

## AGSA PIXIE AND PIGTAIL CURRICULUM (\*Pigtail coaches should start with Pixie skills/drills and move on as needed)

### AGSA/Pixie

Pixies are kindergarteners and first graders who are new to softball. The first priority is to make the game fun for the girls and begin to build their enthusiasm for the game. It will be important to help many of the girls be aggressive and overcome their fear of the ball, and for us, as coaches, to remember to be patient and to avoid overcoaching. Some of the skills required to master the game are highly complex and defy easy acquisition, particularly at this age level. Instruction should focus more on demonstration rather than verbal instruction, and macro rather than micro movements.

Practices must be high energy and keep the girls engaged and active. Practices should emphasize the most basic elements of the game – receiving the ball with two hands, throwing with the hips and good hand separation, swinging hard and through the ball. The drills included here are designed to build strong fundamentals and to serve as a platform for continuous development through upper levels of AGSA. Enthusiasm for her and her team’s performances, and aggressiveness in pursuing the ball, both with the bat and the glove, are two of the main goals for Pixies. Practices should be run with these priorities in mind. Safety should be emphasized as well (checking surroundings before swinging the bat, wearing helmets, dropping (not throwing) the bat after hitting, giving a target when receiving the ball and looking at target before throwing).

### Practice length

1 hour

### Suggested Practice Plan

0:00-0:05	Warm up
0:05-0:15	Throwing
0:15-0:25	Split team into two: 1) Fielding; 2) Hitting
0:25-0:30	Break
0:30-0:40	Switch hitting and fielding groups
0:40-0:50	Game knowledge/positional coverage
0:50-0:55	Baserunning/High energy skill game/competition
0:55-1:00	Wrap up/discussion

### Recommended Warm-up Exercises

Cardio	Jogging Skipping Jumping Jacks Base sprints/races Running to positions race/game
Agility	Hand-eye coordination Shuffles
Stretching	Floppy arm twists (arms out and flopping around body as girls twist from side to side) Woodchopper (hands up to the sky on one side, then down to the opposite foot, twisting at core, switch after 10) Arm circles (arms out to the side, rotate backward, small circles to big, reversing every other arm as the circles get larger. Then forward, small to big circles)

### Key Skills and Drills

#### Throwing and Receiving (catching)

Throwing goals: Basic elements of throwing: wrist snap, arm slot (away from shoulder/head), use of hips and legs

Refinements: Separation of hand from shoulder/head, ball facing away, turning feet and shoulders (glove side of body toward target; not square to target), stepping toward the target; following through throwing arm to opposite knee and throwing leg steps through.

Receiving goals: Gain comfort receiving the ball/overcoming fear of the ball. Giving a target and receiving the ball with two hands.

1	Warm up	<p>Lines of 3-4 players line up opposite 3-4 adults. Players rotate through as follows, all players completing first item before beginning next item:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 3 <i>wrist snaps</i> aimed at creating backspin off the fingertips (facing adult, feet shoulder width, throwing arm in an “L” with elbow in front of torso at shoulder height, glove hand cupping throwing elbow). Goal: Gives new players a feel for how the ball should leave their hand.</li> <li>● 3 <i>front rotation throws</i> (square to/facing adult, feet shoulder width, both arms in front as in catching position, then rotate hips back and separate hands/arms with glove hand out toward target, throwing hand back - arms out from body, elbows slightly bent, palms facing away from body; then bring hips and arm forward to throw). Goal: Engages the hips in propelling the arm forward to release the ball.</li> <li>● 3 <i>side rotation throws</i>. Same as previous, but players’ are glove side (perpendicular) to adult, and add step and follow-through bend at waist with throwing hand to opposite knee. Goal: Engages the legs and back in adding velocity to the throw.</li> </ul> <p>NOTE: These three drills de-emphasize the importance of the arm in the throwing motion, except in terms of its position away from the body, on the theory that the arm will find its natural slot if these other elements are learned.</p> <p>Cycle through the warm-up 3-5 times. Total time spent on this warm up should be approximately 5-7 minutes.</p>
2	Self toss	<p>With no glove, player lightly tosses ball in the air and catches it with both hands. Variations: underhand toss to self; basketball spins.</p> <p>Progression: Once mastered, player puts on glove and resumes tossing. With improvement, player should toss higher. In addition to catching, teaches player to refine control of the ball - as it goes higher, it should stay within a limited radius, preferably in front of the player.</p>

