

# NEW YORK STATE AMATEUR HOCKEY ASSOCIATION

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH USA HOCKEY

“INTRODUCTION TO BODY CONTACT”



INTRO TO BODY CONTACT  
LESSON PLAN HAND OUT





## WELCOME TO CHECKING THE RIGHT WAY FOR YOUTH HOCKEY

### Introduction

This Handout is intended for all who coach hockey. The purpose is to use it as a resource on how to teach and apply checking in the best tactically, technically and ethically responsible way. Developing sound checking skills for all players is a necessity. Not only does our team's defensive ability largely rely on each individual's ability to check effectively, but the safety of our players is directly dependent on how well they are trained to protect themselves. In addition, the safety of the opponent is also jeopardized if our players are not trained to check the right way. The right way includes physical ability, technical skills and ethical judgment. Short comings in any of these three areas can be very destructive to our team's results, and it can be dangerous to all players on the ice. Making sure all of our players know how to check the right way gives us added control. As coaches we feel good about the game, our team and ourselves when we are in control. On the other hand, losing control is very frustrating. We sometimes say, "things get out of control," but in reality, it is we, the coaches, who let it slip. Blaming the referee, the other team or their coach, is just a sign of resignation, and a confirmation that we have really "lost it."

There are three parts to checking:

Physical ability, technical skills and ethical judgment are important in improving your players, and teaching them how to check correctly, begins with developing a code of conduct. Consciously, or subconsciously, we all have a code of conduct, but when leading and fostering young people, we must make sure our code is ethically correct and is based on all the values we

want our children to learn. When you work through the “Safety and Ethics” of this handout, we hope you’ll confirm and commit to the responsible code. Poor checking techniques and an unethical code of conduct can be hazardous to the safety of the players. In the following chapters, we will work on the right techniques of angling, stick checking and body contact. We will also work in depth on the right body checking techniques, and demonstrate some appropriate drills. The purpose is that we, as coaches, will improve our skills of instructing players and develop their skills to be the right way of checking.

The Core Hockey Skills are:

Skating, stickhandling, passing, receiving, shooting and checking. Checking is not an isolated set of skills. They are intertwined with all other hockey skills such as skating, stickhandling, passing and shooting. While skating skills form the foundation for all other hockey skills, it is important to develop all core skills simultaneously. In addition to physical skills, developing awareness on the ice so you know where opponents and teammates are on the ice is equally important. A well-balanced training regimen that focuses on core skills will be very beneficial and give your players the best opportunity to improve.

## THE DEFENSIVE SKILLS OF THE GAME – THE OTHER HALF OF SUCCESS

As much as hockey is based around creating plays to score goals, it is as important to disrupt plays to prevent goals. The defensemen and forwards are expected to check, contain, box out, pin, block shots, and work as an organized team to prevent the opponent from scoring. Traditionally, this part of the game has always been prioritized among the coaches while swift skating, surprising stickhandling moves, deceptive passes and powerful shots fascinated the fans. Playing defense became labeled as boring hockey except for the hard and heavy body checks. Fans were excited and entertained by watching two players collide and body checking became a marketable product. People who grow up watching hockey on television are often left with the idea that body checking equals the defense of the game. Effective checking means being brave, tough, solid and strong. Talent and skills are rarely used to describe a player’s checking efficiency. Good checkers seldom get credit for their agility, timing, balance, stability, arsenal of checking techniques, ability to anticipate the game and fair play. Instead, the ability to intimidate, play with an edge, push the envelope, get under one’s skin, and do anything for the team are commonly used to describe a checker’s value. These perceptions make it very challenging for us as coaches to build the right checking skills. Do you think that media and TV COVERAGE influence our view of youth hockey?

In today’s hockey, teams have systems for aggressive and passive (contained) fore-checking schemes. Each of those systems is only as effective as the player’s abilities to execute. Aggressive fore-checking demands exceptional skating, body checking and stick checking skills. A more passive (contained) fore-check requires smooth skating skills, the ability to anticipate and steer, a quick stick to cut off passes and great communication. If you want to transition between the two strategies you will need to challenge your players to develop all of these skills.

