

12-and-Under

At the 12-and-Under level, coaches should focus on the following age-appropriate concepts and skills so that players enjoy the experience and develop both as hockey players and as young kids.

FOCUS POINTS

- Fun and Engagement
- Active Practices
- Age-Appropriate Training
- Skill Development
- Body Contact/Body Checking

FUN AND ENGAGEMENT

It's important for coaches to understand that 12-and-Under players are in the Golden Age of Skill Development, which is a crucial time in the long-term development of a player. Coaches should also remember that fun is a key component of youth sports, and that practices and games at the 12-and-Under level must be fun in order for these players to continue working hard to acquire and improve skills.

When coaches are able to deliver the appropriate level of skill development for each player, then players have an excellent opportunity to engage. Engagement occurs when players are able to successfully execute the targeted skills within an environment that still provides an appropriate challenge level (i.e., not too easy, not too hard). Finding the appropriate balance between success and challenge for each player can be an ongoing challenge for coaches, but providing the optimal blend should always be the goal.

Remember, fun and engagement are important factors in the development process. Coaches should never underestimate the importance of each.

ACTIVE PRACTICES

While a 12-and-Under practice shouldn't be as active as an 8-and-Under practice, coaches must still seek to increase the amount of time players spend participating in drills and small games in each practice session (rather than standing and watching). Players are more likely to successfully execute skills when they have been given many repetitions in practice. Coaches should consider designing practices with high activity levels each week so that players have ample opportunity to practice the targeted skills. Coaches should also design practice sessions that are not as high in activity level, but instead require the players to go hard for short intervals with appropriate rest to follow each interval. Coaches should strive to find the optimal work-to-rest ratio in any of these practices. Refer to the Player Activity Chart found on the free Mobile Coach App and at admkids.com under Coaches/Repetition for a form to evaluate the developmental opportunities that occur for players in practice and in games.

AGE-APPROPRIATE TRAINING

Players in the 12-and-Under age classification are at a sensitive stage in their development. Two aspects of their game need special attention: body contact/body checking and skill development. Coaches at this level must be extra careful when determining what is appropriate for 12-and-Under players to learn. On-ice skills and drills must be age-appropriate and coaches should spend considerably more time developing players' skills rather than teaching systems. Small games should be used to teach appropriate concepts such as understanding the game. Improving hockey sense takes on a heightened priority at this stage.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Since 12-and-Under players are in the Golden Age of Skill Development (ages 8-12), coaches must maximize the skill development that occurs during this time period. While skill development can occur during later years, the opportunity for positively affecting the long-term development of a player is never

greater than in this age period. Players should be allowed to focus on developing all of their hockey skills at this age. The development of these skills takes a tremendous amount of time and the time invested at this age will pay great dividends later. Players who are allowed to spend large amounts of time acquiring and developing skills at this age will have an advantage in later years over many players who did not have this opportunity.

BODY CONTACT/BODY CHECKING

Although body checking is not allowed in games at the 12-and-Under level, coaches should teach players the proper techniques of making legal body contact with an opponent. Players must learn that body contact should have a purpose and that purpose is to gain possession of the puck. Skills related to body contact and body checking should be taught in a progression and should be practiced in every session. These skills should include angling, stick position, delivering body contact, and receiving body contact. These skills should be practiced both on and off the ice with the goal of improving the body contact/body checking skills of each player and preparing each player for body checking at the 14-and-Under level. Refer to *Checking the Right Way for Youth Hockey* for information and drills related to body contact and body checking.

PRACTICE FOCUS

Practices should focus on (percentage of time listed after each):

1. Individual skills (hockey skills and activities) — 65%
2. Hockey sense (teaching of concepts through small area games) — 25%
3. Systems (team-play training) — 10%

While these percentages are approximations, they emphasize that individual skill development remains the highest priority at this stage, and the majority of practice time should be spent improving skills. The percentages also indicate that hockey sense and concepts are still more important than systems and team-play training at 12-and-Under.

