

1st Grade Practice Game Concepts and Drills

You should be cycling through these various game concepts and drills at every practice. Through repetition and consistency, the kids will learn how to play the game of basketball, properly shoot the ball, shoot a lay-up, pass, and dribble.

At this age, they don't need much variety. Keep things simple and repetitive, so they can build good habits. Refer to the Basketball Skills Progression Document to see the correct form on dribbling, passing, shooting, lay-ups, footwork, and game concepts.

Pick one drill from each of the following categories for each practice:

- **Game Concepts/Scrimmaging**
- **Passing**
- **Dribbling**
- **Lay-ups**

If there's time, there are other drills that you can do, listed at the bottom. Dribbling, lay-ups, passing, and some kind of scrimmage or game play should be all done at every practice. Make sure to include some fun games

Game Concepts

Yes, this seems very basic, but we are laying the groundwork for these kids becoming good basketball players. There is no sense in teaching them about any fundamentals if they don't understand how the game works at a basic level. You may need to take a few minutes at each practice to remind the kids about basketball game concepts.

- **OFFENSIVE CONCEPTS**
 - At this level on offense, we really want the kids to learn:
 - Quick passes
 - Go directly to the line with your dribble.
 - Don't force a shot if it isn't there.
 - What does offense mean?
 - The team that has the ball.
 - What is the offense trying to do with the ball?
 - Put it in the basket.
 - Can you run/walk with the ball?
 - Discuss pivoting vs. traveling
 - Can you dribble the ball with 2 hands?
 - Can you kick the ball?
 - Can you dribble the ball again after you have picked it up from dribbling?
 - Triple Threat Position
 - You can pass, dribble, and shoot from this position.
 - What is faster: Passing or Dribbling?
 - Demonstrate that you can get the ball to the basket faster by passing vs. dribbling.
 - Should you shoot the ball with someone in your face?
 - Pivot and pass to an open player.
 - What should you do when a shot goes up?
 - Crash the boards: Go for the rebound. Follow your shot.

- What should you do as soon as the defense gets the ball, either from a steal or off a rebound?
 - Immediately run back to protect the basket. No pressing.
- **DEFENSIVE CONCEPTS**
 - What does defense mean?
 - The team without the ball.
 - What is your job on defense?
 - Stop the other team from putting the ball in the basket.
 - When your team is on defense, you are all “goalies” protecting the basket (the goal) together from the ball.
 - Everyone has a player to guard, but the ball is the #1 priority on defense.
 - If a player doesn’t have the ball, can they score?
 - No. Always know where the ball is.
 - What is a foul?
 - Can you push the other player?
 - Can you hit the other player?
 - Can you grab the other player?
 - Good defensive position
 - Feet shoulder-length apart, knees bent slightly, and arms out
 - Watch belly button of offensive player. Only body part that can’t fake you out!
 - What should you be watching on defense?
 - #1 – the ball
 - #2 – your player you are guarding
 - Back to the basket. Does the basket move? Only the ball and player move.
 - Player should ALWAYS be in a position on defense where they can see both the ball and player at the same time. If they can’t see both, it isn’t good defense.
 - *GAME TIP:* Remind your players on defense, “Where’s the ball? Where’s your player? Point to them both.”
 - REBOUNDING: When a shot goes up, you should find your player and box them out.
 - Players tend to turn and look at the basket and run to it vs. first finding a player to box them out. Introduce this concept now, so it can be reinforced later.
- **SCRIMMAGING**
 - Off Ball Screens
 - Please see the progression chart for instructions on how to teach setting a screen and using a screen. Make sure the defense knows how to defend against a screen.
 - 1-on-1 half-court
 - You only have 4 dribbles to use on offense.
 - Use them to go quickly and directly to the basket.
 - Defense needs to move feet to keep the ball from going to the basket.
 - 2-on-2 half-court
 - No dribbling, just passing.
 - Focus on pivoting and quick passes.
 - Defense is not allowed to steal the ball, but can make it difficult to pass it.
 - Trying to keep the ball moving towards the basket.
 - 3-on-3 half-court

- Simulate how a game will be with the same game rules.
- Make sure to stop and correct the kids. It seems tedious, but by the end of the season, they will catch on to the concepts.

Passing

- CHEST PASS
 - Kids pair up with only 1 ball for the pair.
 - Start close and gradually move farther apart as they progress. Make sure they are keeping proper form as they move apart.
 - They should hit the target directly in the chest.
 - See how long they can go without someone dropping the ball.
- CHEST PASS SHUFFLE
 - Same drill, except kids are shuffling down the court passing the ball back and forth to each other.
- PROGRESSION DRILL
 - If your kids have mastered the chest pass, introduce the Bounce Pass.
 - Refer to the Basketball Skills Progression Document for how to teach a Bounce Pass.