## Skills of Checking, Skating, Stick Checking, Containment Screening Out, Boxing Out Pinning, Taking a Check Body Checking

In this handout we will describe proper execution and explain the best way to help our players develop and master these skills. We will methodically build the separate pieces, preparing the player to play the complete checking game in all three zones. But checking skills are not restricted to the defensive plays. The player carrying the puck or battling for a good scoring position also needs skills on how to protect himself and how to avoid being checked. Checking is a skill that can be learned, trained and developed. Developing our players to check the right way will give us the tools we need to make our teams more successful. Setting up and scoring goals is one half of the game, while preventing the opponent from scoring is the other half? We would say that our team's ability to play without the puck determines fifty percent of our chance of success. All players need the right checking skills and, as any skill, they can be learned, trained and developed.

### ***Safety & Ethics***

Body checking is an integral part of hockey and with body checking comes a potential risk for injuries. Each time children are on the ice to play or practice, as coaches we are well aware of the risks. The players themselves, however, often have the feeling that they are invincible. A lack of experience, an egocentric view of life and a low degree of appreciation of others are common characteristics of young people. These traits combined with the armory of equipment, and the fact that those who continue to play most likely did not get injured, combine to create a potentially dangerous and fearless player who is willing to take risks with his own and others' safety.

#### ***Who is responsible for a player's actions?***

*The Coach The Player The Referee*

#### **Is it safe for a 12-year old to body check?**

We believe that how to play with body contact should be taught beginning in the 8-and-under (Mite) age group and continuously in a progressive manner through 10-and-under (Squirt), before body-checking is introduced at 12-and-under (Pee Wee). There is a great deal of body contact in all levels of hockey. Growth and development literature tells us that around this age, we can expect children to be mature enough to be reasonably coachable. This provides coaches with the prerequisites to teach our players how to body check the right way. In the United States, children 12 & Under are not permitted to body check. We don't think they have the fundamental skills to deliver and, more importantly, to protect themselves against body checks. We also know that they do not have the maturity to execute the body checks in a fair and safe manner. The players just are not mature enough to body check at that age, however, they are mature enough to

learn checking skills. Are you ready to choose the right way of body checking in youth hockey regardless of what players, parents, referees, opponents, and professional athletes say? If you are, great! Go out and do it because we want our children to take part in a stimulating and developing program, and we don't want anyone to get hurt. If you feel you're not ready, this program can assist in you taking the first step in becoming ready. We need you. Our children need you to lead them in a safe and fun structure and thereby help them get the utmost out of their talent.

***Only we, the coaches, can be expected to be in charge.***

## **ARE MINORS MATURE ENOUGH TO BODY CHECK?**

Every parent experiences the incredible development a child goes through and how the body and skills transform from one stage to another. Parents with more than one child also experience how different the development paths can be.

Some children mature faster. Others learn new skills faster. Although children reach the development stages in different orders and at different times, we know that by the time the children reach the ages of 20 to 22 years, they will be fully developed adults.

Some stages of the development are hard to see. For example, in order to grow, the skeleton of a child is softer than that of an adult. This characteristic makes it more flexible. It can form, or deform, depending on exterior influences, and it is less likely to break. In addition, a child's bones heal more quickly. Some coaches might draw the conclusion that this is perfect for a tough game of hockey, thinking, "The bones don't break easily, and they heal quicker. Great! Let's crash and bang!"

***A human's bones do not harden until the person is finished growing. Soft bones do not protect the internal organs.***

***Which organs should be protected by the:***

*Skull? Spine? Thorax? Pelvis?*

Because the bones are softer, they don't protect the vital parts of the body nearly as well as bones that have hardened. The softer, flexible skull for example can't protect the brain from even moderate impact. If a blow is made to the head, the bones of the skull will bend inward and the brain itself will absorb the impact. As soon as the impact is over, the skull "bounces back" to its original shape. You can't see anything on the outside, but the brain might be injured, and if not attended to correctly, there could be irreparable damage. An adult skull would have withstood the impact of the blow, and the brain would have been protected. The functions of the two different skulls could be illustrated with the characteristics of a tennis ball and a coconut. If you throw the tennis ball into a wall, it will temporarily flatten and then bounce back without any visual damages to its surface. The coconut, however, won't flatten nor bounce. Now ask yourself, would you prefer a helmet made of a tennis ball shell or one made of a coconut shell? Our children have no choice. They are equipped with the "tennis ball helmet." This lack of protection also applies to other body parts, such as the spine, the pelvis and the thorax. Moderate

force is harmless to these areas of an adult's body, but a child could suffer severe injuries including lung puncture, heart trauma, torn nerves, or spleen and liver damage. Since the developmental stages come in different orders and at different ages for all individuals, there is not a magic age" where everyone's bodies are strong enough to justify a higher tolerance of the impact of body checking. In fact, nothing justifies exposing a child's body to excessive blows, and all players in youth hockey are children.

