

What, When, and How to Teach Preschool Tumbling Skills

By Patti Komara

Below are my Ten Commandments of Teaching Tumbling:

1. Move- Don't just stand there and call off skills and corrections, but move alongside the student as you give encouragement and suggestions as you spot them.
2. Organized- Keep good records of what you've already taught your students by dating the progression sheets as you teach them each a new skill. Have all your needed props and equipment out and ready for your class.
3. Spot- For every skill introduced you should spot the first skill so the child feels the correct way to perform it. Then, move alongside them as they attempt the skill at least two more times.
4. Excited- It's your enthusiasm that motivates your students. If you're excited about a new skill, they will be, too.
5. Safety- From your ability to spot, the equipment and your safety certification to what skill you should suggest, make safety #1.
6. Reinforce and Repeat- Do each skill in every lesson at least three times. Repeat the name of the skill often. Quiz the students throughout the class, review what you did in class, and then leave them with a challenge.
7. Visual Cues- Use small traps and equipment such as poly dots, handprints and footprints as indicators for hand and foot placement.
8. Teach Part/Whole Method- Teach each tiny part of the skill and let the student feel achievement and then put it all together.
9. The Latest Equipment- Look through the newest equipment catalogs. Stay on top of this industry and use the latest, most innovative equipment pieces.
10. Make it Fun- When Mom or Dad asks that invariable question, "Did you have fun?" The students have to answer enthusiastically, "yes!" To keep your classes full, make it FUN! Try to do relay races, parachute or a quick game at the end so they leave laughing, out of breath and happy.

Skills, Stations and Spotting

With all beginning students regardless of age, you should start with the basic body positions. For preschoolers, I identify these as: squat, pike, straddle, lunge, v-sit, tuck (squat is on the floor and tuck is knees to the chest in the air), bridge (for those who are physically ready and over four years old), and "Ta-Da" (straight body landing with flexed knees and arms overhead in a "V"). Keep in mind that young children often have difficulty understanding prepositional phrases such as behind, next to, or in back of. Because of controversy and concern regarding introducing spinal hyperextension skills such as bridges or back-bends, we avoid emphasis in this area until the children are at least age five.

I have observed that many instructors don't place enough emphasis on these basic positions. Instructors should review these positions at the beginning of every class as part of the warm-up and reinforce them throughout the lesson. If a child understands the basic positions and remembers their names it's much easier to put together movements and create skills.