



Participant Manual

A program of the

National
ALLIANCE
For Youth Sports

This Participant Manual was created as a guide for parents. Enclosed you will find information about the Start Smart Basketball program including:

- **Activities with performance cues to continue practicing at home with your child after the completion of the program.**
- **The Readiness Test with ways to interpret your child's score.**

While teaching your child all of these skills, please remember that the #1 goal is FUN!!!

Contents of this Manual

Start Smart Basketball and the contents in this manual are the property of the National Alliance For Youth Sports. For additional information, please call 1-800-729-2057.

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What is Start Smart Basketball?

Start Smart Basketball teaches children (ages 3-5) the basic motor skills necessary to play organized basketball, while they work one-on-one and spend quality time with their parents. The program focuses on teaching children and their parents dribbling/ball handling, shooting, passing/catching, and running/agility without the threat of competition or the fear of getting hurt. Start Smart Basketball sessions are held one time per week for 6 weeks, and each week the exercises become increasingly more difficult as the class progresses and the children show improvement.

Why Start Smart?

Before entering organized youth sports programs, children need to master the fundamental motor skills that serve as a basis for more complex sports skills. Children do not effectively learn these skills by playing games, but rather by learning and practicing *developmentally appropriate activities*.

Developmentally appropriate activities are tasks that are designed for the current level of performance ability of the child with equipment that enables the child to be successful. Success is extremely important in early motor skill learning experiences, as it builds self-esteem and the motivation and confidence needed to try and improve.

Children who enter youth sports programs with fundamental motor skills and confidence in their ability to perform are much more likely to learn new, more complex sport-specific skills, achieve success in competition, and enjoy a positive sports experience. These children are also more likely to participate in sports fitness activities as adults.

All children should be provided with effective, developmentally appropriate activities and equipment to prepare them for future organized sports competitions. Start Smart accomplishes this by offering programs that encourage children and parents to spend quality time together, without the threat of competition or the fear of getting hurt.

Program Guidelines

These guidelines should be emphasized to ensure that the children obtain high levels of success and achievement during the Start Smart Basketball program.

- ***Positive Learning Environment:*** Children must be provided with a positive, non-threatening learning environment where they receive a great deal of encouragement and success.
- ***Children Are Unique:*** All children are unique and learn at different rates. It takes them much effort and many practice trials to improve.
- ***Maximum Involvement:*** Each child needs the opportunity to practice skills learned. START SMART activities are organized to provide children optimal time to practice skills at the same time. To maximize individual practice time, equipment is provided for each instructor-child group.
- ***Success Is Important:*** The child should experience high success rates on a task. Modify the task if it is difficult for the child to succeed. Once success is attained, increase the difficulty of the task incrementally. An example of modifying a task is changing the distance a ball must travel.
- ***Appropriate Equipment:*** The equipment must be developmentally appropriate for the child. Start Smart provides equipment that is the appropriate size and weight for this age group.
- ***Keep it Simple:*** Children are not “little adults.” They learn and comprehend differently than adults. In the early learning stages, keep it simple by demonstrating exactly what you want them to do.
- ***Positive Feedback:*** Clear, concise, and positive feedback from the staff regarding the child’s performance and effort will enhance learning.
- ***Expect Success:*** All kids need lots of encouragement and a feeling that your only expectations are that they learn and improve. If you expect success, your child will have the confidence to believe that he/she is capable of succeeding in the particular task.
- ***Complete Tasks before Continuing:*** Start Smart activities are organized from simple to more complex. A child should complete one task successfully before moving on to the next exercise.
- ***Review Tasks:*** Children will benefit from reviewing previously-completed tasks. This practice is especially helpful if they are having difficulty with the task at hand.

Dribbling / Ball Handling

Activities and Performance Cues

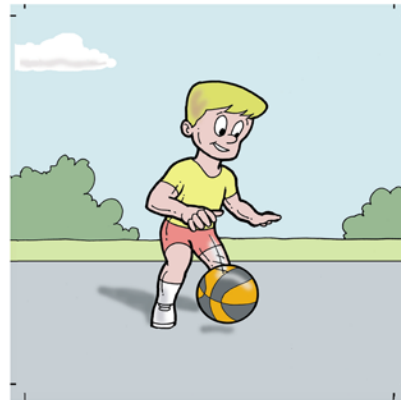
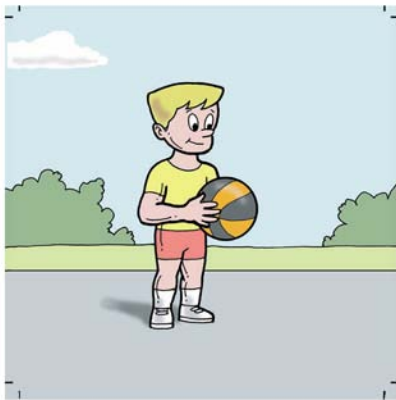
Equipment

- Use a basketball to teach the children proper dribbling technique.