## **A CHILD'S BODY IS NOT A MINIATURE VERSION OF AN ADULT BODY**

The most important responsibility for all coaches in youth hockey is the safety of all players on both teams. Teaching the right techniques about how to receive a body check is only one part of this duty.

Continuously keeping the players in line with the right ethics and respect for human values is the bigger task.

***The leader has his mind set on where he wants the players to go. The follower gets affected by the players and follows them wherever they go.***

The momentum of a game starts to shift back and forth, so does the mental stages of a player. A tired, frustrated, and hurt player is more likely to "step out of line" than a well-rested and balanced player. It is our job as coaches to evaluate our players and act before someone loses their focus.

What makes this task particularly tough is that when your players are getting frustrated, you are more likely to be frustrated yourself. This is where the character of a leader versus the lack of character of a follower comes into play. The leader has his mind set on where he wants the players to go and can lead the way. A follower gets affected by his players' reaction and follows them wherever they go, even if it's downhill.

***Being a strong leader and taking charge will prevent many children from being injured.***

USA Hockey recommends that team staff members be trained in First Aid. If an accident happens and someone gets hurt, we, the coaches, need to know the ABC's of First Aid. The very first treatment, or lack thereof, will decide the seriousness of the injury in many cases. This course is not authorized to teach you the first aid skills, so we strongly recommend that you and all your staff members attend a special first aid clinic as soon as possible. It is not enough that just one of the staff members has this certification. When an accident strikes, there could be more than one injury and your first-aid expert might be occupied attending someone else, or he may have already left the arena to go to the hospital. It is wise to plan every game and training session as if an accident will occur. Here is a checklist of things to do prior to each activity. Even

in your home rink things change, so go through this checklist every time. It will only take you a minute once you've got into the routine.

### **First Aid Checklist**

1. Who is trained in first aid?
2. Is any attending parent a doctor or a nurse?
3. Is anyone from the visiting team a doctor or a nurse?
4. Will they stay throughout the entire game/practice?
5. Could they commit to being responsible for first aid?
6. Where is the first aid kit?
7. Where is the first aid room?
8. What is the phone number for the hospital?
9. Who has a cell phone?
10. Where is the ambulance entrance?

***Always remember: Prevention is the best treatment.***

### **Developing Checking Skills**

Youth hockey fulfills many needs and functions. Activating children in sound physical activities is an important investment in the future of public health. Learning to work as a group and appreciate the achievements attained through teamwork are vital experiences that prepare young people for life ahead. Building life-long friendships improves the spirit in the community in an immeasurable way.

*Youth hockey in the United States improves public health, fosters teamwork, builds lifelong friendships, prepares youth for life as an adult and prepares players for higher levels of hockey.*

### ***What other benefits do you think hockey provides to kids?***

Youth hockey also prepares players for hockey at a higher level, and since hockey is a contact sport, the young players have to be taught how to body check and how to protect themselves properly. When practicing body checking, always keep these two goals in mind:

1. Learn how to check.
2. Learn how to take a check.

The importance of learning how to take a check far outweighs the importance of learning to deliver a check. All players do not need to be good checkers, but every player is a potential target and will receive body checks. Therefore all body checking drills must emphasize how to receive and protect oneself, rather than how to apply a body check. To ensure that our checking drills meet these objectives, the players have to work in pairs and work on these goals together. The checker must commit to a code of conduct that directs the relationship between checker and receiver. Through this code, the checker will restrict the impact of the check to a level that is suitable for the receiver to develop his receiving skills. Think about checking drills the same way you think about goaltending and scoring drills. The shooter needs the goaltender and the goaltender needs the shooter – one can't get better without the other. The checking practice works the same way.

***Youth hockey is not a man vs. man competition; it's children playing a game.***

The players should commit to the same code of conduct for games as they do for practices. Everyone in youth hockey should have the opportunity to have fun and develop as hockey players. They can only do so if the code of conduct is reinforced.

