

# Parents' Introduction to Youth Hockey



**USA Hockey, Inc.**

## This Is USA Hockey

USA Hockey, Inc., is the national governing body for the sport of hockey in the United States. As such, its mission is to promote the growth of hockey in America and provide the best possible experience for all participants by encouraging, developing, advancing and administering the sport.

Headquartered in Colorado Springs, Colo., USA Hockey is the official representative to the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) and the International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF). In this role, USA Hockey is responsible for organizing and training men's and women's teams for international tournaments that include the IIHF World Championships and the Olympic Winter Games. USA Hockey also coordinates activities with other national hockey federations around the world and, closer to home, works with the National Hockey League (NHL) and the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) on matters of mutual interest.

With a membership of more than 550,000 players, coaches, officials and volunteers, USA Hockey's primary emphasis is on the support and development of grassroots hockey programs. USA Hockey is divided into 11 geographical districts throughout the United States. Each district has a registrar to register teams; a referee-in-chief to register officials and organize clinics; a coach-in-chief to administer educational programs for coaches; a risk manager to oversee liability and safety programs; and an initiation program administrator to facilitate learn-to-play programs for youth players and their parents.

For the player, USA Hockey annually conducts regional and national championship tournaments in various age classifications; sponsors regional and national player identification and development camps; studies and makes recommendations for protective equipment; distributes Hat Trick, Playmaker and Zero Club Awards; and provides an insurance program that includes excess accident, general liability and catastrophic coverage.

For coaches and officials, USA Hockey conducts clinics and produces training manuals and videos through the Coaching Education Program and the Officiating Education Program. These programs enrich the knowledge of coaches and officials through careful study, training and examination. USA Hockey also promotes uniformity in playing rules and the interpretations of those rules.

USA Hockey has not forgotten parents, supplying this vital segment of the hockey family with a "Parents' Introduction To Youth Hockey" brochure, which includes tips on buying equipment, rules of the game and the role of parents in youth sports.

USA Hockey also publishes *American Hockey Magazine*, the main communication vehicle for the organization which is sent to the household of every registered member as a benefit of membership.

In December 1994, USA Hockey introduced its official inline hockey program — USA Hockey InLine — to provide structure and support for the growth of the sport across America. Through valuable membership packages which include standardized playing rules, competitive playing opportunities at the regional and national levels, and a variety of educational programs for players, coaches and officials, USA Hockey InLine is dedicated to providing a positive experience for all participants.

# Hockey: The Game

Ice hockey is played on a rink, a sheet of ice which is approximately two-thirds the size of a football field, usually between 185 - 200 feet long and 85 - 100 feet wide.

The game is played in three periods of equal length; 20 minutes for each period at most levels, but often 12 or 15 minutes in youth classifications. The sport involves four basic skills: skating, passing, stickhandling and shooting. These skills can be learned at any age, and the good hockey player continually works to improve and refine his or her skills.

Physical size is not an important factor in becoming a skilled and successful hockey player. Every player has an opportunity to be a part of the action given the speed of the game, the number of players on a team and the size of the surface upon which the game is played.

## The Four Basic Skills Of Hockey

**Skating** is the skill that makes hockey unique and it is something that players at all levels of the sport continually strive to improve. Without adequate skating ability, players are less able to perform the other essential skills of the sport.

**Stickhandling** is perhaps the most difficult of the basic skills to master. It allows a skilled player to maneuver around opponents and create better offensive opportunities.

**Passing** is what makes hockey a true team sport and helps make the game fun. Passing gets everyone on the ice involved in the action and turns scoring into a team effort. Helping teammates experience success is what the game is all about, and passing allows the thrill of scoring to be shared.

**Shooting** is the end result of an offensive team play and is the action that produces a goal. Many players spend most of their time practicing shooting because they believe scoring is the most fun. Players should, however, place an equal emphasis on the other basic skills of hockey, given the fact most players generally take fewer than six shots in an entire game.

## The Team

A **team** is comprised of a maximum of six players on the ice at any one time (see "penalties").

The **goaltender** is responsible for guarding the team's goal and preventing the opposing team from scoring.

The primary responsibility of the **defensemen** (two) is to prevent the opposing team from having a good shot at the goal. The defensemen also attempt to gain possession of the puck and pass to teammates to initiate an offensive scoring opportunity.

