

## 17. Play-Up / Play-Down Policy

- (a) USA Hockey, the Arkansas Hockey Association (AHA) Board of Directors, and the Southern Amateur Hockey Association (SAHA) believe that all players should play at their age appropriate level. Exceptions to this rule may be granted on a case-by-case basis by the AHA Board of Directors. Nothing in USA Hockey's or SAHA rules requires the AHA to allow any player(s) to play-up.
- (b) The AHA Board of Directors recognizes that in rare and specific cases it can be appropriate and even beneficial to a player's development for him or her to play-up to the next hockey age classification. A fine balance needs to be struck, however, to avoid placing the desire of a player above the legitimate opportunity for that participant to be successful in an older age classification. As such, play-ups should be viewed as 'providing development opportunities for the player while improving the overall age group classification's competitiveness' vs. a player simply 'being able to keep pace with the advanced age classification's players'.
- (c) There is increased risk of injury for players playing outside of their designated age classification. However, USA hockey allows movement in certain situations if specific guidelines are followed. You should carefully balance the need for advanced competition with how it will affect mental, physical and social development.
- (d) In granting exceptions, the AHA Board of Directors will at a minimum consider the physical, emotional, and social maturity of the player relative to those he or she would be playing with; the skill level of the player; the number of years the player has been playing; the benefit to the player of playing at his age appropriate level; and the need of the player to play in an older age classification in order to fill a reasonable roster.
- (e) Players and parents should acknowledge that approval to play-up in a specific season does not necessitate the need to continue in a play-up situation or guarantee approval to play-up in future seasons. The player requesting a play-up must meet the criteria for each year of eligibility.
- (f) Players may request to play-up in an older age classification under the following criteria.
  - i. In no circumstances should an exception allow a player to play-up more than one age classification.
  - ii. Age 8 or younger – Under no circumstances will a player age 8 or younger be approved on a 10U (Squirt) team roster in any registration category, including but not limited to: Tier II, Travel, House/Rec and Invitational Tournament.
  - iii. Criteria for allowing play-up players will be based on the evaluation of the player's skill and ability to contribute to the advanced age classification, as well as the player's maturity level compared to the advanced age classification's players. This evaluation may include on-ice and off-ice.
  - iv. The move up player should be projected to be among the top 25% of all players in the same position on the next age classification team.
  - v. A completed Play-Up Request & Acknowledgement of Risk and Liability Form for all players in a play-up situation must be submitted with the team roster in order to receive roster approval from the AHA Registrar.
- (g) Consideration should be given as to how the play-up will impact the two teams involved. The number of players within each age classification should be considered. The request should be denied if the play-up will displace an age appropriate player that would otherwise have played as determined by the team selection process.
- (h) If a play-up request is granted, the play-up player shall continue to be rostered on their current age classification team. In addition, the play-up player shall give their current age classification team priority on rostered teams.
- (i) The AHA recognizes that it operates in a small market for youth hockey resulting in a limited number of registered players within an age classification. Furthermore, the AHA recognizes that there is limited availability for ice time in order to conduct age specific age classification practices and games.

The AHA acknowledges that during the course of an AHA hockey practice, certain age classifications may conduct practice drills together. In these circumstances, the AHA shall not require a Play-Up Request & Acknowledgement of Risk and Liability Form by each participant. However, the comingling of practices amongst age classifications shall be limited to (i) 8U (Mite), 10U (Squirt), and 12U (PeeWee) and (ii) 14U (Bantam), 16U (Midget 16), and 18U (Midget 18). The head coach for each age classification will carefully evaluate the appropriateness of including participants within a younger age classification with participants of an older age classification when conducting a specific drill. In all circumstances, drills involving body contact shall be limited to a single age classification.

The AHA acknowledges that house league games often involve one or more age classifications. In these circumstances, the AHA shall not require a Play-Up Request & Acknowledgment Form to be completed by each participant. However, house league games shall be limited to the following combined age classifications: (i) 10U (Squirt) and 12U (PeeWee) and (ii) 14U (Bantam), 16U (Midget 16), and 18U (Midget 18). Coaches will make every effort to avoid younger age classifications playing against older age classifications.

- (j) The AHA reserves the right to reverse any decision allowing a player to play-up at any time. If the player that has moved up is experiencing difficulty, as determined by the player's coach and/or the AHA, the AHA may reverse the decision allowing the participant to play-up. In this case, every attempt should be made to place the player on a similar team within the player's proper age classification. Parents and players should carefully consider this outcome prior to making a request to play-up.
- (k) In order for a player (of any age), regardless of physical size or skill level, to 'play-down', it must be shown by the child's physician that it is medically necessary for the child to do so. The doctor must detail the specific medical condition that causes the child to incur this medical necessity of 'playing-down'. Players who are granted permission to 'play-down' should be limited to participation in house leagues and are not eligible to compete on a team bound for a National Championship Tournament.

Additionally, an "Atypical Medical Condition" waiver and release form will be required to be completed and signed by the parents or guardian before any such 'play-down' permission can be considered. Most of the atypical medical conditions which have been permitted to 'play-down' involve mental, physical or emotional impairments that create a handicapping situation for the player to have to overcome.

*Adopted by the AHA Board of Directors January 4, 2018.*