

**SUBURBAN  
Hockey Schools**



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# **COACHING MANUAL**

*For players 6 & under*

# COACHING OUTLINE FOR PLAYERS 6 & UNDER

## **INDIVIDUAL SKILLS**

### **READY POSITION**

To have good balance and strength on the skates, and to be strong with the stick, players should get in the habit of being in ready position. Ready position should be utilized for all skills.

- Feet should be shoulder width apart, knees bent, upper body upright,
- Two hands on the stick, with the stick blade on the ice in front of them.

### **BALANCE & CONTROL**

These are key elements in all aspects of skating and hockey.

- For balance, the knees should be bent all times, the more the better.
- Upper body should be upright, with the body weight over the skates.
- For control, players should keep their stick blade on the ice and “lead with their stick”, meaning whichever direction they are going, their stick blade goes first, and they follow.

### **FALLING DOWN**

When falling, players should try to fall forward or straight down, on their knees, as opposed to leaning too far backward and falling in that direction.

### **GETTING UP**

Players need to keep their legs and feet underneath their body, keeping their upper body upright (not leaning forward) placing one foot directly beside the other knee, then pushing straight up off of that foot. Players should not use their hands or their stick to push off of in getting up.

### **Common problems**

- Knees or feet too wide apart
- Leaning forward with upper body

## **FORWARD STRIDING**

- Knees should be bent for good balance and for power in striding (pushing).
- Upper body should be leaning slightly forward with head up.
- Elbows should be close to the sides, with arms moving up and back and there should be minimal side-to-side movement of the arms across the body. Stick blade should be on the ice, moving up and back.
- Only one hand needs to be on the stick unless the player has the puck, is about to get the puck, or needs two hands on the stick to battle for the puck.
- In striding the toe should be turned out to grip the ice with the inside edge of the blade, and the push should be diagonal, back and to the side, with a final thrust off of the toe of the blade at the end of the stride.
- At the completion of the stride, the player glides on the other foot, while returning the striding foot completely back underneath the body to set up for the stride with the other skate.

### Common problems

- Minimal knee bend causing poor balance and a short stride
- Side arm movement causing side to side body movement, resulting in poor balance
- Short stride caused by player not returning skates completely under body. Wide base with feet means player loses length off of beginning of stride

## **STOPPING**

- Player should be in “ready position” with feet shoulder width apart, knees bent, upper body upright, with two hands on the stick and stick blade on the ice in front of the skates.
- Proper body positioning allows the player to keep the body weight over top of the middle part of the skate blades.
- To stop, the player needs to “release” the skate blades from the ice (straightening legs slightly) while turning from forward to the side, then slide to the side, applying more pressure to be able to stop quicker.
- Getting a feel for letting the inside edge of the lead skate blade shave the ice is the hard part.

### Common problems

- *Legs straight, upper body leaning too far forward and feet too close together*
- *Stick off of the ice and arms and upper body out of control*
- *Player “cuts” the ice (as in rollerblade stopping) rather than shaving the ice*

## **GLIDE TURNING**

- Player needs to bend both ankles to get on the inside edge of the outside skate, and the outside edge of the inside skate. The inside skate should be slightly ahead of the outside skate, in a heel-toe relationship.
- Feet should be shoulder width apart with good bend at the ankles and the knees.
- The upper body should be upright, with the player’s head, shoulders, and stick turning first, and the lower body following.

### Common problems

- Stick and upper body turning the opposite direction of the skates causing poor balance
- Minimal knee and ankle bend
- Upper body leaning into the turn too much

## **FORWARD CROSSOVERS**

- To crossover, the player needs to be able to bend the ankle of the inside skate outward, while stepping over and in front of the other skate. The ankle bend of the inside foot is critical to get on the outside edge of the skate.
- For balance, players should have good bend at the ankles and knees, keeping the upper body upright, with the shoulders, head and stick rotated to the inside of the turn.
- Players should practice in a small circle (around their stick) as the smaller radius forces them to get on the outside edge of the inside foot and crossover. Shoot for 2, then 3, then 4 crossovers in a row, then continue to build on it.

### Common problems

- Upper body leaning into the turn too much
- Stick and upper body rotated to the outside of the turn causing poor balance
- Minimal knee and ankle bend

## **PIVOTING – FORWARD TO BACKWARD**

To be able to face the puck, and face the play at all times, players need to be able to pivot quickly with good balance at top speed.

