



ICM TENNIS ACADEMY

JUNIOR FOOTWORK & ATHLETIC DEVELOPMENT

TRAINING GUIDE

AGES 6 – 12



1 | SCIENCE-BASED DESIGN

Rafa Nadal Academy: prioritizes coordination and injury prevention, including balance, reaction, direction changes, mobility and stabilizing strength [1].

Tennis Canada: emphasizes fundamental movement skills, coordination, agility, balance and fun for U9 and U12 players [2,3].

ITF: describes agility, balance, coordination, speed and reaction time as skill-related fitness components [4], and advocates age-appropriate, enjoyable junior tennis [5].

IOC and NSCA: support varied, developmentally appropriate strength and neuromuscular training, quality movement and recovery [6,7].

WHO: recommends an average of 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity per day across the week for ages 5-17, with muscle/bone-strengthening activities at least three days weekly [8]. These home sessions complement, rather than replace, everyday activity.

2 | HOME SETUP & SAFETY

Equipment: 4 flat floor markers or paper spots, 1 soft tennis ball, a towel, a stable wall (optional), water and athletic shoes. Clear a nonslip area approximately 2 m x 2 m; avoid furniture edges, stairs, hard obstacles and slippery socks.

Warm up before fast footwork. Use controlled landings and short distances; do not train to exhaustion. Stop for pain, dizziness, unusual breathlessness or loss of coordination. A parent should supervise younger children. Modify exercises for disabilities, injuries or medical conditions with appropriate professional guidance.

3 | SESSION STRUCTURE

Phase	Ages 6-8	Ages 9-12
Playful warm-up	3 min	4 min
Footwork + reaction	6-7 min	8-9 min
Strength + balance	4-6 min	6-8 min
Cool-down + reflection	2-3 min	2-4 min

Training intensity: children should finish feeling capable of doing more. Emphasize accuracy and quiet, controlled foot contacts over speed. Avoid max-effort testing, weighted loads and punishment-based exercise.

4 | THE EIGHT CORE EXERCISES

1. Ready Position + Split-Step

Athletic stance; make a small, quiet two-foot hop, land softly, then freeze balanced. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 15 sec; 9-12: 3 x 20 sec.

2. Side Shuffle & Stop

Shuffle between two markers 1-2 m apart, face forward, stop under control; do not cross feet. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 20 sec; 9-12: 3 x 20 sec.

3. Four-Corner Tennis Steps

Move from a center marker to front/back/left/right spots; touch, recover to center. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 4 calls; 9-12: 3 x 6 calls.

4. Colour / Number Reaction

Parent calls a marked spot at random; child looks, decides, moves and returns. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 5 calls; 9-12: 3 x 6 calls.

5. Single-Leg Balance + Ball Pass

Stand on one foot and gently pass a soft ball between hands; switch legs. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 15 sec/leg; 9-12: 2 x 25 sec/leg.

6. Sit-to-Stand / Bodyweight Squat

Sit onto a stable chair and stand, or perform shallow squats with knees tracking over feet. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 6; 9-12: 2 x 8-10.

7. Wall Push-Up + Bird Dog

Controlled wall push-ups; then hands-and-knees opposite arm/leg reaches, trunk steady. Suggested dose: 6-8: 1-2 x 6 each; 9-12: 2 x 8 each.

8. Soft Landing / Mini Hop

Small two-foot hop in place, land quietly and hold 2 seconds; no high jumps. Suggested dose: 6-8: 2 x 4; 9-12: 2 x 6.

Rest approximately 20-40 seconds between short sets, or longer as needed. Counts are ICM practical starting suggestions, not doses validated specifically for every child.

5 | FOUR-WEEK PROGRESSION

Week	Main focus	Session A / B / C
1 — Move well	Balance, posture, soft landings	A: 1,2,5,6 B: 1,3,5,7 C: 2,4,6,8
2 — Move & stop	Sideways movement, deceleration	A: 1,2,6,8 B: 1,3,5,7 C: 2,4,5,8
3 — See & react	Random cues, decision-making	A: 1,4,6,8 B: 2,3,5,7 C: 1,3,4,8
4 — Tennis-ready	Combine split-step, first step, recover	A: 1,2,4,6 B: 1,3,5,7 C: 1,3,4,8

Progression rules

Week 1: learn slowly. Week 2: improve stopping and balance. Week 3: make cues unpredictable while keeping technique. Week 4: connect a small split-step to the first movement and controlled recovery. Only progress when the child can move smoothly without pain. For ages 6-8, prioritize play and shorter rounds; ages 9-12 may add a set only if technique stays sound.

6 | TENNIS-SPECIFIC HOME CHALLENGE

“SEE - SPLIT - GO - RECOVER”: Parent points left, right, short or deep. Child looks, performs a tiny split-step, takes the first step toward the cue, then returns to the center. Complete 4-6 cues with 30-45 seconds of rest; 1-2 rounds for ages 6-8 and 2-3 rounds for ages 9-12. Do not swing a racquet indoors near people or objects.

7 | PARENT CHECK-IN

After each session, ask: “Did you have fun?”, “Which movement felt easiest?”, and “Can you land quietly?” Track completion and enjoyment rather than rankings, speed records or body weight.

Week	Session A	Session B	Session C	Child enjoyed it?
1	[]	[]	[]	[]
2	[]	[]	[]	[]
3	[]	[]	[]	[]
4	[]	[]	[]	[]

8 | REFERENCES & SCOPE

[1] Rafa Nadal Academy — Training Method

<https://www.rafanadalacademy.com/en/about-us/training-method/>

[2] Tennis Canada — Whole Player Development Pathway

<https://www.tenniscanada.com/compete-perform/whole-player-development-pathway>

[3] Tennis Canada — U9 and U12 Player Evaluation

<https://newbrunswick.tenniscanada.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/U12-and-U9-Dev-and-Fund-Stages-Evaluation-fillable-final.pdf>

[4] ITF — Conditioning Overview

<https://www.itftennis.com/media/2297/conditioning-overview.pdf>

[5] ITF — Tennis Play and Stay / Tennis10s

<https://www.itftennis.com/en/growing-the-game/itf-tennis-play-and-stay/>

[6] IOC — Youth Athletic Development Consensus (2015)

<https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2015-094962>

[7] NSCA — Youth Training and Long-Term Athletic Development

<https://www.nasca.com/about-us/position-statements/youth-training-and-long-term-athletic-development/>

[8] WHO — Physical Activity and Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines

<https://www.who.int/europe/news-room/fact-sheets/item/physical-activity>

IMPORTANT EDUCATIONAL NOTICE

This ICM Tennis guide is an independently designed educational training resource informed by the public references above. It is NOT the proprietary program of Rafa Nadal Academy, Tennis Canada, ITF, IOC, NSCA or WHO, and none of these bodies has reviewed, certified or endorsed it. Exercise selection, sets, repetitions and weekly sequencing are practical ICM programming choices, not exact protocols issued by those organizations.

This guide is for generally healthy children ages 6-12. It is not a medical assessment or substitute for individualized coaching. Parents should consult a qualified healthcare professional before participation when a child has an injury, chronic condition, exercise restriction or concerning symptoms.

ICM TENNIS | HIGH PERFORMANCE & COMPETITIVE PLAYER DEVELOPMENT