



Lesson: Ninja Rolls

Category: Ninjutsu

Overview

Learning how to fall and roll safely is an extremely important skill to master in life. One of the most common ways that people are injured in their home or in nature is by falling. Learning how to do a proper ninja roll can save you from serious injury. In this lesson we start with the simplest roll called a ninja somersault, and then progress to a forward diagonal and backward roll. In a more advanced lesson plan, we focus on the dive roll. Once students have demonstrated proficiency with these three rolls, they can progress to the dive roll.

Materials

A soft surface to practice on such as a yoga mat, sleeping pad, thick blankets, athletic mat, mattress, soft grass or leaves (if in nature). Once these rolls are mastered, they can be done on harder surfaces.

Setting

Make sure you have adequate room to do an entire somersault (2-4m).

Safety

If training indoors, make sure there are no objects to roll into (lamps, chairs, walls etc.). Note that the ninja somersault is a straight roll. For the diagonal rolls, have awareness that of the diagonal path so people and objects will not be hit. If training outdoors, scan the rolling area for sharp rocks, sticks, wasp nests, poisonous plants etc. Always start with the simplest roll (somersault) and progress next to the forward diagonal and backward rolls.



The intent of this technique is to learn to protect the head and neck when rolling.

Lesson:

1. **Ask-** Who has ever fallen and injured themselves (raise hands)? What are ways that people fall and injure themselves while playing sports, at home, or doing things in nature? (Bike wipeouts, tripping in soccer, being pushed etc.)
2. **Say-** Today we are going to teach ways to fall and roll to protect you from getting hurt. The first technique we will do is called the **ninja somersault**.

Ninja Somersault

3. Show them the video below by Sensei Roemke, or demonstrate yourself.
4. Have students form lines in front of the rolling area. Each student goes one at a time then lines up again.
5. **Important things to practice:** 1) Stay low. 2) Tuck into a tiny ball. 3) Breathe out when rolling. 3) Touch the ground in front of you with both hands.
6. As a leader you may need to help kids who have trouble with this roll by spotting them (helping to support and roll them over).
7. Once most kids have learned this technique you can move on to the forward diagonal roll.

Forward Diagonal Roll/Zenpo Kaiten Naname (pronounced **Zen-pō Kī-ten Nah-na-may**)

8. **Say-** The next roll we will learn is called zenpo kaiten naname. Zenpo is Japanese for “forward.” Kaiten means “roll,” and Naname means “diagonal.” Put it all together and it means “forward diagonal roll.” The reason it is a diagonal roll is that it starts on one shoulder and rolls diagonally across your back to the lower opposite side. This protects



your head, neck, and back which is very important when falling or rolling.

9. Show them the video for the forward diagonal rolls or demonstrate the roll.
10. **Important things to practice:** 1) Reach one arm deep under the other armpit. 2) Tuck the head. 3) Stay in a tight ball. 4) Push off with the back foot. 5) Breathe out when rolling.
11. As a leader you may need to spot and help kids roll who have trouble with this skill.
12. Once most kids have learned this technique you can move on to the backwards roll.

Backwards Roll/Koho Kaiten (pronounced **Kō-hō Kī-ten**)

13. **Say** - Koho means backwards. We will now learn the backwards roll.
14. Show them the video for koho kaiten or demonstrate the technique.
15. **Important things to practice:** 1) Start seated with one knee up. 2) Imagine you are holding a pitcher of water on that knee. 3) Imagine pouring that water over the same side shoulder as you push off with your foot and lean back. 4) Keep your head turned to the side and follow the imaginary pitcher of water with your head. 5) Breathe out when rolling.

Variations

- **Being pushed-** have students turn their back to you, then give them a gentle touch or push. When touched or pushed, the student should do one of the rolls.
- **Multiple rolls-** have the students do two or more rolls in succession.
- **Silence-** see how quietly they can roll.
- **Stand up** at end of roll- see if they can roll into a crouching or standing position.



- **Crouching**- see if they can roll from a crouching posing for all three rolls.
- **Eyes closed**- try rolling with eyes closed
- **Holding an object**- see if they can roll while holding a soft object in one hand (like a ball, small pillow etc.)

Debrief

Ask- which roll was the easiest for you? Which was the hardest? Who was able to roll without their head touching the ground? **Say**- learning to do ninja rolls in an emergency situation requires muscle memory. Muscle memory means that you practice a movement so many times that you don't have to think about it. This is perseverance, which is the meaning of the Japanese word "nin" as in "ninja." **Ask**- What are some things that people learn to do with muscle memory (ex. driving a car, typing, sports, playing a musical instrument). After you learn these rolls, we next will teach the flying dive roll, known as hicho kaiten (pronounced- **Hee-cho KI**-ten.)

Mind of the Mentor

Many kids these days have never done a somersault, so learning these rolls can be a big challenge and a HUGE accomplishment. It is nice to acknowledge those who struggled but persevered and figured out how to do these rolls. Some kids may say "I can't do this." Doing a perfect roll is not the goal of this exercise. Trying something new, training, and learning is the goal. Most people will do a barrel roll the first time they attempt zenpo kaiten naname. This is expected and is fine. They are learning to move their body in a new way. It takes time and repetition to learn these skills. We usually start all of our ninjutsu classes (basics to advanced) with practicing ninja rolls. Doing a lot of ninja somersaults first will get kids accustomed to the disorienting feeling of a roll. Some kids will still try to roll over their head for the diagonal or backwards roll and will get "stuck" midway through the roll and also forget to stay in a tight ball. This is expected. This is where being a spotter and giving encouragement are helpful. Many kids will immediately want to go directly to doing dive rolls, but this can lead to injury if they don't learn the basics first (especially turning their head to the side), and develop muscle memory. So practice



these, a lot and have fun! Basic skills such as these are the foundation of ninjutsu. They are a very important skill of the art of the ninja.

Video Links:

[Ninja Somersault](#)

[Forward and Backward Ninja Rolls](#)

Join our private [NiN Mentors Facebook Group](#) to ask questions and share experiences from our curriculum.

