



Movement, Coordination, Catching

By John Q

Catching is an important movement skill for children to learn. And like all things, catching is learnt best when practiced in a context which is fun and supportive; both elements which you can easily provide.

For young children who are only beginning to try catching, a balloon makes the perfect toy. Children associate balloons with fun times. Balloons are also lightweight and very slow through the air, they are forgiving - unless squeezed that little bit too hard!

A good game to begin with is simply tapping or hitting it through the air between partners. Make sure you are in a clear area that is safe and free of possible obstacles. See how many times you can tap between each other. Set a goal of a certain number of taps and see if you can get there. You can both do the counting – this will then help their numeracy as well. If this is pretty easy, aim to set a record number of taps between each other. Next time you play you can see if you can beat this record.

You can make these simple tapping games more complex by hitting to each other over a string used as a net, or over a chair. You can explore hitting the balloon with different parts of your body, left hand, right hand, back of your hand, fingers, feet, knees, elbows, even your head. Or you can restrict hitting to only one of these body parts.

Once your child is comfortable with hitting the balloon, you can explore catching the balloon. Younger children often display a level of fear when catching, usually because they think they are going to be hit by the object, so they turn away. Using a balloon is a good beginning because they know that a balloon hitting them is not going to hurt. And having played the tapping games with you, they know they should be looking at the balloon as it approaches them.

The catching game should start with you standing quite close together, even such that you nearly hand the balloon over to your child for the first catch. This will also allow you to talk to them about how tightly they should be trying to grip the balloon – too tight could end up in a big fright! When this is going OK you can increase the distance between you. See how far apart you can get; this can be the record to be beaten next time. You should be encouraging your child to keep looking at the balloon as they catch it with two hands. If this seems to be coming along well, you can introduce balloons that are less inflated and therefore more solid and a bit smaller. Experiment with different levels of inflation.

This simple progression from balloon tapping to balloon catching will introduce your child to catching in a fun and supportive context – mainly because they are doing it with you!

Biography:

John is currently a university lecturer having worked at the University of Melbourne for the past 10 years. Here he specializes in training primary school teachers in the art and science of teaching physical education. Prior to this he taught physical education to secondary students in a large independent school in Victoria. He is married with two children, one in the middle years of childhood and the other

about to become a teenager (although he thinks he is already there). He ardently follows his AFL team and enjoys getting out on his road bike on the weekends.