

Coaching Youth in Minor Hockey

Bow Valley Hockey Society



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Introduction

Throughout your coaching career you will encounter players with a range of personalities and athletic ability. It is important to know different strategies and coaching techniques that will ensure you make decisions in the best interest of the development of the player and the team as both good citizens and athletes. One of the biggest challenges as a coach is managing the various personalities on a team. The following guide is designed to provide coaches with strategies to manage a wide range of players and situations a coach might encounter on any given team. Regardless of what team or group of players, a coach should always treat their players with respect and make playing the game as much fun as possible for all players.

Making Hockey Fun

This should always be the number one goal of any minor hockey coach. Regardless of whether you are coaching boys or girls, five or 18 year-olds, elite players or recreational players, you should always remember that kids play the game of hockey for fun. If the game is not fun, kids won't want to play and they certainly won't enjoy their time. Through participation in sport, children learn important social skills, the meaning of teamwork and the value of hard work. Making practice enjoyable will maintain a player's interest and make development fun.

Coaching Code of Ethics

Respect

Treat each athlete with the highest level of respect regardless of gender, race, athletic potential, origin, socio-economic status, sexual orientation, or any other conditions.

Have respect for the game of hockey, your players and fellow coaches, the officials, opposing players, coaches, and parents.

Understand Your Position

Understand that your goal as a coach is to develop players in a fun and safe learning environment.

Coaching is time intensive and will require a commitment of time as you plan for practices, games, team activities, and discussions with parents, association representatives, etc. Part of this commitment is becoming a student of the game by taking the time to learn proper skills and drills necessary to develop yourself as a coach and your players.

There are many resources available to help you along the way. Be sure to make connections within your own association and the greater Bow Valley Hockey Society community. There are many experienced and educated coaches who can share their experiences and provide you with further insight and advice. Bow Valley Hockey Society also runs many coaching clinics throughout the year to help in the development of coaches. There are many sites online that provide useful hockey drills and excellent demonstrations of particular skills.

Integrity in Relationships

One of the most important qualities successful coaches possess is effective communication. As coach, clearly stating your expectations and the consequences for failing to meet those expectations must be communicated to both parents and players from the very start. Be sure parents and players are aware of team and league rules. It would be best to print and hand them out at the beginning of the season.

Be consistent. Make sure the rules of the team go for everyone. For example, if your rule states that any player who misses a practice cannot start in the next game; this must always be the case even if that player is your starting goaltender. You should always be consistent with your praise and in your demeanour.

Celebrate improvement. Little accomplishments like finally learning how to stop on the left side for a Timbits player or finally mastering the wrist shot for an atom player are all reasons for celebration. When improvement happens, young athletes need to have that pointed out to them by an adult whose opinion they respect.

Reward effort. As a coach, you should be much more satisfied with a team that lost but gave their best effort than a team who won but gave less than their best effort. Encouraging young athletes to practice their weakness until they become strengths will help build skill and good character.

Honouring Sport

Model proper sportsmanship at all times. Win or lose you must always support your players. Emphasizing the same sportsmanship to your players is essential. Teach players to respect the sport, their opponents, their coaches, the officials, the fans, and even the people who work at the arenas. Simple gestures such as cleaning up the dressing room after each game or saying “Please” and “Thank You” go a long way!

Emphasize teamwork. Everyone’s role on the team is important. Games are not won or lost because of one individual, especially in the game of hockey. Teach players to cheer and support one another. For example – cheering for a teammate and being genuinely happy when they succeed is a great lesson for any young hockey player to learn.

Source: NCCP, Coaching Code of Ethics

Understanding Different Learning Styles and Strategies for Coaches:

Even though you are coaching a team sport, every child is an individual who learns in his or her own way. There are four main types of leaning styles and by understanding how to recognize these four styles you will become a more effective coach.

The Visual Learner

Visual perception might be the most important source of information when performing sport skills. Visual learners’ primary source of information is received through their eyes. This type of learner learns best by watching a demonstration or model. Seeing another player demonstrate a movement or skill are helpful tools for enhancement of learning. Coaches can use visual aids to supplement their instruction, feedback, and discussions will enhance the visual athlete’s ability to process information. For example, analyzing game film, drawing up drills or plays on a

whiteboard, are all useful tools to enhance the learning process of visual learning athletes. However, not all athletes, especially beginners, will know what to watch for in a demonstration. The coach's role, especially with the beginner, is to assist or cue the young athlete as to what input is important and what specifically to watch out for in a model or demonstration.

Source: Farwell

The Auditory Learner

The athlete who is an auditory learner focuses on sounds and rhythms to learn movement patterns along with verbal description of the movement. Auditory learners learn best through the use of language including lectures and group discussions. To enhance understanding of athletes who are auditory learners, coaches should provide opportunities for athletes to talk through plays, movements, skills, and game strategies with other team members or coaches.