3	Flips	<p>No gloves, players in pairs. Lined up opposite one another, about 5-8 feet apart, players lightly underhand toss the ball to one another, and should catch it with both hands. Goal: Diminish fear of the ball, encourage using two hands to catch, encourage players to control their release of the ball in terms of accuracy and, especially, velocity.</p> <p>Progression: 1) Increase distance until players are about 15 feet apart (only after some catching proficiency is achieved). 2) Let players use their glove once they demonstrate some proficiency in catching without them. 3) Players can move further apart and toss overhand to one another. Coaches should monitor players closely at this point to ensure they are working towards mastery of throwing goals.</p>
4	Pick up/Team Pick up Relay	<p>Place three balls on the ground a few feet apart in a line and about 5-10 feet in front of player (or line of players). Player runs to pick up one ball and throws it to designated target (adult a reasonable distance away (or at base) so player can reach with some effort). Player returns for second and then third ball. Start without gloves. This should be done with an emphasis on speed, as in a race with teams (you can divide team into two or three groups and each player throws one ball and then tags next teammate; each line with its own adult receiver). Focus on arm slot, footwork and positioning for the throw. Good end of practice competition.</p> <p>Progression: Have multiple stations around the field, at different bases and home plate, and in different directions. Increase distance. Increase number of balls.</p>

### Fielding

Foster aggressiveness towards ball; Build comfort moving toward and fielding groundballs. Grow comfortable throwing to a base after picking up a grounder.; Encourage communication

1	Pickup and Throw	Set up two (or three) lines, one at shortstop, the other at second base, and the third 15 feet behind the pitcher's mound. Start with no gloves. Put an adult at 3rd, one at 1st, and one at home to catch. All players
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		<p>positioned to face home plate. Roll a ball from the direction of home plate to stop somewhere in front of the first player in each line. Once it stops, player charges it and makes the throw to the corresponding base. After the throw, player runs to the end of the other line. Goal: Introduce movement, approach, and footwork when throwing in different directions. Praise those players for a particularly aggressive approach to the ball, take the correct angle, or put their feet in the correct position.</p> <p>Progressions: 1) Have a coach or parent roll the ball toward the player and have the player pick it up before it stops. Roll the ball to the right and left for additional variations. Add gloves to drill for another variation. 2) Use a bat to move the ball to the players instead of rolling it. Use gloves.</p> <p>Team competition: Another variation is to turn the drill into a competition: one point for each team that makes an accurate throw; 2 or 3 points for the team that finishes first (depends on how many kids on each team).</p>
2	Touchbase	<p>Similar to <i>Pickup and Throw</i>. Divide teams between shortstop (about 5 feet from 3rd base) and second base (about 5 feet from 1st base). Draw a line or put down a cone so they know where to start. Adults rolls grounder to each line. Player in front of line has to field the ball and run and touch the base...and yells "out". When the player touches the base (with the ball), the parent rolls the ball to the next player in line (coach cannot roll it until they have touched the base). It's a relay race. First team done wins. Drill can be done same as above but with a bucket by the coach...kid fields the ball and races to put it in the bucket. When ball in bucket coach can roll the next ball.</p>
3	Grounders	<p>3 adults with lines of 3-4 kids each about 15-20 feet away. Adult rolls three grounders to each player, then rotate. Players should work to field the all at the top of the triangle (feet as the base, hands as the apex) and with two hands. Variations: charging slow rollers; moving/shuffling side to side to still get in front.</p>
4	Race to the Ball	<p>Set up two or three lines of players on the foul line between home and first. Toss a ball onto the field 15 or more feet in front of the players. Players race to the ball. First one to get there calls "Mine mine mine", picks up the ball, and throws it to a designated base. Target can be at 2nd, 3rd, or home. Use caution to avoid collisions.</p>

