



8-and-Under Off-Ice Practice Philosophy

Off-ice training for the 8-and-Under age classification should be centered on developing a strong foundation of agility, balance and coordination (the physical literacy ABCs).

These traits are important to the long-term athletic success of the player. ABCs are the platform for building acceleration and speed in childhood and adolescence. Also, by consistently participating in off-ice training at this age, children and parents are learning a great habit. Off-ice training should simply become an expected part of what kids do as hockey players. Done correctly, off-ice training should be as fun and beneficial as the on-ice practices. This habit will pave the way to more structured and intensive off-ice training as players get older.

Young players should learn ABCs in an environment that is fun and centered in play. Children, and most adults, tend to work very hard at things they enjoy. Once a basic understanding of an off-ice game is established, the players should have the ability to adjust the rules. In other words, give them some ownership in the training. Again, if it is their game, they will work very hard at it. With very simple instruction, they will train themselves as long as they are having fun. Also, a fun environment will make the players comfortable. They will be much more willing to push the limits of their ability if there is no fear of making a mistake. Losing one's balance or taking a wrong step is perfectly OK. It may even be funny. If this is the case, players will continue trying new skills until they are mastered without fear of looking bad.

Try to avoid elimination-type games. If a player is eliminated, he or she is not training. Competition is fine, but no elimination.

Lastly, a good off-ice training session performed before practice is also an excellent warmup. This is another way a coach can help maximize his or her team's ice time. After a good 30-minute off-ice training session, the players will be both physically and mentally prepared for a productive on-ice practice.