



When Should Kids Start Pitching In Games?

This resource stems from a question submitted to the Ask PCA blog. Responses come from our experts including PCA Trainers, who lead live group workshops for coaches, parents, administrators and student-athletes.

"I'm a baseball, softball, and lacrosse coach in Weston, MA and have thoroughly enjoyed your sessions each season.

I'm just wondering if PCA has any resources or opinions it can share regarding when kids should start pitching in games. I did some searching online and couldn't find anything but individual opinions (and they ranged from 7 to 12 years old)."

PCA Response By David Jacobson, PCA Trainer & Senior Marketing Communications and Content Manager

I doubt you'll find a universal standard for when kids should start pitching. Speaking as a past Little League Baseball and Softball coach, here are some observations and considerations.

- Most important is arm health and safety, taking care that a child not pitch too much, even in practice, and not throwing curve balls, which puts unique stress on the arm, too early. Little League's rules and guidelines have gained general acceptance.
- Another safety consideration is the training of batters to avoid being hit by pitches, and how to minimize the impact and damage when they cannot get move out of the way of an errant pitch fast enough. And, another safety consideration is teaching pitchers the footwork and glove work necessary to defend themselves against balls hit back at them at high speed.
- The next level of consideration is more subjective and depends on your league's/community's standards for baseball development. Keeping kids in baseball -- a sport increasingly seen as "boring" by kids who grow up with fast-action video games and other forms of immediate gratification in regards to what keeps their attention and engagement -- depends on the ball being put into play.
- The younger the pitcher, the less that happens. Why? Because inexperienced pitchers mean more walks and more nervous batters, who fear being hit by an obviously errant pitcher and won't put in play the same ball at the same speed and same location as one thrown by an adult.

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Start pitching, continued

- Still, in order to ensure your community has the pitchers needed to continue age-appropriate baseball development, you need to start working youth pitchers into games at some point. Unless you have extraordinarily talented youth athletes and/or extraordinary coaching, it is not likely that you will strike the balance between ball-in-play needs and pitching-development needs before age 9-10.
- One of the keys toward striking that balance is to let kids throw BP and in practices and scrimmages (again, safety first...give pitchers helmets, L-screens, whatever they need, in order to have a chance to find the plate and minimize danger). Then, if your league rules allow, or if coaches in house league play can agree on altered rules, you can gradually work the better pitchers into live action. Even then, to ensure ball-in-play, have a written or unwritten rule that the game goes to coach-pitch after, say, three walks in an inning.

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