5	Rundown Relay	<p>This is done as a competition. In groups of three, with no gloves, players line up about 30 feet apart, two at one end, one at the other. Starting at the two player end (Players 1 and 3), Player 1 runs with the ball and hands off to Player 2, who runs and hands off to Player 3, who runs and hands off to Player 1, etc. Cycle through until players are back in their starting positions. Goal: Gets players used to receiving the ball, and to the feel of the ball, while also learning the pattern for a rundown.</p> <p>Progressions: 1) Instead of hand-off, can have player lightly underhand toss the ball to other player from 8-10 feet away. 2) Add gloves. Have players run with the ball in throwing hand held in throwing position.</p>
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### Hitting

- a) Feet parallel to plate
- b) Proper grip (front arm hand on bottom, back arm hand on top - so a righty would have their right hand on top; door-knocking knuckles lined up)
- c) Hands back
- d) Nose/eyes on ball
- e) Stepping toward the ball
- f) Swing hard

Tee drills (tee placement should out in front of front hip, eye and nose down on empty tee after swing, make sure bats are appropriate size/weight (smaller is better than too big/heavy when learning to swing))

1	Hip rotation	With bat behind back, make contact with ball on tee (tee needs to be placed further back than normal, near the back hip instead of the front hip to allow for contact and avoid over-rotation). Encourages explosive hip rotation.
2	Dance step	Player takes their stride multiple times to get the feeling, and then swings. Player should maintain weight back upon touch, and then shift weight as hip rotates with swing. "Touch, touch, touch, step and swing." Emphasizes stride and weight shift.

3	Ready...Set... Fire!	Tee is set up with cones lined up out in front of the tee. Can do multiple tees at once if space/safety allows. Coach says "Ready, Set, Fire" to get players to fire the hips and drive the hands through the ball to drive the ball past as many cones as possible. Player gets one point for each cone that is passed. Players are encouraged to improve their totals throughout the season. Can also be done as an end-of-practice competition.
4	Tee reps	Players hit off the tee. Focus on how the batter's grip, stance, how she moves her hands to the ball, and eyes focused on point of contact after swing. Sets of 5-10 and then break/rotate to avoid fatigue and distraction.

Hitting Progression: Hitting underhand coach pitch - just for fun - later in the season. Coach should use a net/screen and be as close as possible to achieve maximum control and be able to adjust speed depending on the needs of the batter.

### Baserunning & Sliding

- a) Running through first base
- b) Rounding bases
- c) Pumping arms (hands should pump cheek to hip, forward and back - not side to side)
- d) Sliding intro - Introducing sliding helps players get used to getting dirty, feeling the ground under their butts, and reaching the base with their feet. Plus, young kids love playing in the dirt!

1	Run through First	Player hits off tee, drops bat, and runs through first. Emphasis on dropping bat and running through first base, slowing down only after crossing the base.
2	Base Race	Half team at home plate and half at second. Players run around bases (hitting inside of base) until they get to where they started and tag the next player on their team. When the last player reaches everyone sits down. First team finished wins.

3	Crab walk	Crab walk full speed (chest up, butt down) feet first towards base. Kick out legs when base in reach.
4	Bear crawl	Bear crawl (belly down, butt up) head first toward base, swing legs out to base when in reach.
5	Limbo	Coach or parent holds the noodle (or two adults hold toilet paper) across the basepath at the point where the player should begin her slide. Player runs (can go at half to three-quarter speed) and slides underneath the noodle. Can also do this using sliding matt instead of on the dirt.

### Game Knowledge

1	Position warm up	Warm up by having players jog to position or base that coach yells out. Can make this a race, rotate the players calling out positions, etc.
2	Positions talk	Briefly review 1 or 2 positions at each practice. Team joins coach at position (e.g., first base) for brief discussion and demonstration of position responsibilities: what area each position is supposed to cover, including what base to cover. Next practice, review discussions by asking players to describe position responsibilities.
3	Freeze game	Half team in field, half at bat. Team 1 hits the ball off the T and runs to get as many bases as she can. Team 2 fields batted ball and when someone has possession of it in the INFIELD yells "Freeze." Team 1 gets as many points as bases that have been touch. Next batter goes and so on. Be sure to move infielder positions, especially if many of the batters hit to the same location.
4	Race to first	Half team lines up behind third base, half line up to bat. One fielder steps into ready position at third; one batter steps into box. Adult catcher at 1st base. Ball is placed behind the pitcher's rubber. Batter swings (but doesn't actually hit), drops the bat, and runs to first. Third baseman runs to pick up ball and throw to first. One point to fielding team if batter is out; one point to batting team if safe. Switch after all batters



		have run. Can play multiple “innings” depending on time. Adjust distance of fielding as necessary (if third base is too far, try pitcher or second).
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### AGSA/Pigtail