Skills

- To practice dribbling, have the child:
 - Dribble the mini basketball in place, first with his/her dominant hand only and then alternating hands.
 - Dribble around cones or to a dot marked on the floor.
- To practice ball handling, have the child:
 - Pass the mini basketball around his/her ankle.
 - Pass the mini basketball around his/her body and/or neck.

Dribbling



- Stand with the ball in the fingertips of your hand (no palms).
- Bounce the ball on the ground starting with your dominant hand (but then try both hands).
- Keep your knees bent slightly.
- Use your wrist and fingers to dribble the ball.
- Do not “slap” at the ball.
- Do not let the ball go higher than your bellybutton.
- Try not to look at the ball while dribbling.

Shooting

Activities and Performance Cues

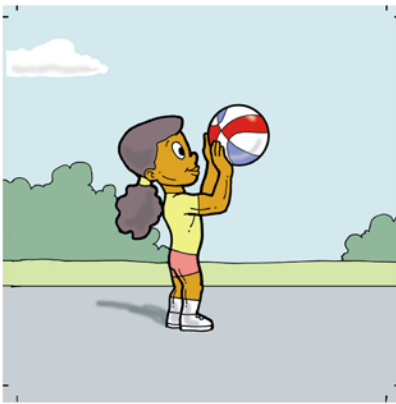
Equipment

Use the basketballs and the basketball hoops to teach children the proper form for shooting.

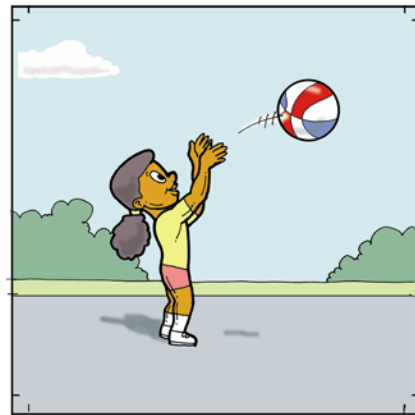
Skills

- To practice shooting, have the child:
 - Shoot to a target on a wall.
 - Shoot free throws into the hoop, first at its lowest setting and then increase the height of the basket.
 - Practice lay-ups.

Shooting

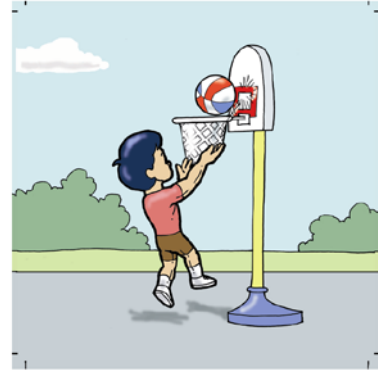
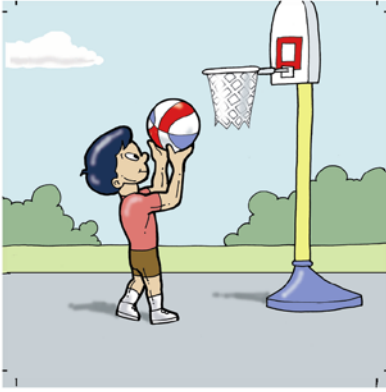


- Stand facing the hoop with the ball in your dominant hand (no palms), feet shoulder-width apart.
- Raise the ball in your hand with your elbow directly under the ball and the back of your hand facing towards you; place your non-dominant hand on the side of the ball for support only.
- Make an “L” with your arm (keep your forearm perpendicular to the ground).
- Bend your knees.



- Raise your elbow, then extend your arm, then snap your wrist, then release ball off of your fingertips.
- Make sure your elbow is fully extended, wrist bent, and fingers outstretched. (Arm should mimic the shape of a gooseneck).