The primary responsibility of the **forwards** (three: right wing, center and left wing) is to score. However, forwards also assist the defensemen by back-checking after their team has yielded control of the puck to the opposition.



## The Playing Zones

The ice surface is divided by blue lines into three zones: defensive, offensive and neutral.

The defensive zone is the area in which a team protects its own goal and attempts to keep the opposition from scoring. This same zone is the opposing team's offensive zone, or the area in which they are attempting to score.

The neutral zone is the area between the two blue lines.

## The Officials

At higher levels of ice hockey competition, three officials — one referee (identified by an orange arm band) and two linesmen — are utilized. At the youth level, two officials — both of whom are referees — are common. The referee is the ultimate authority during the game and is primarily responsible for calling penalties and determining if goals have been legally scored.

The primary responsibilities of the linesmen include conducting face-offs, determining violations of off-side and icing while assisting the referee in enforcing the rules of the game.

## The Rules

The playing rules of hockey are divided into three basic categories:

- 1) Violations that result in a face-off
- 2) Violations that result in a player being awarded a penalty shot
- 3) Violations that result in a player being sent to the penalty box for a specified period of time

The following is a brief explanation of each type of violation. Naturally, there are technical aspects of each rule that will, at various times, determine whether or not the violation is called.

## Face-Offs

**Off-Side** — An offensive player may not precede the puck across the blue line into the offensive zone.

**Icing** — A team, when both teams have an equal number of players on the ice, may not shoot the puck from behind the center red line over their opponent's goal line (except if the puck goes into the goal). In Junior B and above, the puck must first be touched by a player from the defensive team before icing is called.

## Penalty Shot

A penalty shot is most commonly awarded if:

- 1) A player, while in a scoring position, is fouled from behind and deprived of a scoring opportunity; or
- 2) A defensive player grabs or falls on the puck when it is in the goal crease.

To take a penalty shot, an offensive player takes control of the puck at center ice and tries to score against the opposing goaltender. All other players are removed from the action.

## Penalties

For the following penalties, the penalized team must play minus the number of players serving such penalties, with one exception: the penalized team can have no fewer than four players, including the goaltender, on the ice (delayed penalty):

**Minor Penalty** — Two minutes. If a team is scored upon while it is shorthanded because of a minor penalty, the penalty shall terminate immediately.

**Major Penalty** — Five minutes. Does not terminate early for any reason.

**Match Penalty** — Five minutes, depending upon the violation, and is served by a teammate. If assessed a match penalty, the offending player is ejected for the balance of the game and may not play in future games until the case has been reviewed by league administrators.

For the following penalties, the team will replace the penalized player on the ice immediately:

**Misconduct** — Ten minutes. Served in the penalty box.

**Game Misconduct** — Ejection for the balance of the game and the player or coach will serve an additional one-game suspension.

**Gross Misconduct** — Ejection for the balance of the game and the player may not participate in any future games until the case has been reviewed by league administrators.

The following is a quick list of penalties and their definitions:

**Slashing** — Hitting or swinging at an opponent with the stick.

**Holding** — Impeding the progress of an opponent by using the hand, stick or any other means.

**Elbowing** — Checking an opponent with the elbow extended.

**Hooking** — Using the stick to impede the progress of an opponent.

**Tripping** — An action against an opponent's leg which causes the opponent to fall.

**Charging** — Body checking an opponent at an excessive speed; checking or pushing from behind.

**High-Sticking** — Carrying the stick above normal shoulder-height. If the violation results in an injury to an opponent, a major penalty should be assessed.

**Interference** — Impeding the progress of an opponent who is not in possession of the puck.

**Cross-Checking** — Checking an opponent with the stick across the body.

**Checking From Behind** — An extremely dangerous action characterized by a player checking an opponent directly from behind. Parents, players, coaches and referees must all work to eliminate this infraction from our sport.

## Glossary Of Hockey Terms, A to Z

**Assist:** An assist is credited in the scoring record to the offensive player or players involved in the play immediately preceding a goal. Maximum of two assists per goal.

**Back Check:** The action of the forwards skating back into their defensive zone to break up the opposing team's offensive play.

**Body Check:** Using the body to impede an opponent who has possession of the puck to break up or disrupt an offensive play.

**Breakaway:** A scoring opportunity that occurs when there are no defending players between the puck carrier and the opposing goaltender.

