

CONNECT WITH THE BALL (1): CORE BALL MANIPULATION & BALANCE EXERCISES

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Dear Ministry of Football Family,

These exercises are designed for **children aged 3 to 7** (although some of them would be appropriate to use before and after that age range too). They are chosen specifically because they contain core ball and balance movements, and most of these can be **practiced in a bedroom or a living room**. The aim of this is to help develop children who grow-up with a minimum level of technical ball control skills. In order to develop good ball skills and confidence, it is essential that children learn to move in different ways with the ball. They should be comfortable **using either foot**.

At Ministry of Football, we will include these core movements in our practice sessions, and we expect parents and children to practice these movements at home also. **Repetition is key**, and children will grow more competent and confident only if these movements are practised regularly.

In general, the easier movements are given first, and the more difficult ones come later. Usually when a parent and child practice football together, they will kick the ball to each other, or try to score goals against each other. We hope that by using the exercises below that we can help your child become more than just a "kicker" and grow into a capable and creative dribbler and mover also. The final two activities give alternative practices that you can use with your child if you both want to play together, and these may be more developmentally useful than just kicking a ball to each other.

When using these exercises, please use the terminology given in the activity description below. So say "We are going to practice our Bounding" - then the children get used to the vocabulary and it makes it easier for them to remember what the activity is. It also reinforces and links the learning from MoF sessions to practice at home.

Please aim to practice 3-4 times a week. Give the child a ball to practice with, which can be then taken out at practice time in the same way a school reading book is taken out at homework time.

Importantly, please **use a small ball**. A size 1 or 2 football is perfect. You could even use a tennis ball. It is not appropriate to expect a young child to practice these movements using a full-size adult ball. If the ball is kept indoors, it will not get dirty and can be used indoors throughout the year, whatever the weather.

In our experience, there is a MASSIVE difference in progress, confidence and enjoyment between a child who practices regularly and one who doesn't. It is like learning a musical instrument - the majority of practice needs to take place between the structured, timetabled, weekly classes. As with music practice, we need to ensure the child does this practice correctly. Slow is fine to begin with, but the movements need to be deliberate and careful. It's better to have 3-4 repetitions of really careful practice, than 20 repetitions where there is no focus or attempt to get it right.

Finally, **be patient** with your child. They may not be used to practice, and we do not expect them to suddenly become masters of practice. To begin with, they may only be able to focus for 2-3 minutes at a time. That's OK. It's a good start. Keep encouraging them. Some tips to motivate them to practice: Video them doing the move, and then watch it back together; Or get two balls, and join in yourself; Use different colours and sizes of small ball; Count how many good repetitions they can do, and see if they can beat this the next day.

(You needn't limit the children to just these exercises. As children progress, more complex movements can be taught, and YouTube is a great resource for copying tricks and skills. But please keep coming back to these main key movements as the base of your practices).

Thanks, Mark

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1/ DRAW A CIRCLE WITH THE BALL: Using the sole of one foot, try to move the ball carefully so it makes a small circle on the ground in front of you. Repeat using other foot. Progress: Make other shapes (e.g. letters and numbers), and write name - practice on both feet.

2/ TOE TAPS: Standing with a ball in front of you, place the front part of the sole of the right foot (under the toes) on the ball gently. Jump up and switch feet, so the left foot lands very gently on the ball and the right foot on the ground. Progress: Do this with one leg to each side of the ball, so the jump is from side-to-side.

3/ FOOT TO FOOT: Standing in one place, move the ball from one foot to another. Practice rolling the ball from foot to foot with the sole of the foot, and using the inside of the foot to move the ball from foot to foot. Control the ball with sole of foot as it arrives under each foot. Progress: Rolling slightly forward each time to move forward slowly, then same moving backward slowly

4/ ROLL AND CONTROL: Gently roll ball forwards with the sole of foot (approx 1 metre), catch up with the ball and control it. Repeat using both feet. Progress: Side to side, using both feet. Control the ball with the sole of the foot when you catch up with it - practising foing this with both feet.

5/ MOVING LEFT AND RIGHT: Keeping ball under control, use inside of right foot, to move to the left, using as many touches as you want, initially for 1 metre then more if you have space. Control the ball when you stop using sole of the foot. Repeat using left foot going to the right.

6/ DRIBBLE AND CONTROL: Keeping the ball under control, and using inside of both feet, move the ball forward as quickly as possible, and then stop and control the ball as quickly as possible. Use both left and right foot to stop the ball, sometimes with sole and sometimes by running beyond the ball and stopping it with the inside of the foot

7/ DRIBBLE AND TURN: Using inside of both feet, move than ball forward as quickly as possible, then stop, turn 180 degrees, and come back to where you started. Turns can be using sole of foot or inside of foot, practice turning with right foot and with left foot. Aim to move forward a distance of about 1 metre.

8/ BOUNDING: Standing on the right foot, try to leap sideways to land on the left foot and keep your balance. Repeat coming back taking off from left foot to land on right foot. This could be done over a ball or over a spot on the ground, or a line on the floor, or without any obstacle. Progress: 'bound' diagonally side-to-side going slowly forwards.

9/ PROTECTING THE BALL: With a partner/parent trying to get the ball from you, turn your back to them so they can't see the ball and keep the ball under control with your feet. Make your body into a shield that doesn't let your partner get to the ball, and move the shield around if your partner tries to come round the side of you. Switch over so both people get to be the 'protector'.

10/ FOLLOW THE LEADER: With a partner/parent, one is a leader the other is a follower. The leader must dribble and move the ball carefully using both feet. The follower must follow and copy everything they do. The leader should change direction and speed often, and stop, turn and move the ball using different parts of the foot. Repeat: allowing only right foot to be used, and then repeat using only left foot. Place 'gates' with cones or spots (or other obstacles) for the leader to navigate through, place them close together so leader needs to change direction often. Focus on control rather than speed. Remember to switch so both get to be leader and both get to be follower.