Six Steps to Teaching Pushups

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Pushups are a great full body exercise that can be performed anywhere since no equipment is required. All that’s needed is one’s own bodyweight and the desire to become better at performing pushups. When pushups are done correctly, they work the chest, back, shoulders, arms, core, glutes and legs.

Like most exercises, performing a pushup with correct form is a skill; a skill that can easily be taught. It’s important to note that one pushup done with correct form is better than a hundred pushups done with incorrect form.

The easiest way to teach a proper pushup is by performing what’s called a “Negative Pushup.” A negative pushup refers to lowering the body to the ground in a slow and controlled manner, using gravity as resistance, before repeating again.

Repeating the six step skill set below on a consistent basis will allow kids to not only learn correct pushup form, but they will become stronger, fitter and more confident in the process.

I’ll also show you what a pushup isn’t and I’ll show you five basic pushup progressions from less challenging to more challenging.
STEP 1

Lay face down on the ground with hands at armpits and feet together.
STEP 2

Push up to knees by straightening arms and keeping the core braced.
STEP 3

Lift hips and rise up onto toes.
STEP 4

Squeeze quads, glutes, and brace core as if to be punched in the stomach. Keep head in line with the spine.
STEP 5

Lower body down to a slow count of 1-2-3-4-5, and keep body in a straight line from the ankles, through the knees, hips, neck and head.
STEP 6

Touch chest to the ground before the lower body touches the ground, returning to the starting position. This is one repetition.
What a Pushup Isn’t

Many times I see kids performing pushups with incorrect form. This could be for a number of reasons:

1. They have never been shown how to perform a pushup correctly,

2. They are doing pushups at a progression they are not ready for or,

3. They have become fatigued from doing their pushups at their current progression and can no longer maintain correct form.

The key is to make sure every pushup is performed with correct form. When correct technique can no longer be maintained, the pushup is either stopped at the current progression or it continues but using a lower regression.

On the following pages are photos illustrating incorrect pushup form:
Hips to low and back extended

Hips to high and hands to far forward
Head Hanging to low

Elbows flared out
Basic Pushup Progressions

When performing pushups it’s important that correct form is maintained at all times. By correct form I’m referring keeping the body in a straight line from head to toe and going through the full range of motion. This means lowering the body to the point where the elbows are flexed to ninety degrees.

If correct form cannot be maintained then the current position must be regressed to a position where the pushup can be performed with proper technique. It’s been said before but it needs mentioning again, “One pushup done with correct form is better than a hundred pushups with incorrect form.”

Performing pushups with incorrect form will lead to injury as well and will cause the child to develop a poor motor pattern which is the last thing you want to do. Remember, your goal is teach kids a skill they will have for the rest of their lives, so it’s crucial they learn it correctly from the beginning.

Because each child is different, you may have many of kids performing pushups from various positions based upon their individual strengths and experience. The kids can then be progressed from that point on.

There are over a hundred different ways to perform pushups. Here are the first five basic progressions. With each progression the hands are lowered and the feet extended out, thus making the pushup more challenging.
Progression 1

Progression 2
Progression 3

Progression 4
Progression 5

Our goal as parents, coaches, teachers and sports administrators is to turn youth on to a lifetime of healthy living and physical activity.

By keeping things fun, engaging them in what they are learning, and by continuing to inspire and motivate them in a positive and respectful manner each and every time, we will achieve our goal.
About David

David Kittner, aka the Youth Fitness Guy, is a passionate, caring and dedicated individual with over 20 years experience working with children. He truly understands the unique sciences associated with child development and the practical means by which those must be applied to any fitness or sport-based venture.

He is among the leading authorities of more than 2,500 Youth Fitness Specialists that make up the International Youth Conditioning Association, the premier international authority with respect to athletic development and youth participant based conditioning.

David is a contributing author of the Best Selling book “The Definitive Guide to Youth Athletic Strength, Conditioning and Performance”.

He’s certified as a Youth Fitness Specialist, Youth Speed and Agility Specialist, and Youth Nutrition Specialist with the International Youth Conditioning Association.

As Youth Fitness Guy, David conducts athletic development sessions, workshops and clinics for kids, parents, teachers and coaches, and presents at Fitness and Physical Education conferences. He also serves as Education Director for HANG Training and for SchoolFit, he’s Youth Fitness Specialist and Master Trainer for Lebert Fitness, Master Trainer for Dynamax Medicine Balls as well as being the Youth Fitness Specialist for the Fitness Nation.

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