The Kinesthetic Learners

Kinesthetic learners learn by doing. Information is actually processed and learned when the athlete is provided an opportunity to move. All learners have a need to touch things and try their new skill, but the kinaesthetic learner needs to know what the movement feels like. Over time, the correct feeling becomes the frame of reference with which to compare all subsequent performances. The best way for a coach to accommodate this type of learner is to provide game and skill simulations along with opportunities for repetition to establish muscle memory. Understanding that replicating movements are the key for the kinaesthetic learner and coaches should pay careful attention to both accuracy and form of the movement. It is the coaches responsibility to ensure that the correct movements are emphasized and reinforced while incorrect ones are identified and corrected.

The Thinker

These athletes require information that they can analyze for understanding movement concepts, principles, plays, skills, and strategies. The thinker athlete is driven to find solutions to movement problems by being allowed to ask questions and solve movement problems creatively. As a coach, the best way for you to maximize the performance potential of these athletes is to provide opportunities to process information in a variety of ways – written articles, discussions, analysis of skill performance and game strategy to utilize the athletes preferred method of processing information.

Source: Family Education

Body Language

As a coach you are also a mentor and role model to your players, therefore you should always be aware of the words you choose, the tone of your voice, and your body language when speaking to the team, a player, or anytime you are in the arena or team function.

Verbal

Whether you are correcting misbehaviour, teaching a player how to catch a pass, or praising a player for a good effort, you should always consider a number of things when sending a message verbally:

- Be positive and honest
- State it clearly and simply
- Say it loud enough, say it again (repetition, repetition, repetition)
- Be consistent

It is important to choose your words wisely and pay attention to the tone of your voice.

Non-Verbal

Actions speak louder than words. Be sure the tone of your voice and the words you use match your body language. For example, the extreme opposite of this would be telling a team “good effort” while looking down at your feet and shaking your head disapprovingly. Two of the more obvious non-verbal indicators are facial expressions and body language, make a conscious effort to keep them positive and upbeat.

Strategies for Coaching Various Players and Situations

Coaching Your Own Child

It is not uncommon for a majority of coaches to start out coaching because their child is playing the sport. This can cause some major conflict in the parent-child relationship, especially as the child gets older. It is important, but difficult, to separate the roles of coach and parent. At times, these roles can especially become confusing to the child if proper communication is not initiated by the parent. A few ways to make the situation a positive one:

- Be sure to explain the two roles to the child. For example, at home your child may be the center of attention, but at the hockey rink they are not. This is confusing for many young players. Another example is that mom may comment on the child's performance at the rink, but not at home. Be sure to explain the differences in behaviours to the child.
- Ask your child if they want you to coach them.
- Explain to them why you want to be involved.
- Discuss how your interactions will change when you take on the role as coach at practices or games.
- Limit your coaching behaviour to when you are in the coaching role. For example, it is okay to give feedback on a particular play at the rink, but not at home while eating dinner with the family.
- Reaffirm that you love your child irrespective of their performance.
- Also, be careful of what you say about your child in front of the team. For example, do not highlight positives or negatives in the dressing room after a game.
- Treat your child the same way you would treat any other player. It sounds simple, but it is not always that easy.

Coaching Mixed Gendered Teams or Players of the Opposite Gender

In this situation, you will most likely encounter a team where the majority of players are boys and the minority are girls. Perhaps you are a dad coaching your daughter's girl's peewee team or a mom coaching your son's novice team. Here are a few helpful suggestions to make this a positive experience for all players:

- On the ice, treat all players the same and be sure all the players follow your lead. Under no circumstances should there be "special" treatment for any player. Even in levels peewee or higher where body checking is introduced, the rules of the game should apply to all players during practice and games.
- All players should treat each other and their differences with respect. Anything less than full respect should be immediately addressed by the coach.
- Players should dress in the same dressing room up through Atom-PW. Any team playing Bantam or above, boys and girls should dress in separate rooms. As coach, it may be helpful to establish a routine of meeting as a team in the main dressing room prior to going on the ice and immediately coming off the ice. It is a great way to unite the team and make sure everyone is included.
- As a coach, it is important to protect yourself. Never put yourself in a situation where you are alone one-one with any player. Always have another adult, assistant coach, parent, etc present whenever you need to address a player individually.
- Regardless of gender, players should never be yelled at or singled out in a negative way.