**Breakout:** Movement of a team in possession of the puck out of its defensive zone.

**Changing On The Fly:** Substitution of players without a stoppage in play.

**Clearing The Puck:** Shooting the puck out of the defensive zone or away from the front of the goal.

**Delayed Penalty:** A team shall not be shorthanded on the ice more than two players at any one time because of imposed penalties. Therefore, should a team receive a third penalty, that penalty shall be delayed in its start until one of the preceding penalties has terminated.

**Delayed Whistle:** When a violation occurs, the official will not blow the whistle to stop play as long as the non-offending team is in possession of the puck. The moment the offending team touches the puck, play will be stopped.

**Face-Off:** Dropping the puck between one player from each team to initiate play.

**Forechecking:** Pressuring the opponent when they control the puck in the neutral or defensive zone.

**Goal Crease:** The area marked off in front of the goal. An offensive player may not enter the goal crease unless the puck is already inside this area.

**Goal Judge:** An off-ice official who sits behind the goal, outside the boards, and determines if the puck enters the goal. Should there be a difference of opinion, the referee will have the final decision.

**Hat Trick:** Term referring to a player scoring three goals in a single game.

**Icing:** A team, when both teams have an equal number of players on the ice, may not shoot the puck from behind the center red line over their opponent's goal line (except if the puck goes into the goal).

**Minor Officials:** More commonly referred to as "off-ice officials." Includes the goal judges, game timer, penalty timer and official scorer. Not all positions are utilized in youth games.

**Off-Side:** When an offensive player precedes the puck across the blue line and into the offensive zone. For an off-side violation, a face-off will be conducted in the neutral zone.

**Poke Check:** Using the blade of the stick to knock the puck away from an opponent.

**Power Play:** An attempt to score by a team which has a numerical advantage in players due to a penalty or penalties.

**Referee's Crease:** A restricted area, marked by a red semi-circle, in front of the timer's table which a player is prohibited from entering while the referee is reporting a penalty.

**Screen:** Offensive players positioning themselves to block or shield the opposing goaltender's view of the puck.

**Shorthanded:** When a team is playing with one or two fewer players than their opponent due to penalties.

**Slap shot:** A sweeping motion with an accentuated back swing to shoot the puck (similar to a drive in golf).

**Slot:** An unmarked area in front of the goal approximately 10 to 15 feet in diameter.

**Wrist shot:** The motion of shooting the puck with the puck directly against the blade of the stick.

**Zamboni:** A machine used to resurface the ice between periods.

## **Equipment: What Will They Need?**

Selection of hockey equipment is a key issue for players, parents and coaches. When purchasing and fitting hockey equipment, remember two important factors: 1) make certain the player is adequately protected and 2) be sure the fitting allows freedom of movement so the player can properly perform the necessary skills. By carefully considering these two factors, your child will be more comfortable and will have more fun playing hockey.

A complete set of hockey equipment can be purchased for a relatively reasonable cost. Shop around for the best values and remember that you need not buy the most expensive equipment. Inquire about local equipment swaps and team discounts, but keep in mind the equipment must fit properly to provide maximum protection. USA Hockey members receive special discounts on equipment purchased through Play It Again Sports retailers nationwide.

**Skates** — Purchase skates that will fit your child today, with no more than 1/2" allowed for growth. Seek adequate protection in the ankle, toe and instep areas. Improperly fitted skates will hamper your child's ability to skate.

**Helmet** — Must be of a design and construction approved by the Hockey Equipment Certification Council (HECC). Must be sized at the time of purchase to fit properly. The chin strap must always be fastened.

**Facemask** — Must also be of a design and construction approved by the Hockey Equipment Certification Council (HECC).

**Mouthpiece** — Required for players in the 12-or-under through junior age classifications. USA Hockey encourages players of all ages and ability levels to use a mouthpiece.

**Stick** — Length should generally extend from the ice to the player's chin (with skates on). Quality and price differ greatly, so the choice is your's.

**Shin Pads** — Check for proper length so they protect the knee and shin completely.

**Supporter and Cup** — Essential protective equipment.

**Gloves** — Check for proper fit with good finger and hand mobility.

**Shoulder Pads** — Adjust to fit the individual at the time of purchase. A fiber cap is extremely important in preventing shoulder separations and should extend to the tip of the shoulder.