Pigtails are second and third graders, about half of which are returning and the other half are new to the game. Early practices will need to review/introduce the fundamentals of the game (see Pixie league). Later practices will begin to add to the Pixie level, specifically encouraging girls to use their entire body when throwing, fielding, hitting, and running. At the Pigtail level the score is kept at games so players need to learn how to get outs defensively and when/how to run the bases.

Practices must be high energy and keep the girls engaged and active. Practices should emphasize the most basic elements of the game – receiving the ball with two hands, throwing with the hips and good hand separation, swinging hard and through the ball - and begin to incorporate getting outs defensively and basic baserunning skills. The drills included here are designed to build strong fundamentals and to serve as a platform for continuous development through upper levels of AGSA. Enthusiasm for her and her team’s performances, and aggressiveness in pursuing the ball, both with the bat and the glove, continue to be underlying goals. Effort should be encouraged and rewarded, not results. Mistakes are the way players learn, and we must coach in a way so players stretch their efforts, instead of being fearful of mistakes. Consider instituting a team mistake ritual (see Positive Coaching Alliance for more information). Safety should be emphasized as it was in Pixie level.

Third graders who are interested in pitching and catching should attend the AGSA-sponsored clinics.

### Practice length

1:15-1:30

### Sample Plan

0:00-0:10	Warm up
0:10-0:20	Throwing
0:20-0:35	Split team into two: 1) Fielding 2) Hitting
0:35-0:40	Break
0:40-0:55	Switch hitting and fielding groups
0:55-1:15	Game Knowledge/ Positional coverage
1:15-1:25	Baserunning/High energy skill game/Competition
1:25-1:30	Wrap up/discussion

### Recommended Warm-up Exercises

Exercise Group	Options
Cardio	Jogging Skipping / Power skips (reaching high) Jumping Jacks Base sprints/races
Agility	Hand-eye coordination Shuffles and cross over steps Drop step
Stretching	Floppy arm twists (arms out and flopping around body as girls twist from side to side) Woodchopper (hands up to the sky on one side, then down to the opposite foot, twisting at core, switch after 10) Arm circles (arms out to the side, rotate backward, small circles then big (reversing every other arm as the circles get larger). Then forward, small to big circles) Standing squats (slowly with breath, keeping knees above ankles - not allowing knees to move forward)

## Key Skills

### Throwing

- a) Footwork for throwing to a target (field ball at top of triangle, cross over step in front toward target)
- b) Flipping the ball to a target

1	Warm up	<p>Lines of 3-4 players line up opposite 3-4 adults. Players rotate through as follows, all players completing first item before beginning next item:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 3 <i>wrist snaps</i> aimed at creating backspin off the fingertips (facing adult, feet shoulder width, throwing arm in an “L” with elbow in front of torso at shoulder height, glove hand cupping throwing elbow). Goal: Gives new players a feel for how the ball should leave their hand.</li><li>• 3 <i>front rotation throws</i> (square to/facing adult, feet shoulder width, both arms in front as in catching position, then rotate hips back and separate hands/arms with glove hand out toward target, throwing hand back - arms out from body, elbows slightly bent, palms facing away from body; then bring hips and arm forward to throw). Goal: Engages the hips in propelling the arm forward to release the ball.</li><li>• 3 <i>side rotation throws</i>. Same as previous, but players’ are glove side (perpendicular) to adult, and add step and follow-through bend at waist with throwing hand to opposite knee. Goal: Engages the legs and back in adding velocity to the throw.</li></ul> <p>NOTE: These three drills de-emphasize the importance of the arm in the throwing motion, except in terms of its position away from the body, on the theory that the arm will find its natural slot if these other elements are learned.</p>
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		Cycle through the warm-up 3-5 times. Total time spent on this warm up should be approximately 7-10 minutes.
2	Outs at First	½ team runs from home, ½ team at pitcher circle. Adult batter and adult catcher at first base. Adult rolls or hits the ball to the pitcher who fields it and throws to first. Running team gets a point when they are safe. To make it a closer play (and give fielders a chance), runners can be moved closer to first base (draw a line) or coach can say “go” well after the ball is rolled/hit. Progression: Replace adult at first base with a player. Allow players to roll balls to pitcher and then run to first.
3	Pick up	Player runs to pick up 3 balls placed separately on the ground and throws them to designated position. This should be done with an emphasis on speed, as in a race with teams. Focus on footwork and positioning for the throw.