- Upper body upright, good knee bend, weight over skates, not bending forward at the waist
- Feet apart to form good base for stability
- To release blades from ice, player needs to straighten up slightly, while rotating stick, head, shoulders, and hips around to begin skating backward

### Common problems

- Legs straight, feet too close together
- Bending forward at the waist
- Stick and upper body out of control causing poor balance

## **PIVOTING – BACKWARD TO FORWARD (Mohawk)**

To be able to face the puck, and face the play at all times, players need to be able to pivot quickly with good balance at top speed.

- Upper body upright, good knee bend, weight over skates, not bending forward at the waist
- With weight on pivot skate, rotate stick, head, shoulders, and hips, bring heels together under body
- Step from an inside edge to an inside edge, without breaking stride

### Common problems

- Straightening up
- Bending forward at the waist
- Crossing feet over
- No rotating upper body

## **BACKWARD STRIDING**

Very similar to forward striding in terms of body positioning and mechanics.

- Player should have one hand on the stick, with good knee bend, and the upper body upright, like sitting on a stool. Feet should start side by side underneath the body, with the weight on the striding skate, toe turned in and ankle bent in to get on inside edge.
- The push is to the side, with the leg straightening, and the ankle flexing to finish with a push off of the toe. After the push, the player glides on the other leg, while returning the foot completely back underneath the body (a c-cut) to get set to stride with the other leg.
- As in forward skating the elbows should be tight to the sides, and the arms should be moving up and back in rhythm with the legs.

### Common problems

- Poor balance caused by minimal knee bend and bending forward at the waist
- Little or no arm movement
- Short stride caused by pushing only with the ankle, not the leg
- Short stride caused by not returning skate completely under body (too wide of base)

## **HOLDING STICK PROPERLY (ONE HAND)**

- The stick should be grasped firmly (but not squeezed) with the top hand placed at the end of the shaft (little finger right at the end) with no butt end sticking out.
- The palm of the hand should be on the top side of the shaft with the thumb and fingers pointing down, and the fingers wrapping around the bottom. Many younger players incorrectly place the palm of their hand under the shaft with their thumb and fingers point up. This bad habit, if not corrected early, will be tough to break and will limit their ability to properly use their wrists in handling the puck.

## **HOLDING STICK PROPERLY (TWO HANDS)**

- With the top hand at the top of the shaft, the bottom hand should be placed about “the width of the player’s body” down the shaft.
- The bottom hand should also grip the stick firmly, but also needs to be able to move up and down the shaft as needed to maneuver the puck, and on and off as needed for skating and puckhandling.
- The palm of the bottom hand should be on the backside of the shaft of the stick, not on the underside.

## **STICKHANDLING (STATIONARY)**

- Be sure that players are in ready position and are holding the stick properly, with their hands slightly away from (in front) of their body.
- The puck should be handled on the heel of the stick blade, with the player using the wrists to cup (close) the blade of the stick over the puck as it moves side to side.
- The puck should be handled in front of the body directly in front of the skates. In this position, the player can keep the head up, and still see the puck in front of them, while developing a feel for it on their stick.
- In addition to handling the puck in front of their skates with their wrists, players should use their arms and be able to reach wide to each side, shifting their weight onto the skate on that side, and getting their hands away from the body to move the puck wide to side.

### Common problems

- Hands incorrectly positioned on stick
- Heel of stick blade not on ice
- Head down looking at puck
- Arms moving only, not wrists
- Puck handled at side of skates, not in front

## **STICKHANDLING (MOVING)**

- Whenever possible the puck should be handled in front of the body, forcing the player to use the wrists to move it side to side, while allowing them to keep the head up and still see the puck. Pushing the puck along on the forehand at the side of the body limits the options for a player in going around a defender.
- While moving a player should be able to reach wide to each side, to move the puck around the defender, and be able to move the puck quickly, and wide to the side.

## **ONE-HANDED PUCK CONTROL**

- When in open-ice with room to move, players should get accustomed to handling the puck with one hand on their stick so that they can control it while moving at full speed. The puck should not slow them down.
- The puck should be in front of body, and with arms moving up and back, the wrist of the top hand is turned (palm up, or palm down) to maneuver the stick blade to one side or the other. The player taps the puck straight ahead (not side to side) using the heel of the stick blade and then strides into it and taps it ahead again.

## **FOREHAND PASSING**

Very similar mechanics to the wrist shot. Passes should be firm, on the ice, and at the stick blade of the intended receiver.

- Players should get a feel for the puck on the heel of their stick, get their head up looking at the target, and then use the arms and wrists to direct the puck to that target.
- The rolling wrist movement, which closes, opens and closes the blade again, causes the puck to spin and keeps it flat on the ice for better control.
- The path of the stick blade should be a straight line, not an arc.

