

Little ninjas

Ages 3–5

30 minutes

3–4 minute blocks

Games carry the technique

Objective: Stand in a ready stance and throw a straight punch on command, then stop on the “freeze” signal.

EQUIPMENT

A hand pad with a sticker on it, 4 to 6 cones, one kick shield. An assistant if the class is bigger than about eight children.

WHAT THIS CLASS REALLY TEACHES

Listening, balance, body control and following instructions, with martial arts as the vehicle. Use one-word cues and demonstrate everything: three-year-olds copy what they see, not what they hear.

MIN	ACTIVITY	COACHING CUE	COMMON ERROR
0–3	Bow in, “focus eyes” check	<i>“Eyes on me, hands on knees”</i>	Looking at parents, not the instructor
3–7	Animal walks: bear crawl, frog jump, crab walk	<i>“Slow bear, bouncy frog”</i>	Racing through the walks
7–11	Statues: freeze in ready stance when the instructor claps	<i>“Feet wide, fists up, freeze”</i>	Moving after the clap
11–16	Punch on the pad: both hands at the hip, punch, back to the hip	<i>“Punch the sticker”</i>	Thumb outside the fist
16–20	Obstacle line: step over a cone, jump a cone, punch the shield at the end	<i>“Big step, big jump, strong punch”</i>	Skipping the step to get to the punch
20–24	“Instructor says” with stances and punches	<i>“Only move when I say it”</i>	Moving before the command
24–28	Stretch in a circle, mat chat on listening	<i>“What do our ears do in class?”</i>	–
28–30	Sticker or stripe, bow out, high fives	<i>“Show your parents your ready stance”</i>	–

Mat chat theme

Listening. Return to the same theme every week for a month so it comes home with them.

Plan B

Low energy: swap the obstacle line for a second round of statues. Big class: assistant runs the obstacle line while you hold the pad.

Why the freeze signal

Once they learn it, you can stop a room of 15 preschoolers in two seconds. It pays off far beyond this class.