### Fielding and Receiving

- a) Moving feet to get in front of ball
- b) Triangle with bent knees (hands at top of triangle, fielding ball out in front, feet at base of triangle)
- c) Two hands (“alligator chomp”)
- d) Two hands when receiving/catching

1	Pickup and Throw	Set up two (or three) lines, one at shortstop, the other at second base, and the third 15 feet behind the pitcher’s mound. Start with no gloves. Put an adult at 3rd, one at 1st, and one at home to catch. All players positioned to face home plate. Roll a ball from the direction of home plate to stop somewhere in front of the first player in each line. Once it stops, player charges it and makes the throw to the corresponding base. After the throw, player runs to the end of the other line. Goal: Introduce movement, approach, and footwork when throwing in different directions. Praise those players for a particularly aggressive approach to the ball, take the correct angle, or put their feet in the correct position.
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		<p>Progressions: 1) Have a coach or parent roll the ball toward the player and have the player pick it up before it stops. Roll the ball to the right and left for additional variations. Add gloves to drill for another variation. 2) Use a bat to move the ball to the players instead of rolling it. Use gloves.</p> <p>Team competition: Another variation is to turn the drill into a competition: one point for each team that makes an accurate throw; 2 or 3 points for the team that finishes first (depends on how many kids on each team).</p>
2	Touchbase	<p>Similar to <i>Pickup and Throw</i>. Divide teams between shortstop (about 5 feet from 3rd base) and second base (about 5 feet from 1st base). Draw a line or put down a cone so they know where to start. Adults rolls grounder to each line. Player in front of line has to field the ball and run and touch the base...and yells "out". When the player touches the base (with the ball), the parent rolls the ball to the next player in line (coach cannot roll it until they have touched the base). It's a relay race. First team done wins. Drill can be done same as above but with a bucket by the coach...kid fields the ball and races to put it in the bucket. When ball in bucket coach can roll the next ball.</p>
3	Grounders	<p>3 adults with lines of 3-4 kids each about 15-20 feet away. Adult rolls three grounders to each player, then rotate. Players should work to field the all at the top of the triangle (feet as the base, hands as the apex) and with two hands. Variations: charging slow rollers; moving/shuffling side to side to still get in front.</p>
4	Race to the Ball	<p>Have a line at SS and a line at 3B...roll grounder at or in between the 2 fielder. Have them call the ball "mine" three times loud, and the other goes and backs up. Player who backed up goes again. Player who fielded it goes to back of other line.</p>
5	Rundown Relay	<p>This is done as a competition. In groups of three, with no gloves, players line up about 30 feet apart, two at one end, one at the other. Starting at the two player end (Players 1 and 3), Player 1 runs with the ball and hands off to Player 2, who runs and hands off to Player 3, who runs and hands off to Player 1, etc. Cycle through until players are back in their starting positions. Goal: Gets players used to receiving the ball, and to the feel of the ball, while also learning the pattern for a rundown.</p>

		Progressions: 1) Instead of hand-off, can have player lightly underhand toss the ball to other player from 8-10 feet away. 2) Add gloves. Have players run with the ball in throwing hand held in throwing position.
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### Hitting

- 1) See Pixie above for basic hitting mechanics
- 2) Using hips and legs to generate power
- 3) Timing different pitching speeds (so the player is making contact out in front of front hip)

Tee drills (tee placement should out in front of front hip, eye and nose down on empty tee after swing, make sure bats are appropriate size/weight (smaller is better than too big/heavy when learning to swing))