SMALL AREA GAMES

Hockey sense becomes a more important focus at this age level. Hockey sense includes the ability to understand important age-appropriate hockey concepts and execute tactics related to these concepts. Rather than telling players how to play each situation, small area games provide a great opportunity to let a game teach the desired concept(s). Players learn the desired concept by playing the game within its parameters; it challenges players to find their own solutions, increasing their confidence and retention. Consistent use of these games is important in the development of hockey sense for each player. They should be playing a variety of games, and in each case, figuring the game out on their own. Coaches should not be telling players how to play. The number of players, rules of the game, and size of the game area should be varied with each game. Coaches might also opt to use pucks, balls, or ringette rings to change the dynamic of each game.

Small area games are great teaching tools that also create a fun and competitive environment. Refer to the *Small Area Competitive Games Handbook* and the *Small Area Competitive Games 2* book for age-appropriate small area games.

OPTIMAL WINDOWS OF TRAINABILITY

In order for players to maximize their ability and reach their potential, it's important for youth coaches to do the right thing with young athletes at the right time. Focusing on these key components at the appropriate age will give young athletes the best opportunity to achieve their potential as they progress through their teenage years. Researchers have concluded that players in this age classification should spend time developing the following capabilities related to their long-term development:

1. **Skill Acquisition and Development (for boys and girls)**
– Science has shown this is the prime age for children to acquire and develop sport skills, therefore it's known as the Golden Age of Skill Development.
2. **Speed (for girls)** – This is prime time to increase speed by improving the stride length and stride frequency through drills requiring high velocity for shorter intervals of time.
3. **Stamina (for girls)** – This is prime time to improve the endurance of each female athlete (the ability to sustain prolonged physical or mental effort).

The factors affecting long-term development differ slightly for boys and girls at this age level.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE

Players should know:

1. Rules
 - a. face-offs
 - b. body contact
 - c. offsides
 - d. icing
 - e. checking from behind
2. Common Infractions
 - a. unsportsmanlike conduct
 - b. body checking, checking from behind **and boarding**
 - c. cross-checking, charging **and slashing**
 - d. head contact, elbowing, and high-sticking
 - e. tripping, hooking **and kneeing**
 - f. interference and holding
3. Penalties
 - a. minor
 - b. major
 - c. **misconduct**
 - d. **penalty shot**
 - e. **match**

INDIVIDUAL HOCKEY SKILLS

Players must learn and master:

1. Skating
 - a. ready position **and the ability to find this strong position when engaged in body contact**
 - b. edge control
 - c. forward start
 - d. forward stride
 - e. controlled stop: two-foot and one-foot snowplow
 - f. controlled turn
 - g. forward crossover
 - h. backward skating
 - i. backward stop

- j. ABCs of skating: agility, balance, coordination, and speed drills
 - k. One-foot stop
 - l. backward crossover
 - m. mohawk turns
 - n. lateral skating**
 - o. backward cross-under start**
 - p. backward two-skate stop**
 - q. backward power stop (one skate)**
2. Puck Control
- a. lateral (side-to-side) stickhandling
 - b. front-to-back stickhandling
 - c. diagonal stickhandling
 - d. attacking the triangle
 - e. puck protection
 - f. change of pace
 - g. toe drag
 - h. give and take
 - i. accelerating with the puck (one-hand carry)
 - j. change of direction**
 - k. backward puck control**
 - l. fakes and deception while stickhandling**
 - m. puck off the boards**
3. Passing and Receiving
- a. forehand pass
 - b. backhand pass
 - c. receiving a pass properly with the stick
 - d. saucer pass (forehand and backhand)
 - e. receiving a pass properly with the skate
 - f. indirect pass
 - g. receiving a pass properly with the hand**
 - h. surround the puck**
 - i. one-touch passes**
 - j. area passes**
4. Shooting
- a. wrist shot
 - b. backhand
 - c. flip shot
 - d. screen shot
 - e. deflection