## **BACKHAND PASSING**

Virtually all passes should be made on the forehand and made with the wrists. Occasionally, backhand passes should be made when there is no option to use the forehand, or it is the quicker option.

- Hands need to be away from the body, and the puck needs to be swept across the body, with both hands moving together across the front of the body, and the path of the stick blade should be a straight line, not an arc
- The puck should start on the heel of the stick blade and be released toward the toe. At the end of the pass the back side of the stick blade should be facing upward

## **PASS RECEIVING**

To receive a pass with their stick blade, players actually have to “catch” the pass, using their wrists to receive the puck.

- Stick blade should be on the ice presenting a target
- Players should try to receive the puck on the heel of the stick blade, using the wrists to make sure the blade of the stick is “closed” or cupped over the puck, allowing it to “give” 6-8 inches as they catch it for better control.

## Common problems

- Stick blade not on the ice
- No “give” with wrists – poor control
- Not trying to catch puck on the heel – poor control
- No wrist movement – no control of puck on blade of stick
- Slapping at the puck – no control
- Keeping arms and hands tight to the body- players need to have hands away from body and reach to the back and then to the front on the follow-through

## **WRIST SHOT**

- Player should begin in ready position with feet shoulder width apart, knees bent, chest and head up, and hands held properly on stick.
- To be able to shoot the puck, the player needs to be able to move the arms and hands across the front of the body, and shift the body weight from one leg to the other.
- The puck should start on the heel of the stick blade, with the arms and hands reaching back, so that the puck is positioned about a foot behind the back foot. The player's weight should be on the back foot.
- To shoot, the player needs to move the arms and hands across the front of the body, rolling the wrists so that the blade of the stick goes from a closed position (cupped over the puck), to open, then closed again. As this wrist action occurs the puck will spin from the heel of the blade to be released toward the toe. The spinning of the puck allows for better velocity and accuracy of the shot.
- At the same time the player needs to transfer the body weight from the back foot to the front foot to "step into" the shot for more velocity.
- At the end of the shot the player's stick blade should follow through to the spot where the puck is intended to go.

### Common problems

- No weight transfer – not shifting weight from back foot to front foot
- Keeping arms and hands tight to the body- players need to have hands away from body and reach to the back and then to the front on the follow-through
- Rotating upper body and keeping top hand tight to front hip, using the bottom hand only to shoot – so path of stick blade is an arc rather than a straight line from front to back
- Slapping at puck – no control
- Not starting puck back behind the back foot
- No wrist movement – no control of puck on blade of stick
- Flipping the puck to get it up in the air – players should not be concerned with getting it up, but more concerned with velocity and accuracy

## **STICK LIFTING**

At times, the best defensive play is to lift the puck carrier's stick and simply take the puck. This requires that the defender be in good position, be strong on the skates, strong on the stick, and quick to "tap" the stick up, and "take" the puck. It is used when pursuing from behind, and the puck carrier leaves the puck exposed, or in any 1 on 1 battle for the puck.

- Defender needs to have two hands on the stick in a position of strength and be strong on the skates with good balance
- Defender needs to slip stick underneath puck carrier's stick as close to the ice as possible – quickly tapping it upward (it only needs to be high enough to get the puck), and quickly taking the puck away

## **DRILLS FOR SKILLS**

### **BALANCE, AGILITY AND STRIDING**

- Touching one knee to the ice (left and right) – without using hands, drop to one knee and then stand right back up – keep weight on the skate on the ice – not on the knee – keep the skate directly underneath the body
- Down on both knees and back up
- Balancing on one foot
- Jumping while balancing on one foot
- Jumping using both feet
- Stepping over their stick
- Spinning in a complete circle
- Doing a deep knee bend
- Gliding – two legs and one
- One leg push – push diagonally to the side and back using inside edge – return feet all of the way together underneath (touch together) before taking next push

## STOPPING

- Shaving the ice with the inside edge of the skate blade – weight should be on the middle of the blade – feet together underneath the body – ankle bend in – slide the skate away from the body – gradually shifting the weight onto that skate – go as far as possible out and then return foot completely underneath to start again
- Push and slide – same concept only now the player pushes off the left skate and slides on the right skate (and vice versa) – both skates need to stay pointed straight ahead and the player needs to stay in ready position – it is a balance and weight distribution drill – as they push off with one foot – they shift their weight and slide on the other to stop – but both feet remain on the ice for stability.
- Passive movement and stop – moving ahead slowly five or six feet and then stopping – five or six times consecutively to the right and then to the left – the key is to be in ready position and to do it slowly. Once players get a feel for balance, weight distribution and shaving the ice with their skates, then the speed can be increased.