1	Hip rotation	With bat behind back, make contact with ball on tee (tee needs to be placed further back than normal, near the back hip instead of the front hip to allow for contact and avoid over-rotation). Encourages explosive hip rotation.
2	Dance step	Player takes their stride multiple times to get the feeling, and then swings. Player should maintain weight back upon touch, and then shift weight as hip rotates with swing. "Touch, touch, touch, step and swing." Emphasizes stride and weight shift.
3	Ready...Set... Fire!	Tee is set up with cones lined up out in front of the tee. Can do multiple tees at once if space/safety allows. Coach says "Ready, Set, Fire" to get players to fire the hips and drive the hands through the ball to drive the ball past as many cones as possible. Player gets one point for each cone that is passed. Players are encouraged to improve their totals throughout the season. Can also be done as an end-of-practice competition. Be sure players keep their nose on down (and don't pull their head up to watch the ball!)
4	Tee reps	Players hit off the tee. Focus on how the batter's grip, stance, how she moves her hands to the ball, and eyes focused on point of contact after swing. Sets of 5-10 and then break/rotate to avoid fatigue and

		distraction.
5	Coach Front Toss	Coach should use a net/screen (depending on power of batters and coach's reflexes) and be as close as possible to achieve maximum control and be able to adjust speed depending on the needs of the batter. Coach should move to the front of the pitching circle over the course of the season. Another coach can hit groundballs to defense between pitches/when batter doesn't make contact. Can have other hitting stations going on in outfield/perimeter as space and safety allow.
6	Timing Drills (Right...now)	Teaching players to wait for the ball to get into the smash zone (in front of their front leg) before they start their swing. Players say "right" when they see the ball and then "now" when they have to swing. So a faster pitch would be "right...now" and a slower pitch would be "right.....now".
7	Team Survivor	Split into two teams. Alternating teams. First time through each player gets 3 strikes to hit the ball. They get one point for each ball put into fair territory. Then a player on other team goes. Continue rotating until everyone has gone, keeping track of points as you go. Second time through they each get 2 strikes to hit it fair. Last time through they get 1 strike. (If they foul the last pitch they get another – just like a game). Team with the most points at the end, wins. Variation: One team hits while other team fields, then switch, instead of having everyone hit at once.

Baserunning & Sliding

- a) Running through 1st base
- b) Rounding 1st base
- c) Stopping at 2nd & 3rd bases

1	Run through First/Run to second	<p>Player hits off tee, drops bat, and runs through first. Emphasis on dropping bat and running through first base, slowing down only after crossing the base.</p> <p>Progression: First base coach waves girls to 2nd base, where they have to stop on the base. Coach can vary when (s)he sends runners or keeps them at first.</p>
2	Base Race	Half team at home plate and half at second. Players run around bases (hitting inside of base) until they get to where they started and tag the next player on their team. When the last player reaches everyone sits down. First team finished wins.
3	Crab walk	Crab walk full speed (chest up, butt down) feet first towards base. Kick out legs when base in reach.
4	Bear crawl	Bear crawl (belly down, butt up) head first toward base, swing legs out to base when in reach.
5	Limbo	Coach or parent holds the noodle (or two adults hold toilet paper) across the basepath at the point where the player should begin her slide. Player runs (can go at half to three-quarter speed) and slides underneath the noodle. Can also do this using sliding matt instead of on the dirt.

### Game Knowledge

#### a) Force outs vs. tag plays

1	Force outs	Runners run from home through first while fielders throw/run ball to first off coach's batted or thrown ball. Adjust when (or how far up baseline) runners leave to make the plays close and put pressure on the defense. Can keep points (defense vs. offense). Rotate fielders and runners.
2	Toss & catch	Line of kids 5-10 feet from second base position, and a player standing on second base. Plus a line of players 5-10 feet from third base, and a player standing on third base. Coach(es) rolls the ball to the fielder, who fields it, turns and flips it underhand to the person standing on the base close to them for the out. Players on the base receiving the ball should call out the base three times loudly as the other player is fielding.



3	Force at Home	Players at pitcher and runners at third base. Roll or hit ground ball to pitcher. They have to field it and run and step on home before the runner gets there. Coach yells "go" to the runner. Watch out for collisions at home!
4	Force outs at 2nd and 3rd	Same as above two, but with runners at first base, and then first and second base. Emphasize runners stopping on base, fielders using good technique (triangle with alligator), and communication (receivers on base calling for the ball loudly three times).