

“What Should I Be Teaching?” Skills Your Players Should Know

As a coach, you may find yourself unsure of where to start or what to teach. This list is meant to give you an idea of skills that every player should have at their respective age group. Each player is capable of growth, but remember that each kid will start from a differing level and progress at a differing rate. Skills are listed for each division and ordered by priority. Players should know all previous skills before moving on to the next level.

Level 1 (3rd-4th Grade)

Skill	Competency	Details To Focus On
Lay Up	Should be able make lay up with dominant hand. Eventually progress to using secondary hand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Start close with no dribble. • Progress to one step and jumping off of one foot. • Make sure to get the ball high off of the backboard.
Footwork	Should know the triple threat position	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pivot on both left and right foot without traveling
Shooting Form	Should be able to shoot basket without losing proper form.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on keeping the ball forehead high and elbows in. • Utilizing legs is critical for shooting strength.
Ball Handling	Dribble with left and right hands equally well.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the ball with the off-hand. • Avoid watching the ball when dribbling.
Athletic Movement Skills	Be able to skip, stop, move laterally, squat, lunge and other basic movements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These skills can be incorporated into practice during the warm-up and cool-down periods.
Basic Passes	Should know chest, bounce and overhead pass	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on hitting target in chest. • Make sure passes are thrown with right velocity and are catchable.
Small Sided Games	1 on 1, 2 on 2, 3 on 3 games	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These games allow for more experience and touches. • Also allow for more space to operate and use new skills.
Offense	Stay active and involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't focus on set offensive plays or keep it to a minimum of one play. • Should stay focused on where the ball is and what to do with it when in possession.
<p>Note - If you use a few basic cuts and maybe screens in your shooting drills during practice, your players will learn more about offensive basketball than running set plays. Don't waste time making sure kids go to the right location in an offense, rather are alert and know what to do with the ball.</p>		

Basic Cuts	Know how to cut to the basket with and without the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on moving without the ball and going to the open space on the court.
Defense	Should know basic stance, defensive slid and basic off-ball principles.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Don't spend too much time on defense as kids will it up later on. • They should know to stay between their man and the ball. • Stop the ball if it is in front of you.

Level 2 (5th-6th Grade)

Skill	Competency	Details To Focus On
Lay Up	Jump off one foot and jump stop lay ups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure not to travel. • Play under control, faster does not equal better. • Make sure to get the ball high off of the backboard.
Teach Cuts	Should know back cut, curl cut and how to use screens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on being assertive when using a cut. • Try to brush shoulders with the screener when using a screen.
Shooting Form	Introduce movement for shooting drills.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure form doesn't suffer as they increase distance they shoot from. • Focus on leg strength and keeping the ball high. • Release point and follow through will be an increased priority.
Ball Handling	Dribble moves such as crossover, inside-out dribble (fake crossover), hesitation move, and between legs dribble.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect the ball with the off-hand. • Avoid watching the ball when dribbling. • Don't waste dribble – dribble with a purpose. • Don't pick up dribble without a plan.
Passing	Introduce baseball and wrap around pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure passes under pressure are accurate.
Basic Screens	Should understand how to set a screen to open teammate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on being stationary. Don't lead with shoulder. • Should know how to use on and off ball screens.
Footwork	Should know jab step and ball fakes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure not to travel. • Focus on getting defender off balance and moving in other direction. • Shot and pass fakes can be used in same manner.

Rebounding	Should understand how to rebound.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on staying low. • Identify or mark player to block out. • Time jump for rebound and be ready to put ball back up on offensive rebounds.
Post Moves	Drop step and jump hook should be understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of the power dribble to create space. • Stay low on the block and know position on the court.
Spacing	Player should understand how to move with and without the ball.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid congestion. • Keep distance to make easier passes identify open players.
Offense	Players should understand offensive plays	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limit plays to 2-3. • Make sure they understand each position. • Rotate players to give more exposure.
Defense	Man-to-man defense should be understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure they use defensive stance, slide and off-ball principles learned earlier. • Defense is more about effort and hustle than anything else. • Avoid using hands, focus more on moving feet.

Level 3 (7th and 8th Grade)

Skill	Competency	Details To Focus On
Lay Up	Contested lay ups. Reverse and full speed lay ups with either hand.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shoot under control. • Practice keeping ball high on backboard.
Cuts	Introduce dekes (fake cut) and trail cut (following player that just cut into the space they left).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cuts should be made in assertive manner. • Always look for the ball when cutting.
Shooting Form	Shoot off of the dribble and from pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure form doesn't suffer as they increase distance they shoot from. • Focus on accuracy and jumping straight up on jump shots. Avoid leaning or falling away.
Ball Handling	Dribble moves such as spin move and dribble behind the back.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Avoid watching the ball when dribbling. • Don't waste dribble – dribble with a purpose. • Dribble under control and low to the ground.
Passing	Introduce touch pass, dribble pass, behind the back pass and no look/look away pass.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure passes under pressure are accurate. • Passes should be made to gain advantage, not to be fancy.
Post Moves	Moves such as drop step counter and up-and-under.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work on keeping pivot foot with traveling. • Use head fakes to get defender off balance.

Offense	Introduce motion offense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should be able to identify difference between man and zone defense. • Set offensive plays become more broad and involved.
Defense	Man to man and full court defense should be understood.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on rotating to proper position. • Understand how to help and recover. • Zone defense should be introduced, but focus should remain on man to man defensive principles.

ONLINE COACHING RESOURCES

All of the specific skills and techniques listed above can be found in detail at:

www.breakthroughbasketball.com

Other good sites for additional information:

www.coachlikeapro.com – Tips, techniques, ideas for practice plans and general information.

www.bestbasketballdrills.com – Good database of drills for kids of all ages.

www.coachesclipboard.net – Plays and more detailed information, better for older kids.

www.basketball-basic.com – Drills with videos. Good site for demonstrating skills.

www.betterbasketball.com – More advanced information with additional tips.

General coaching sites:

www.nysca.org – Comprehensive site with information all new coaches should find valuable.

www.positivecoaching.org – Coaching training site that focus on positive approach for everyone.