

Patti Komara

Tumblebear Connection

PO Box 117

Dyer, IN 46311

Phone (219) 865-2274

Fax (219) 865-2389

www.tumblebear.com

pkomara@sbcglobal.net

Teaching Tumbling to Tots

The methodology behind teaching preschool tumbling and school-age tumbling is quite different. When you're working with children under the age of six and getting them to understand where to put their feet, where to place their hands, or where to look in the middle of a skill, you must provide them with visual cues. Visual cues are the secrets to teaching tumbling to tots.

Let's use cartwheels as an example. To begin teaching a cartwheel to a 2-year-old you would start by asking them to do a side bunny hop, therefore creating the needed lateral movement. Bunny hops are done by piking forward from a stand placing both hands on the floor. Have them move their hands and then their feet continually down the mat. After they have accomplished this move, go on to the cartwheel. Put a hula-hoop in front of them. Have them touch their front toe to the hoop. Tell them to put their hands in the hoop and to bunny hop their feet around to the other side. By providing them with a visual cue (the hoop)

that gives them a place to put their hands and a space to land their feet. If you're undecided as to which foot should go in front for the cartwheel...have them do a horsey kick (like a handstand where the feet are kicking alternately in the air) and not which foot was kicked up first. The other leg is usually the cartwheel leg. Set up as many stations as you can, because repetition also is imperative in a preschooler's learning. Have the stations set up so the children are encouraged to "bunny hop around them". We use what we call our "cartwheel factory". We set up a line of double cones so there's an alley to cartwheel through. Put hoops on the floor everywhere you want the gymnasts to do a cartwheel. Have a row of stacked panel mats with each having a hoop on top. Also use the small trapezoid pieces with a hoop on top. Put stacked panel mats or trapezoid pieces on their side to create a wall to cartwheel between. Then, a row of hoops about 3' apart for the "cartwheel machine". We also have a 2' by 5' exercise mat marked with contact paper hand and footprints indicating placement for cartwheels. One side of the mat is marked for "lefties" and one side for "righties". Give your 5-year-olds chalk on their hands and a line for them to cartwheel on enabling them to better understand the principle behind this four-count skill. Also, emphasize a lunge at the beginning and end of the skill. Any visual cue will work. Ethafoam pieces, carpet squares, vinyl or felt cut-put shapes...anything that allows the child the chance to visually see where to put their hands and feet. This will more easily expedite the learning of the cartwheel.

An article on teaching tumbling to tots wouldn't be complete without the mention of barrels, incline mats, mailboxes, doughnuts, and trapezoids. These

innovative pieces of equipment should be a staple in every gym across America. The amount of decreased spotting and increased learning is tremendous and is not limited to simply preschoolers. Different size barrels and inclines are available for all sizes of gymnasts and can be used to teach simple skills such as forward rolls up to back somis and $\frac{1}{2}$ -on $\frac{1}{2}$ -off vaults. Their uses will only be limited to your imagination.

In conclusion, the idea is to provide these young gymnasts with visual cues to allow easier understanding with less effort on the teacher's part as well as the student's. Teaching preschoolers tumbling can be a fun, challenging, and rewarding experience with a small amount of equipment and imagination. Seeing results so fast with these young children can be your greatest teaching joy.

Patti Komara's Bio

Patti Komara has owned a gymnastics school in Dyer, Indiana since 1969 offering gymnastics, dance, swimming, and a fitness-based educational preschool called Gym-N-Learn. Patti began speaking at national seminars in 1981 and has led hundreds of training workshops. Patti's Tumblebear Connection has produced more than 80 instructional DVDs. She has written books on yearly lesson plans for The internationally known Tumblebear Gym Program, School-age Gymnastics, Dancing GymBears, YogaBears, CheerBears, Gym-N-Learn, and her very successful Swim Program. Patti co-authored the original USAG preschool KAT certification program. In 2003 she was named USAG Business Leader of the Year. In 2005 Patti was selected as Client of the Year by Action International and in 2006 was given the national service award by USAG. In 2009 Patti began formal consulting for those in our industry and in 2010 her gym, Patti's All-American, was named in her local newspaper as "Best of the Region" once again. Patti has over 6000 subscribers to her "In the Loop Monthly E-Newsletter" which she has published since February 2007.