## **CROSSOVERS**

- Ankle bends – in ready position – both inward, both outward, both to the left (one in and one out) and both to the right
- Walking crossovers – Head, toes and stick on the ice out front (one hand) facing straight ahead – shoulders square – step one foot over the other keeping everything pointed straight ahead – ankle of the skate on the ice must roll over to the outside (foot must not turn) as the weight is shifted over to the other side.
- Running crossovers – Once walking crossovers are mastered (must be able to do from goal line to blue line) can begin speeding it up by running – everything remains the same except feet are moving faster
- Turns (stick as a turn signal)– Three lines – use coaches glove or cone as an obstacle players skate up 10 feet and then turn to the left both skates on the ice as they turn and then skate back to the line – emphasize the stick on the inside of the turn with either one hand or two appropriately – both skates on the ice and knees and ankles bent
- Turns on one foot (inside edges only)
- Crossover turns – same format only as players turn they must do 1,2,3 crossover steps while moving around the obstacle – as they master each goal (start with 2) add a step to it
- Crossovers around a hockey stick – for smaller kids a smaller circle (tighter radius) will force them to crossover – a larger circle (such as a face-off circle allows them to “straight line skate” on their inside edges.
- Figure 8’s around obstacles
- Weave through obstacles

## **BACKWARD SKATING**

- In and outs – moving backwards – toes in ankles out – legs apart then pull heels in and bring feet together underneath body – maintaining balance –
- Utilize the same drills as in forward skating – knee touches etc. so players can get a feel for the balance points and weight distribution while moving backward.

## **STICKHANDLING**

- Stationary narrow dribbling –Moving puck side to side while standing still – just using wrists
- Stationary wide dribbling – Moving puck side to side extending arms and shifting weight from one foot to the other
- Narrow dribbling while moving – Rolling wrists moving puck side to side while moving forward
- Pushing puck – top hand only on the stick – arm extended straight out in front of the body (elbow not bent) so the puck is directly in front of the player where he can see it even if he has his head up looking straight ahead –and if he loses it – he can kick it back up to his stick with his feet. – blade of the stick should be flat on the ice and the puck can be pushed with both the back and forehand side of the blade – changing sides just by the player turning their wrist.
- Cluster stickhandle – have 4 or 5 players stickhandle any direction they want inside the face-off circle – makes them keep their heads up while controlling the puck

## **RULES – CONCEPTS – TEAM SKILLS**

### **FUN**

Every moment they are on the ice. Smile. Keep it interesting. Keep them moving. Keep them involved. They will learn by doing. Not by listening to what you have to say.

### **ICE MARKINGS**

Goal line, goal crease, blue lines, red line, the face-off circles, the face-off dots, the hash marks.

### **RINK ZONES**

Offensive zone, neutral zone, defensive zone

### **BASIC HOCKEY TERMINOLOGY**

Define and refer often to basic hockey terms like bench, penalty box, locker room, scoreboard, clock, goal, shooting, scoring, passing, assist, goaltender, stickhandling.

### **BASIC PENALTY INFRACTIONS**

Be sure they know that they are not allowed to use their stick for tripping, slashing, cross-checking, high-sticking.

### **SELF CONTROL AND DISCIPLINE**

Be sure to let the players know that as part of the group, there are rules that need to be followed, like taking turns and listening when the coaches are talking.

### **TRYING HARD AT ALL TIMES**

Teach them that they should want to give it their best effort at all times, to do the very best that they can do. They will fall down, they will make mistakes, but they will only get better if they give a good effort.

### **RESPECT FOR COACHES AND OTHER PLAYERS**

As a member of a group, they need to listen to the coaches and work with the other players on the ice.

### **SAFETY**

Teach them it is important to have fun and play hard, but that they should also play safely. Their sticks, their skates, their bodies, and the puck can easily cause injuries to other players, or to themselves, if they do not play safely.

# **COACHING 6 & UNDER HOCKEY PLAYERS**

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF 4-6 YEAR OLD PLAYERS**

- Constantly in motion
- Short attention span – easily distracted
- Individually oriented – doesn't care much about others
- Little concern for team activities – just wants the puck
- Easily bruised psychologically
- No sense of pace – will go until they drop
- Poor balance and primitive eye-hand coordination

## **BEST COACHING TECHNIQUES FOR 4-6 YEAR OLD PLAYERS**

- Smile
- Give brief directions – short and to the point
- Repeat yourself constantly
- Many activities of short duration
- Keep them moving
- Positive reinforcement of good habits
- Consistent correction of incorrect habits
- Begin with simple tasks and build on those tasks
- Build their confidence
- Let them enjoy the game