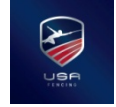


HOME DRILLS

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introduction

As a fencing parent you can help your child get more practice outside of class. Here are some thoughts and suggestions to help you have fun, keep it fun for the kids, and make fencing a great experience together.

goals of extra practice

When I work with young kids my main secret goal is to keep the sport fun and to keep them interested in lifelong exercise. Regular exercise is good for their health. A Washington Post article from 2016 cited 70% of children quitting sports by the age of 13 because “it’s just not fun anymore.” Studies have suggested that adults who exercise at least 30 minutes at least 5 days a week decrease the risk of bad things (like death) 20% compared to people who are sedentary.

I get to bond with my kids and have a wonderful shared experience. If my kids get extra fencing skills that is a very nice bonus. And I am not expecting them to go to the Olympics, earn a college scholarship, or get any specific return on all the money I spend on their sport...

laugh and giggle

When I give a lesson to a young fencer, I do not feel success until there is a lot of laughing and giggling. I play games, use puppets, tickle, have them aim for my butt, and shake my booty. A lot.

positive reinforcement

Rewards. Lots of rewards. Verbal rewards. Imaginary rewards. Candy rewards. High fives. Dancing for their success. I recommend watching the TED talk by Mark Rober titled “The Super Mario Effect – Tricking Your Brain into Learning More.” Keep it fun. All rewards.

the long game

If your child enjoys a sport (any sport) it is more fun to go to practice. More correct practice makes them better. More practice brings about better results. Better fencing results in nice shiny medals. Shiny medals are fun. Another extra bonus.

be a parent first

If you are no fun then maybe you may want to skip this whole home drills thing. Please refer to the first few points. Have fun. Help your kids have fun and learn. This is what I find the best about this sport. Very few of our kids will go to the Olympics. But they can all learn and grow. Fencing is good exercise (good for their health), good for problem solving (good for their brains), teaches the value of hard work and practice (good for their careers), and good for sportsmanship.



footwork drills

Basic movements get a fencer into distance to score on the opponent and to be too far when the opponent tries to score on you. Footwork can be incorporated into games. Goal of practice is to reinforce good footwork. Slow practice is better than sloppy practice. *Expert tips:* make sure the *en garde* is good. Front foot straight towards opponent, back foot 90 degrees turned from front foot, feet shoulder width apart. Heels should be in a straight line. Knees bent. They should be able to easily recover after a lunge (if they are really good they can recover backwards, forwards, or even do

another lunge). With a lunge one pushes with the back foot to gain some distance.

Basic footwork. Advance. Retreat. Lunge. Check forward. Check backwards. The ultimate goal is to change steps, size of steps, and tempo independently. Make your opponent try to follow you rather than following your opponent. Technique is more important than speed.

The Glove Game. (advance-lunge drill). Each fencer is allowed one advance and one lunge trying to hit the partner. Point for a hit to torso (target area). No parrying. Good to fine tune footwork, direction changes, and tempo changes. Sometimes penalty for hitting face. I use stuffed caterpillars to make it fun. Or flowers. *Expert tip:* make sure kids keep balance after lunge.

point control drills

Kids will have a blade so coach will need a mask and jacket. Women coaches should wear a plastic chest protector. If the coach is using a blade the student will also need to wear full protective gear. *Expert tip:* make sure the *en guard* is good. Start with good blade position as well protecting their shoulder of their weapon arm – make a wall on their “outside” to protect their shoulder which is “yummy.” I have my students have a straight line from their bent elbow to the tip of their blade. When kids extend or lunge their arm should finish completely straight. Do not practice “finishing” with a bent arm.

Toys. Have the kids stab toys. There are lots of toys and squeaky things that make kids giggle. I have puppets, dog toys, infant chewing rings. The goal is just to have the kids practice their point control and eventually be able to hit anything they want. The toys can move around. You can even move the toy around. Or cover it. Very funny.

Ping pong ball. Hang a ping pong ball ideally on a doorway with thread or dental floss taped at a height that is the height of their opponent’s target. *Expert tip:* Make sure the kids will not stab anyone in the eye when someone walks in the area. Make sure the kid finishes with a straight arm.

Tick tick. Drill taught to me by Olympian Jason Pryor. Coach has blade in *en guard*. Student hits one side of blade then the other. Can also do two hits on each side. Can add footwork. Can do it from fencer *en guard* position. Can do it with a a half-extended arm. Can do it with arm fully extended.

This teaches fine motor control to get around opponent’s blade. Do it with footwork.

Games of hitting different targets. Have your fencer hit different targets. You can use toys (see above) or your hand or body. Butts are super funny. Lots of giggling when they get to stab a butt. You can even ask them to hit a target and sometimes sweep something across the target to block (like your arm or a toy). The coach does the same action to give the fencer a chance to learn and improve. Add some footwork! The coach’s goal is to make it hard but not impossible.

take fencing classes yourself

If you have time try some fencing yourself through a class or maybe private lessons. You are never too old to learn, to exercise, and to be a role model for your kids. You can enjoy a shared experience. And it can help you appreciate all the hard work you kids are putting in.

videos on youtube

“The Rules of Fencing (Olympic Fencing) – EXPLAINED!” by Ninh Ly

“How to Fence: The Basics of Fencing, Taught by Olympians.” by THINKR. I prefer the lunge by Miles Chamley-Watson.

“The Super Mario Effect – Tricking Your Brain into Learning More.” by Mark Rober.

more information

Go to www.tacomafencing.com and check out my Beginner Fencer’s Guide.

Buy “Fencing Foil: A Practical Training Guide for Coaches, Parents and Young Athletes” by Rob Handelman and Connie Louie.

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I hope you share this guide with everyone you know to encourage more interest in fencing.

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