "Your feet clear the bag first, then you throw. Flip that order and you'll catch a foot in the dirt."

Reading the Hop: The Mental Skill Every Article Skips

After footwork, this is what separates good infielders from great ones at every age: knowing which bounce to take.

A ground ball doesn't bounce once between the bat and the glove — it bounces multiple times, and each hop is different. The short hop (ball that just left the ground) is actually the easiest to field cleanly. The worst is the in-between hop — still coming up but not at its peak, so the fielder has to guess. We teach players to make a binary decision before they move:

- **Charge:** if you can get to the ball before its second bounce, go get it — short hops are controllable
- **Hold:** if a hard one-hopper stays low, wait for it to come to you — the low line-drive bounce is manageable when you're set
- **Never get caught in the middle:** if you can't charge all the way, stop moving and let the ball come

We train this with a read drill: coach hits the ball with a fungo and players call "charge" or "hold" out loud before they move.

between hops drops significantly — it's one of those coaching adjustments with an almost immediate payoff.

Age-Appropriate Adjustments

Age Group	Simplify	Add When Ready
7U-9U	Rolled grounders only; no bare-hand contact; no throws	Two-hand catching technique; lateral shuffle
10U-11U	Skip double-play footwork	Live throws on all stations; read drills with fungo
12U+	Run all seven stations	Double play footwork; charge reads; full-speed fungo grounders

Putting These Into a Full Practice

These stations work best as a 25-35 minute block early in practice — after warmup, before batting or baserunning. If you're building a full practice around them, our 12U baseball practice plan and 8U baseball practice plan both show how we sequence infield, hitting, and conditioning to keep every player active and learning.

One note on arm care: if your infielders are also pitching, count the throwing reps in this session as part of their daily arm workload. A Station 4 plus Station 5 combination at full intensity adds up faster than coaches realize — and protecting young arms means counting every throw, not just pitch count.