## **REFLECTIONS ON BODY CHECKING IN YOUTH HOCKEY**

Youth hockey identifies two different streams, Body Contact and Body Checking. Younger age groups (10 & Under and younger), girls'/women's hockey, and no contact leagues play under the Body Contact regulations. Older players (12 & Under and older) play under the Body Checking regulations. Even though both terms are well known and frequently used, it can be difficult to distinguish between them.

Below are USA Hockey's definitions.

**Body Contact** – Body Contact is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally block or impede the progress of an offensive puck carrier. This tactic is a result of movement of the defensive player to restrict movement of the puck carrier anywhere on the ice through skating, angling and positioning. Contact may only occur during the normal process of playing the puck, provided there has been no overt hip, shoulder or arm contact to physically force the opponent off the puck.

**Body Checking** – Body Checking is defined as an individual defensive tactic designed to legally separate the puck carrier from the puck. This tactic is the result of a defensive player (player without the puck) applying physical extension of the body toward the puck carrier, by using his hip or body from the front, diagonally from the front or straight from the side. The defensive player must not take more than two fast steps in executing the check. A legitimate body check must be done only with the trunk of the body (hips and shoulders) and must be above the opponent's knees and below the neck. If the check is unnecessarily rough, it must be penalized.

### **Doing it Right, Right from the Start**

Successful coaches ensure that every player has a chance to develop all his checking skills in a functional progression, and allow the player's biological maturity and emotional development to reach certain levels. The USA Hockey Checking Progression

Model gradually introduces players to the skills of checking. Steps 1, 2 and 3 include positioning/angling, stick checking and body contact, and they build the players' base during their early levels of hockey, 8 & Under through 10 & Under. Step 4 introduces the skills of body checking. These skills are eased in throughout the 12 & Under level. By the time the players reach the 14 & Under and 18 & Under levels, all players should have had the opportunity to learn the essential checking skills that allow them to play body checking hockey without preventable risks for injury. However, it is important to point out, that even in these age groups, the degree of physical development varies immensely from player to player. This leads to unbalanced competition where variations in size, strength, and the body's capability to withstand



injuries are dramatic. It is of the utmost importance that players, coaches and referees keep the tolerance level of the physical impact to a reduced and safe level for all participants.

**Positioning and Angling** – The first step in teaching checking is to learn how to control skating and to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.

**Stick Checking** – The second step is to effectively use the stick for poke checking, sweep checking, lifting or locking the opponent's stick.

**Body Contact** – The third step is to use the body to block the opponent's way or take away his skating lanes. The correct stance and effective use of leg strength are important parts of these techniques.

**Body Checking** – The fourth and final step is the actual body check. This step includes teaching techniques to give and receive a body check safely and within the rules.

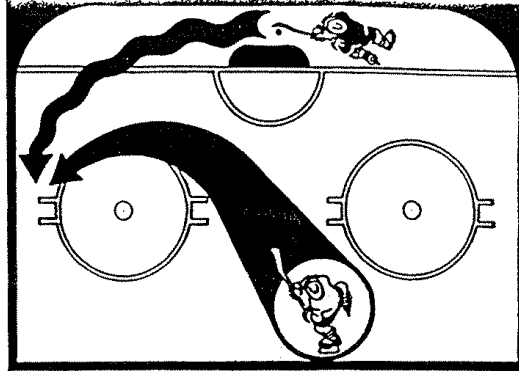
## **DEVELOPING CHECKING SKILLS**

*When teaching checking, emphasize how to control skating to establish position to approach the opponent from an angle that minimizes time and space for the opponent.*

## ANGLING

### KEY ELEMENTS

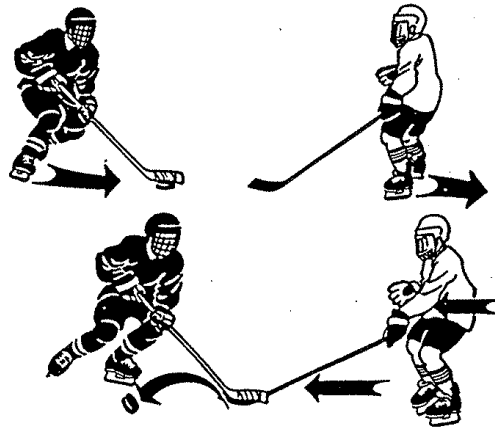
- The checker must learn to play the angles of pursuit
- Stick on stick and body on body
  - Try and play through opponent's hands
  - This allows you to get the puck while separating the puck carrier from the puck.
- Quick acceleration is important once the puck carrier is contained
- Continue to skate when close to the puck carrier — **DON'T GUDE!**