Strategies for Creating Team Cohesiveness

Team cohesiveness is not something you can manufacture, but there are ways to encourage and improve team cohesiveness regardless if you coach Timbits or junior. Not everyone on your team has to be best of friends, but they do have to learn to work together and treat each other with respect. Here are a couple strategies that coaches have done in the past to help develop team cohesiveness:

- Volunteer as a Group. There are many charitable organizations or volunteer opportunities available for groups. Giving back to your community is a great lesson for any young athlete to learn. For example, you can have your novice team clean up a local park or playground, do a bottle drive, raise money for a good cause by participating in a walk-a-thon, etc. With older players, you can have a team meeting and have the players come up with ideas about how they'd like to give back to the community. Many kids have already done some volunteer work through school or other community organizations they belong to. You'd be surprised how many great ideas kids can come up with.

- A Team Outing. A team outing can be a great opportunity for players to get to know one another outside of the hockey rink. This can also be a very inexpensive option. For example, have your team do a hike at one of the local or provincial parks. There are also many great discounts for large groups to attend events such as the Calgary Hitmen, Roughnecks, and even the flames.
- Team Building Exercises. There are many great resources that provide ideas for team building exercises, check out your local bookstore, library or searching online for some ideas. Especially during the beginning of the season sending thirty minutes to an hour playing various name games and doing ice breaker activities will help players get to know one another more quickly. Something as simple as playing a different sport other than hockey such as ultimate Frisbee, bowling, or handball are always great team building exercises and a nice alternative to standard practices.

Coaching a Team of “Mixed” Skill

You might find yourself coaching a team with one or two highly skilled players, a mix of average skilled players, and a one or two very inexperienced players. Here are a few ways to ensure all players are challenged;

- At practice be sure to pair up players according to skill level the majority of the time. This is a way to ensure that each player is challenged according to his or her skill level and will help facilitate positive skill development.
- There might be an occasion where you want to pair up the skilled and inexperienced players. This serves two purposes. First, it is a way for the more experienced player to do some “peer” coaching and learn through teaching a skill. Second, it also provides the more inexperienced player with a peer who can become a role model and whose skill they can strive to emulate.
- Although difficult to do, try not to make it a habit of consistently singling out the more skilled players as examples for the rest of the team to follow, make an effort to praise all players for improvements made.

Coaching the Non-Responsive Player

You might encounter a player who refuses to listen. At the younger level you might have a player who refuses to pass the puck to teammates or at the midget level you might have a player who refuses to play the offensive system. There are several approaches you can take when dealing with an athlete who isn't being a good team player.

- Talk to the player after the practice or game and explain how the coaching staff views their performance and its implications for the rest of the team. Be sure to emphasize how important "team play" is for success of the entire team.
- Use game film/video to reiterate the point. Seeing the game from this viewpoint often highlights the problem more clearly and gives the player a better insight on what they need to do to improve their team play.
- If the player continues to refuse to make adjustments to their game, such as headman the puck to open teammates, reduce playing time during games or remove the player from special teams, until the behaviour is modified.

Coaching a Player Who Loses Self-Control

Some players put a lot of pressure on themselves to perform well. Sometimes, this can have negative consequences on a player's performance and overall enjoyment of the game. For example, you might have a player who misses a wide open net and often comes to the bench in tears. There are ways you can help put the game into perspective for young players which will improve the player's performance and make their playing experience more enjoyable.

- Have the player sit on the bench practicing taking deep breaths in through the nose, out through the mouth for a five second count. The goal is to have the player clear their mind and calm themselves before they step back onto the ice.
- Reiterate that it is okay to make mistakes as long as they player is trying his or her best.
- Have the player to focus on one positive play after each shift. As the player to tell you what they did well.
- Remind the player that there are plenty of opportunities in the game/season to improve.
- Be sure to read Bow Valley's manual for Mental Preparation for more specific information on this topic.

You also might encounter a player who retaliates, plays dirty, or uses offensive language earning unnecessary penalties for your team. Sometimes, the referee might miss the call, but it is your job as coach to discipline the player and set a precedent for the rest of the team.

Remember, you want your team to model good sportsmanship at all times. Here are a few strategies you might consider:

- You speak to the player at the first opportunity explaining that his or her actions were unnecessary, selfish (especially if the action was penalized), and that you expect better judgement in the future.
- Depending on the severity of the action, you bench the player for a shift, a period, or the remainder of the game.
- At the beginning of the season, it is important that you emphasize to your team that each player represents the entire team, including all players and coaches, and their association. Actions by an individual, on or off the ice, is a direct reflection of the entire team, therefore players must always conduct themselves in a positive manner.

Keeping Players Engaged and Interested

Do you get frustrated when explaining a drill on the ice or giving a pregame talk in the dressing room before a game and it seems like one or two kids (or the entire team) aren't even listening? Whether you coach novice players who cannot stop talking about the latest video game while standing in line during practice or bantam players who seemed more focused on the party are going to after the game than the game itself, there are a few strategies to get your players back in the "here and now".