Lay-Ups



- Stand facing the hoop with the ball in your dominant hand (no palms), feet shoulder-width apart.
- Take two steps (same foot as your dominant hand and then your non-dominant foot).
- Raise the ball in your hand with your elbow directly under the ball and the back of your hand facing towards the basket; place your non-dominant hand on side of the ball for support only.
- Make an “L” with your arm (keep your forearm perpendicular to the ground).
- Raise your dominant-side elbow and dominant-side knee together, then extend your arm, then snap your wrist, then release ball off of your fingertips and bounce the ball off of the backboard into the hoop.
- Make sure your elbow is fully extended, wrist bent, and fingers outstretched. (Arm should mimic the shape of a gooseneck).

Passing / Catching

Activities and Performance Cues

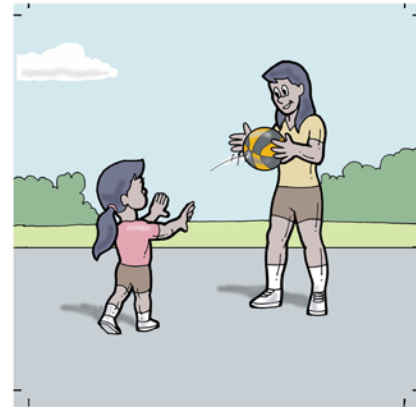
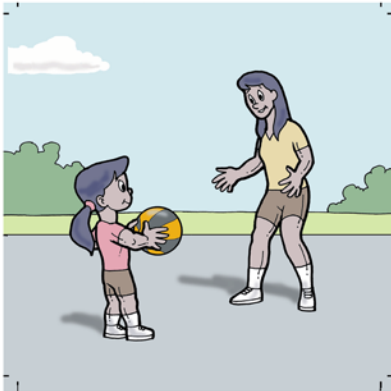
Equipment

- Use the basketballs for passing/catching activities to teach children the proper ways to pass and catch.

Skills

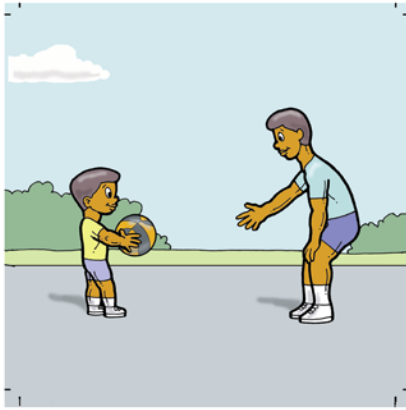
- To practice the chest pass, have the child:
 - Pass the basketball against a wall.
 - Pass the basketball to another person.
- To practice the bounce pass, have the child:
 - Pass the mini basketball to a target on a wall.
 - Pass the mini basketball to another person.

Chest Pass

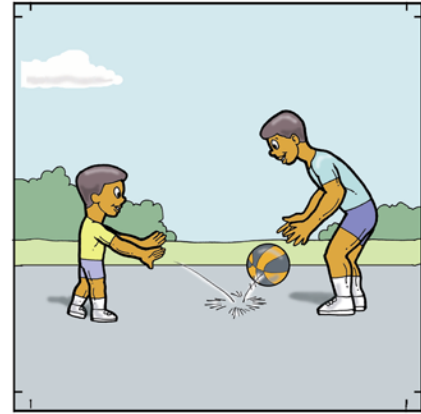


- Stand facing the target.
- Hold the ball with both hands in front of your body at chest-level.
- Spread your fingers on the ball with thumbs pointing toward each other on the part of the basketball closest to your body.
- Keep your elbows pointing out.
- Begin your pass by stepping toward the target.
- Extend your arms toward the target, then snap your wrist, and then release the ball off of your fingertips.
- Finish with your arms outstretched, palms facing away from each other, and thumbs down.

Bounce Pass

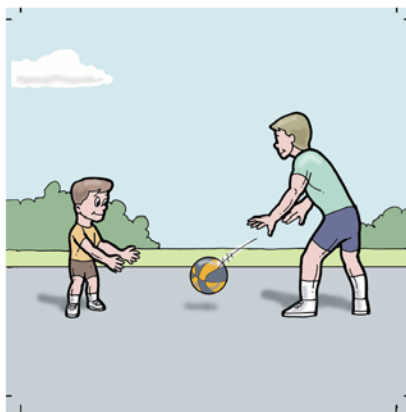


- Stand facing the target.
- Hold the ball with both hands in front of your body at chest-level.
- Spread your fingers on the ball with thumbs pointing toward each other on the part of the basketball closest to your body.
- Keep your elbows pointing out.