- f. off rebound
- g. snap shot**
- h. slap shot**
- i. fake shots**
- 5. Body Contact
 - a. stick on puck
 - b. stick lift
 - c. poke check
 - d. gap control concept
 - e. body positioning and angling
 - f. stick press**
 - g. angling**
 - h. delivering body contact**
 - i. receiving body contact (contact confidence)**
- 6. Goaltending
 - a. positioning
 - i. proper stance
 - ii. angling
 - b. movement
 - i. forward
 - ii. backward
 - iii. lateral
 - c. save technique
 - i. stick
 - ii. gloves
 - iii. body and pads
 - iv. butterfly
 - v. sliding butterfly**
 - d. recovery
 - e. stopping the puck behind net**
 - f. puck retention**
 - i. cradling**
 - ii. rebound control**
 - g. game situations**
 - i. screen shots**
 - ii. walkouts**
 - iii. wraparounds**

TEAM PLAY

Players must learn and understand:

1. Offensive Concepts
 - a. 2-on-1 situations
 - b. 1-on-1 situations
 - c. triangle offense
 - d. team play in each zone**
 - e. face-offs**
 - f. zone entry**
 - g. power-play concepts**
2. Defensive Concepts
 - a. gap control
 - b. stick on puck
 - c. backchecking
 - d. body position: man-you-net
 - e. basic defensive zone coverage
 - f. defending the middle of the ice**
 - g. 1-on-1 and even-numbered situations**
 - h. 2-on-1 and odd-numbered situations**
 - i. forechecking**
 - j. man-short concepts**
 - k. shot blocking**

NUTRITION

Players should learn:

1. **Proper Hydration** – Players should learn the importance of proper hydration before, during, and after all games and practices.
2. **Good Eating Habits** – Players should be encouraged to eat good meals and refrain from eating candy and other foods that lack nutritional value.
3. **Recovery Drink** – While there are many recovery drinks on the market, players should be encouraged to drink chocolate milk following any practice or game session.
4. **Eating and Energy** – Players should be introduced to the importance of eating healthy foods that are high in carbohydrates in order to gain long-term energy. These players will experience tournaments where they are expected to play several games in a relatively short period of time. This is an excellent time for them to learn about the importance of eating the right foods for long-term energy.

FITNESS AND TRAINING

Players should perform exercises that improve their agility, balance, coordination, and speed (ABCs), as well as:

1. Quickness activities
2. Team games
3. Sprint workouts
4. Agility, balance, and coordination exercises
5. Light calisthenics
6. Flexibility exercises
7. Relays and obstacle courses
8. Upper-body strength: body-weight resistance activities
9. Off-ice skill development
 - a. slideboard
 - b. stickhandling with various types of balls
 - c. shooting range
 - d. passing

Coaches should utilize the 10-and-Under/12-and-Under Off-Ice Training Cards (Phase I and Phase II) that are available through USA Hockey and are on the Mobile Coach App.

INJURY PREVENTION

Players and parents should continue to learn about:

1. Heads Up Hockey Program
2. The proper care of equipment
3. The proper fitting of equipment
4. Rink safety
5. Safety precautions for practices
6. The importance of warming up and cooling down
7. The RICE concept for treating injuries (Rest-Ice-Compression-Elevation)

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

Players should continue to exhibit the sport and life skills learned at previous levels, as well as learning:

- the benefits of positive comments. All involved should realize that positive comments help reduce stress, enhance positive self-image for individuals and the team, and they can increase the enjoyment of practices and games.

- to balance family, school, and other activities.
- to be on time for practices and games.
- to take responsibility for their performance and actions at games, practices, school, and home.
- that alcohol and drugs can negatively impact a player. This includes the player's performance and quality of life.
- to be good teammates who encourage each of his or her teammates.

PARENT DEVELOPMENT

Refer to *An American Hockey Parent Handbook* found on the USA Hockey website.

14-and-Under

