

# WORK HARD – HAVE FUN – BE KIND



## Central Vermont Youth Hockey Black Bears

### 8U Programming Overview

*Aligning with USA Hockey's American Development Model and Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development Model*

### Purpose

This document outlines the distinctions between our three 8U program levels—Intro to Hockey, House, and Travel—while emphasizing developmentally appropriate placement. It also establishes criteria for the exceptional placement of six-year-olds into Travel hockey, consistent with best practices from USA Hockey and Hockey Canada.

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## 1. Intro to Hockey

**Target Age:** 4–7 years old (DOB: 2018-2021)

**Focus:** Fundamental movement skills and basic hockey instruction.

**Description:**

This level introduces beginners to skating and hockey skills in a fun, low-pressure environment. Emphasis is placed on learning to move confidently on the ice, understanding basic skills concepts, and developing a love for the game. **(One ice session per week)**

**USA Hockey ADM Guidance:**

- Activities focus on skating, balance, coordination, and agility (ADM Stage 1: Active Start & FUNdamentals).
- Grouped by skill rather than strictly by age.
- Repetition, fun, and exploration are key components.

**Hockey Canada LTPD Reference:**

- Aligned with the “Active Start” and early “FUNdamentals” stages.
  - Encourages mixed-age groupings to build confidence and enjoyment.
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## 2. House

**Target Age:** 5–8 years old (DOB: 2017-2020)

**Focus:** Skill development through structured practice and limited local gameplay.

**Description:**

The House level offers a more structured experience than Intro to Hockey. Players develop core skills in skating, puck handling, passing, and shooting through ADM-style station-based practices. Local jamborees and intrasquad games are introduced in a low-pressure setting to build teamwork and game awareness. One to two tournaments maximum. **(Two ice sessions per week)**

**USA Hockey ADM Guidance:**

- Full implementation of station-based practices and small-area games.
- Cross-ice or half-ice play for all games.
- Encourages equal participation and balanced team play.

**Hockey Canada LTPD Reference:**

- Matches the “FUNdamentals” and “Learn to Play” stages.
- Recommends game formats that prioritize touches, creativity, and decision-making.

**Important Note on 6-Year-Olds:**

The vast majority of 6-year-olds should remain at the House level. This is the most developmentally appropriate environment for six-year-old players, as it emphasizes skill acquisition over competition and allows for a longer runway to mastery.

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## 3. Travel

**Target Age:** 7–8 years old and who have completed at least one year of House (with exceptional 6-year-olds by application only) (DOB: 2017-2018)

**Focus:** Advanced skill development, increased competition, and regional travel.

**Description:**

The Travel level is intended for 7- and 8-year-olds who have demonstrated advanced skill, focus, and maturity, as well as families/caregivers who understand the scheduling commitment. Practices continue to follow ADM principles but may include more intensity and structure. Teams will travel for games, jamborees, and tournaments across the state and possibly region (i.e., NH/NY). **(Two practice sessions per week; 24 Games – 12 home, 12 away; four-five tournaments)**

**USA Hockey ADM Guidance:**

- Still prioritizes fun and skill development over winning. Minimal systems play:

- "...it's really two phases of the game," [says Roger Grillo, a regional manager for USA Hockey's American Development Model](#). "You either have the puck or you don't. You're either working to get it back or working to support it and score."
- Travel should be reasonable and aligned with development—not excessive.
- Coaches are encouraged to foster a compassionate and enjoyable environment within the competitive format.

#### **Hockey Canada LTPD Reference:**

- Falls under "Learn to Play" and early "Learn to Train" stages for more mature 8-year-olds.
- Emphasizes keeping gameplay appropriate to age and skill level.

#### **Six-Year-Old Policy for Travel:**

Six-year-olds may apply for exceptional status to join Travel - [APPLY HERE](#)

Evaluation will be based on:

- Skill assessment
- Maturity and focus
- Coach and family consultation

This ensures only developmentally ready players are placed in a more competitive environment. Players are evaluated to ensure that Travel participation will not compromise their long-term development or enjoyment of the game. Any players born in 2019 or later who register for Travel without prior approval could be reassigned to House pending evaluations.

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#### **Summary:**

Program	Ages	Focus	Game Format	Travel
Intro to Hockey	4-7	Skating skills & fun games	None	None
House	5-8	Core hockey skills, fun games	Cross/Half-Ice	Local only Possible VT Tournament
Travel	7–8 (6 by application)	Advanced skills, competition, and fun games	Cross/Half-Ice	Statewide & Possible Regional games/tournaments (i.e., NH/NY)

Adopted on: 6/25/25

Approved By: Black Bear Board of Directors

**Resources:**

[USA Hockey's American Development Model \(ADM\) 8U Website](#)

[Hockey Canada U9 Pathway](#) (U9 CAN = 8U USA)

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