- Remind players at the beginning of the season and the start of each practice game that while they are at hockey it is important try and forget all the stuff going on outside the rink. Sports can be a great outlet for many players who feel pressure from school or family. Reminding players that it is okay to solely focus on hockey while at the rink is something that can be done each day to reiterate the point.
- Use your practice time efficiently. Children listen to adults (teachers and parents) talk all day long, so whenever you address the team, especially on the ice, keep it brief. Spend as little time during practice standing around. For example, don't spend 5 minutes of a 60 minute practice standing in front of a whiteboard drawing out one drill (that can be done in the dressing room before practice). Keep the lines short, have players moving at all times, when possible perform a drill out of both corners instead of one, do drills that incorporate more players, use as much of the ice as possible. Write up a practice plan, post it in the dressing room before practice, and be organized.
- For younger players, making comparisons between the game of hockey and relatable interests usually helps them remember and understand the game more clearly. For example, comparing roles and responsibilities for specific positions to a popular

children's movie, interesting occupations, or animals can be helpful. For example, with your novice team you can relate the role of the center to a gopher who is a major pest constantly moving in search of food. Pick something that works for your team and use it as a theme all season long. The same principle can apply for older players in midget. For example, give each system a unique nickname that will make it relatable and memorable for the players.

- Give out a player of practice award. Kids usually keep track of how many goals and assists they score, but as coach, you can create a team mentality that working hard is the best achievement any player can accomplish. For example, use a hard hat or a hammer that you can pass out to the hardest working player at the end of each practice or game. This gives the players a short-term goal to focus on each day and will hopefully establish a good habit along the way.

Coaching a Child with Autism

Autism is a lifelong, no progressive neurological disorder typically appearing before the age of three years. The word "autism" means a developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and non-verbal communication and social interaction. The classic form of autism involves a triad of impairments – in social interaction, in communication and the use of language and in limited imagination as reflected in restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behaviour and activities (autismimawareness.org). There are several strategies to handle coaching a player with autism:

Your best resource for coaching a player with autism will often be the parents themselves. Have a conversation with the parents to learn about the child's special needs and to understand the best way to make the most of the child's hockey experience. Always, be sure there are open lines of communication between yourself and the child's parents and do not be afraid to ask questions.

Children with autism spectrum disorders often have trouble interpreting facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. Be as concrete and explicit as possible in your instructions and feedback to the player. Make sure directions are given step-by-step, verbally, visually, and by providing physical supports or prompts, as needed by the player.

Find out what the player's strengths and interests are and emphasize them. Tap into those avenues and create opportunities for success. Give positive feedback and lots of opportunities for practice.

If behaviour is a significant issue for the player, seek help from the parents to understand the

meanings of the behaviours and to develop a unified, positive approach to resolving them. Also, don't be afraid to do your own research such as online or written sources from expert professional resources.

Autistic children thrive best in programs that are consistent and predictable. It helps to have consistent routines and schedules when possible. When you know a change in routine will occur (e.g., a change in practice routine) *prepare* the player by telling him or her what is going to be different and what to expect or do. As with all players, it is beneficial to reward them for each small success.

Work together with the player's parents and implement a plan tailored to meet the players needs. Regularly share information about how the player is doing with the parents.

Source: Autism Awareness Inc.

Coaching a Player with ADD/ADHD

Once again, your best resource will be the parents. Keep an open dialogue throughout the season with the parents. They can provide important information such as the best strategies to help keep their child engaged and learning. Knowing the signs and symptoms will help you understand the disorder and better equip yourself to coach players with ADD/ADHD.

Children with ADD/ADHD will often exhibit some or all of these behaviours;

Inattentive - Children with ADD/ADHD can pay attention when they're doing things they enjoy or hearing about topics they enjoy. But when the task is repetitive or boring, they quickly tune out. Kids with ADD/ADHD also have trouble concentrating if there are things going on around them; they usually need a calm, quiet environment in order to sustain attention.

Hyperactive and Impulsive - The most obvious sign of ADD/ADHD is hyperactivity. While many children are naturally quite active, kids with hyperactive symptoms of attention deficit disorder are always moving. They may try to do several things at once, bouncing around from one activity to the next. Even when forced to sit still – which can be very difficult for them – their foot is tapping, their leg is shaking, or their fingers are drumming.

Impulsivity – This can cause problems with self-control because they censor themselves less than other kids do such as interrupting conversations, asking irrelevant questions, invasion of personal space, and some kids tend to be moody and overreact emotionally.

Summary

Regardless of skill or personality type, there are few common sense rules every coach needs to follow:

- Be Positive and Enthusiastic
- Treat each player as an individual
- Be Consistent
- Make it Fun!

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