Dribbling

Discuss with the players about how to use their dribbles in a game. In the game, they are only allowed 4 dribbles, before they have to pass. These are the dribbling concepts that should be taught to the players throughout the season, at practices and in games:

1. Don't dribble as soon as you get the ball.
 2. Use your dribble to go directly to the basket, not the corners of the court.
 3. Use your dribbles wisely and efficiently.
- BASIC DRIBBLING DRILL
 - Every player has a ball. If there are not enough balls, have them pair off and take turns.
 - Have them spread out in a line, with enough space to dribble.
 - Start with the right hand and demonstrate the correct form.
 - Knees bent.
 - Pushing the ball with fingers, not slapping the ball with palm.
 - Ball kept low to the ground, bouncing up to about knee level.
 - Eyes up!
 - Opposite hand protecting.
 - After a few minutes, have them switch to the left hand.
 - PROGRESSION DRILL
 - If your kids have mastered this drill, introduce the Crossover dribble.
 - Refer to the Basketball Skills Progression Document for how to teach a Crossover Dribble.
 - DRIBBLE AND JUMP STOP
 - Players line up under the basket along the baseline, each with a basketball.
 - When you say "GO", they start to dribble towards the opposite basket with their dominant hand.
 - It is important they maintain good form and not lose control of the basketball. It isn't a race!

- When you say “STOP”, they come to a jump stop. Say “GO” again to have them start dribbling again.
- *PROGRESSION DRILL*
 - Once the kids have mastered the jump stop, introduce a pivot when they jump stop.
 - Refer to the Basketball Skills Progression Document for how to teach a Jump Stop/Pivot.
- **DRIBBLING GAME – KNOCK OUT**
 - This is a great way to teach kids about dribbling, all while learning how to dribble.
 - Every player has a basketball inside a defined area, usually the lines on the floor.
 - If your ball is knocked outside of the area, you are out.
 - You can knock away another player’s ball, but make sure you don’t lose yours in the process!
 - As the number of kids left in the game go down, shrink the size of the game area.
 - Last one in wins!

Lay-ups

Lay-ups should be a progression drill. If the kids don’t understand the footwork, they should not be doing a full lay-up while dribbling. They need to understand the proper footwork and build good habits starting in the 1st grade.

- **FOOTWORK – RIGHT SIDE**
 - Start with correct footwork and no ball.
 - Line up the kids at one end of the court, along the baseline.
 - Demonstrate without a ball.
 - Jump off left foot
 - Right knee goes up
 - Once you demonstrate it to the kids, have them go down the court, without the ball, just practicing the footwork.
 - Left, Right, and jump off the Left foot.
- **LAY-UPS, NO DRIBBLE AND 2 STEPS**
 - Each player has a ball and lines up on the right side. Feel free to split up the kids if you have enough coaches to watch and help the kids.
 - No dribbling! Just footwork and shooting the lay-up.
 - Start with two steps, Right than jumping off the Left.
 - Ball is shot up by the head, not thrown underhanded.
 - Right knee comes up with the ball.
 - Hit the corner of the box on the backboard to bank it in the basket.
- **LAY-UPS, NO DRIBBLE AND 3 STEPS**
 - Each player has a ball and lines up on the right side. Feel free to split up the kids if you have enough coaches to watch and help the kids.
 - Still no dribbling!
 - 3 steps: Left, Right, and jumping off the Left foot.
- **LAY-UPS, 1 DRIBBLE (FINALLY!)**
 - It is essential to not progress to this part until a player has mastered the footwork.
 - Each player has a ball and lines up on the right side. Feel free to split up the kids if you have enough coaches to watch and help the kids.

- The player still takes 3 steps, but adds in 1 dribble with the first step.
 - 3 steps: Left (dribble), Right, and jumping off the Left foot.
- Make sure to explain that this isn't traveling, because their right foot is technically their pivot foot. Eventually, they will do this quicker, but this is how they will learn the right footwork.

Additional drills/games

If there's time, you can do any of these other drills. The focus should be on passing, dribbling, lay-ups, and game concepts.

- **SHOOTING**
 - Each player with a ball lines up in a line in a few feet away from the front of the basket. Feel free to split up the kids at the different baskets if you have enough coaches to watch and help the kids.
 - The players take turns shooting the ball.
 - Emphasis should be on proper form, not making the basket.
 - Please refer to the Basketball Skills Progression Document for correct shooting form.
 - Have the players shoot with only one hand and at close range to teach them about the correct form.
 - Try not to encourage the players to shoot far away from the basket, unless they are able to maintain good shooting form while doing so.
- **SHARKS AND MINNOWS**
 - 1-2 players are the Sharks. The other players have basketballs and are Minnows.
 - The goal is for the Sharks to tag the Minnows, while they are dribbling up and down the court.
 - Once tagged, a Minnow becomes a Scarecrow with the ball between their feet. They can also tag the Minnows, as well as the Sharks.
 - The last one left wins!