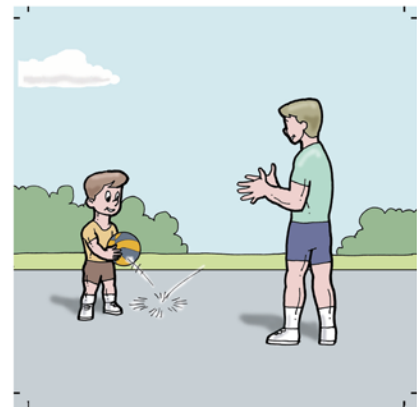


- Begin your pass by stepping toward the target.
- Extend your arms toward the target, then snap your wrist, and then release the ball off of your fingertips.
- Bounce the ball approximately $\frac{2}{3}$ the distance to your target.
- If passing to another person, bounce the ball to the belly button.
- Finish with your arms outstretched, palms facing away from each other, and thumbs down.

Catching



- Move in front of the ball.
- Bend knees.
- Move hands forward to meet the ball.
- Step toward the ball while attempting to catch.



- Watch the ball into your hands.
- Point fingers outward with thumbs toward each other to catch.
- “Give” with the ball.
- Use only your hands to catch, do not “hug” the ball with your arms.

Running / Agility

Activities and Performance Cues

Skills

- To focus on running and agility, have the child:
 - Run and change directions on a parent's call.
 - Practice defensive sliding back and forth.
 - Combine many skills: the child will change activities between skipping, sliding, walking, running, and the grapevine.

Running / Agility



- Keep your head up.
- “Lean into” run slightly.
- Lift your knees.
- Bend your elbows and swing your arms freely.
- Run on the balls of your feet.
- Run lightly.

Readiness Test Introduction

When are the children tested?

Children should be tested **prior** to beginning the Start Smart Basketball program and then **after** completing the program to gauge progress.

Why are the children tested?

The Readiness Test is qualitative, meaning it focuses on performing the skill movement correctly by following the performance cues. After the test is complete, read the “Interpreting Test Scores” section of this manual as it will determine the child’s level of basketball readiness.

How should the test be administered?

Read the directions and set-up for each skill area in this manual. Understand that **the test is NOT used to rank or score any of the children, and the scores are only for you to see, as they will not be collected by the Start Smart Basketball Coordinator.**

****IMPORTANT** Do not give the child any additional instructions other than what is provided to ensure the accuracy of the test results.**

How should the children be scored during the test?

Use the score sheets provided in your manual for the qualitative skill assessment. Give a “√” for each component that is observed, and an “X” if the component is not observed. The child should take as many trials as necessary for you to assess each component individually.

Dribbling / Ball Handling Test

Dribbling / Ball Handling Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

Give each child a basketball. Encourage them to spread out so they have ample room to dribble the ball.

Instructions

The child will dribble the ball in place to him/herself.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

“Dribble the ball to yourself with one hand. As it bounces on the ground, try to keep as much control of it as possible.”

Dribbling Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child holds the ball in the fingertips of his/her hand (no palms) while dribbling with one hand.		
Child bounces the ball on the ground and can control the ball with his/her dominant hand.		
Child uses his/her wrist and fingers to dribble the ball.		
Child does not “slap” at the ball.		
Child keeps his/her knees bent slightly.		
Child does not let the ball go higher than his/her bellybutton.		

Shooting / Lay-Ups Test

Shooting / Lay-Ups Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

For shooting and lay-ups, give each child a basketball and set up the basketball hoops at the station. Place the basketball hoop at its lowest height level, and mark a line 3 feet in front of the hoop.

Instructions

The child will shoot the basketball into the hoop from 3 feet away. After testing the child on shooting, test him/her on lay-ups.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

For shooting: “Stand behind the line and shoot the basketball into the hoop.”

For lay-ups: “Take two steps toward the basketball hoop and shoot. Bounce the basketball off of the backboard when you shoot.”

Shooting Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child stands facing the hoop, feet shoulder-width apart.		
Child raises the ball in his/her hand with his/her elbow directly under the ball and places his/her non-dominant hand on the side of the ball for support.		
Child’s arm makes an “L” with his/her forearm perpendicular to the ground.		
Child bends his/her knees.		
While shooting towards the hoop, the child raises his/her elbow, then extends arm, then snaps wrist, then releases ball off of his/her fingertips.		
Child follows-through- his/her elbow is fully extended, wrist is bent, and fingers are outstretched. (Arm should mimic the shape of a gooseneck).		