**Pants** — Held in proper position by suspenders. Pants provide protection for the lower spine, hips and thighs.

**Elbow Pads** — Properly fitted so they do not slide.

For goaltenders, special equipment is necessary, such as: gloves (catching and stick), chest and stomach protector, goalie skates (with a protective shell), leg pads, and shoulder and arm protectors. The goaltender's equipment is especially important, so seek advice from a knowledgeable source.

## **Hockey Parents Make The Difference**

This brochure has been prepared by USA Hockey to assist parents in becoming more familiar with the sport of ice hockey and its organization and structure at the grassroots level. In this brochure, you will find information designed to enrich the entire youth hockey experience for parents and players alike.

Keep in mind that, above all, the motivating factor for most children who enter an organized youth sports program is their desire to have fun. This is particularly true with young children, many of whom are newcomers to the youth sports scene.

With a supportive attitude and a fundamental understanding of the “basics” of ice hockey, everyone will come away from their youth sports experience with a positive feeling.

### **In The Stands**

Parents can take the fun out of hockey by continually yelling or screaming from the stands. Parents should enjoy the game and applaud good plays. The stands are not a place from which parents should try to personally coach their kids. Kids often mirror the actions of their parents; if they see mom or dad losing their cool in the stands, they'll probably do the same on the ice.

### **Car And Home**

Some parents not only spoil the fun for their kids at the ice rink, but also in the car, believing this is the perfect place for instruction. Parents should try to keep things in perspective. There's more to life than hockey, and the car and home are not places to coach. Parents are responsible for supporting and respecting the coach's decisions and abilities. It is unfair to put children in a position of having to decide who to listen to — their parents or the coach.

### **At Practice**

Parents should remember that if a child wants to improve, he/she has to practice — not just play. Even if a child is not the “star” player for a team, practice stresses the importance of teamwork, establishing goals, discipline and learning to control your emotions, all of which are important lessons children can use both in and away from sports.

### **At The Rink**

Hockey parents can help create a fun environment by making certain their children are wearing properly fitted equipment. Parents also need to stress fair play and risk management to help eliminate injuries.

### **Initiation Program**

The USA Hockey Initiation Program has been developed to make certain that a child's first experience with hockey is positive, safe and fun. Parents should avoid pressuring or placing unreasonable expectations on their children, particularly at the Initiation Program level. No matter what happens on the ice, children need your support, so always strive to be positive.

### **Heads Up Hockey**

In 1996-97, USA Hockey introduced a national safety and awareness campaign called Heads Up Hockey. Designed to

promote a safer, smarter, better style of play, Heads Up Hockey introduces concepts and techniques that will enhance your child's enjoyment of youth hockey. For more information on the Heads Up Hockey program, contact your coach or league administrator. Encourage your child to play Heads Up Hockey.

### Support Your Child

There are many benefits that are derived from playing youth hockey. Boys and girls learn good sportsmanship and self-discipline. They learn to work together, how to sacrifice for the good of the team, how to enjoy winning and how to handle defeat. In the process, they also learn important lessons about physical fitness and personal health.

The degree to which your child benefits from his or her youth hockey experience is as much your responsibility as it is theirs. In order for your child to get the most out of a youth hockey program, it is important for you to show support and offer encouragement while maintaining a genuine interest in the team.

### Always Be Positive

Parents serve as role models for their children, who often look to adults for advice, direction and approval. Never lose sight of the fact that you are a role model and strive to be positive. As a parent, one of the most important things you can do is show good sportsmanship at all times to coaches, referees, opponents and teammates.

Remember that your children are PLAYING hockey. It is important to allow them to establish their own goals and play the game for themselves. Be careful not to impose your own standards or objectives.

### Let The Coach Coach

Avoid placing an exaggerated emphasis on winning. A recent survey indicated 72% of children would rather play for a losing team than ride the bench for a winner. The most important aspect of your child's youth hockey experience is for them to have fun while developing physical and emotional skills that will serve them in life. A healthy, risk-free environment that emphasizes the importance of fair play, sportsmanship, teamwork and, most importantly, fun will be invaluable for your child as he or she continues to develop a positive self image.

### Positive Reinforcement

The best way to help children achieve goals and reduce their natural fear of failure is through positive reinforcement. After all, no one feels good about making mistakes.

If your child does make a mistake — and they will (remember, they're just kids) — keep in mind that mistakes are an important part of the overall learning process. Strive to be supportive and point out the things they do well. Make sure your child knows that, regardless of the outcome of a game, he or she is a winner.

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