Lay-Up Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child stands facing the hoop with the ball in his/her dominant hand (no palms), feet shoulder-width apart.		
Child takes two steps (the first step with the same foot as his/her dominant hand and then the non-dominant foot).		
Child raises the ball in his/her hand with his/her elbow directly under the ball, (non-dominant hand may also be placed on the side of the ball for support).		
Child makes an “L” with his/her shooting arm (keeps his/her forearm perpendicular to the ground).		
Child raises his/her dominant-side elbow and dominant-side knee together, child snaps his/her wrist, and releases ball off of his/her fingertips.		

Passing / Catching Test

Passing / Catching Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

On a large wall at least 10 feet high by 20 feet wide, mark a circle eight feet in diameter with either chalk or masking tape. Mark a line on the ground 10 feet from the wall. Give each child a basketball.

Instructions

The child will pass the basketball into the circle from 10 feet away. The child may step over the line when throwing.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

“Stand behind the line and pass the basketball into the circle. You may step over the line while you pass.”

Passing Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child stands facing the target.		
Child holds the ball with both hands in front of his/her body at chest-level.		
Child’s fingers are spread on the ball with thumbs pointing toward each other on the part of the basketball closest to him/her.		
Child keeps his/her elbows pointing out.		
Child begins the pass by stepping toward the target.		
Child extends his/her arms toward the target, then snaps his/her wrist, and then releases the ball off of his/her fingertips.		
Child finishes with his/her arms outstretched, palms facing away from each other, and thumbs down.		

Catching Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child moves in front of the ball.		
Child bends knees.		
Child moves hands forward to meet the ball.		
Child steps toward the ball while attempting to catch.		
Child watches the ball into his/her hands.		
Child points fingers outward with thumbs toward each other to catch.		
Child “gives” with the ball.		
Child uses only his/her hands to catch and does not “hug” the ball with his/her arms.		

Running / Agility Test

Running / Agility Test Set Up and Equipment Requirements

In a large open area, mark off a starting and stopping point 30 feet apart. No equipment is needed.

Instructions

The child will begin at the starting point. At the parent's call, the child will run to the stopping point by either zig zagging, running straight, or curved.

Verbal Instructions to the Child

"Stand at the starting point. First I will tell you how you will run (zig zagged, straight, or curved) and then I'll say, 'Go.' Run as fast as you can to the finish line."

Running Task Components	PreTest	PostTest
Child keeps his/her head up.		
Child "leans into" run slightly.		
Child lifts his/her knees.		
Child bends elbows and swings arms freely.		
Child runs on the balls of his/her feet.		
Child runs lightly.		

Interpreting the Test Scores

Children Learn at Different Rates

These tests were developed to give professionals and parents an educated *estimate* of when children are ready to begin participation in organized sports programs. Motor skill specialists agree, in all aspects of children's development, that all children go through basically the same skill sequence of motor skill development, but not necessarily at the same rate or time. For a variety of reasons, all children do not reach the same level of skill performance at the same time. For example, there may be a wide range of performance scores on the qualitative assessment tests in a group of children who are all the same age. This is to be expected, and should be considered "normal."

Be Patient with your Child's Progress

As your child proceeds through the Start Smart Basketball, you will constantly be evaluating his/her progress. As the child meets the goals for each task, he/she is then ready to move onto the next task. If not, it simply means that the child needs more practice and encouragement to perform the task. It does NOT mean that the child does not have the ability or will never be able to perform the task.

Be careful not to compare your child to other children in the group. Remember that children develop and learn on different timelines. Be patient, and give your child lots of encouragement and opportunities to practice tasks.

Do not rush your child out of this developmental program into a competitive sports program before he/she is ready. Remember that children must not only be physically ready to play organized sports, but it is important that they are emotionally ready as well. Your child may benefit more during this time by experiencing success and will gain confidence in his/her abilities by continuing in the Start Smart Basketball.

Interpreting the Qualitative Assessment Test

Each child should reach a "mature level" in each skill by age six, and definitely before entering an organized sports program. A "mature level" is achieved when all of the described task components on the assessment tests are consistently demonstrated when performing the particular skill.

If one or more of the components is not observed when the child performs the skill, then more practice and instruction is needed and the parent and child should focus on these remaining components. After the child has demonstrated a "mature level" on all skills (the child consistently demonstrates that he/she can accomplish all of the tasks in the skill assessment tests), then he/she has met the minimum skills necessary to begin organized basketball.



**2050 Vista Parkway
West Palm Beach, FL 33411
1-800-729-2057
www.nays.org**