## STICK CHECKS

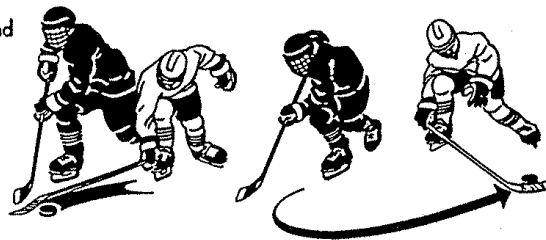
### POKE CHECK KEY ELEMENTS

- Stick hand/arm is held close to body, elbow bent
- As attacker get within range, quickly extend stick, contacting puck
- Defender must maintain good body position in front of attacker — **DON'T LUNGE WITH BODY**
- Finish check off by sliding stick between attacker's legs and making body contact



### HOOK CHECK KEY ELEMENTS

- Most useful when approaching opponent from behind
- Stick shaft is extended along the ice
- Stick side knee is bent
- Stick blade flat on ice
- Use hooking motion to take puck away



#### LIFT THE STICK CHECK KEY ELEMENTS

- Approach the puck carrier from behind
- Skate with puck carrier
- Lift the stick as quickly as possible
- Bring stick down quickly and pull puck away



#### STICK PRESS KEY ELEMENTS

- Close 1 on 1 coverage situations
- Defender places stick over lower part of opponent's stick and presses down hard
- Need upper body strength



### COVERING

#### BACKCHECKING KEY ELEMENTS

- Use crossovers/crossunders to accelerate toward an opponent
- Maintain inside position to prevent pass reception
- Be even or slightly ahead of opponent
  - If behind opponent, keep skating hard
- Be close enough to opponent to allow occasional contact
- Continue to cover opponent until play is broken up



#### CHECKING IN FRONT OF NET KEY ELEMENTS

- Start on far post and adjust to play opponent
- Keep yourself between goal and opponent
- Keep one eye on puck location
- Be able to feel opponent with stick
- Have your stick in a position to control opponent's stick
- Position body to be able to move opponent out of a screening position



## POSITIONING AND ANGLING

### **Being In the Right Place At the Right Time**

Good players seem to be in the right position at the right time, and thereby get more involved in the game than others. Why is that? Are they faster so they can get to the right spot before anyone else? Are they more agile so they can switch directions more quickly? Are they smarter, and know where to be better than everybody else? Do they anticipate, read and react to the play better? Are they better coached? Are they following the system better? Are they more willing to make a difference in the game? Are they more confident? Is it just natural talent? Well the questions are many, but there is only one answer: “They are all of the above.”

***To be in the right spot at the right time, we need to know where that position is, when the right time is and how to get there.***

One thing is for sure – players were not born with all these qualities. Somewhere and somehow as they matured, they developed these skills. In some way, they have gained experience, drawn conclusions and adapted their game. Coaching certainly played a part in it, but self-coaching played an even bigger part. If coaching made such an impact on these players, does it mean we can train all our players to be as good as the best players? Maybe not, but we can certainly train them to be at the right spot at the right time. To do this successfully, there are three things we need to know: what is the right position, what is the right time, and how can our players get there. This hand out on positioning and angling will show some ways to develop these skills. Very young players can learn these concepts. Learning them correctly from the start will make their actions and reactions develop naturally and become second nature. USA Hockey recommends that positioning and angling drills be introduced early in a player’s career. The best ways to develop these skills is through read and react drills and a variety of games. Players as young as seven or eight years old can learn the basics of angling. These skills will form a very important base which will be needed as the players move into body contact and body checking. Take your time building these fundamental skills carefully. In fact, these drills should be reviewed and repeated throughout a player’s career. In the positioning and angling section, players will learn about defensive and offensive side body positioning, passing and shooting lanes, steering and driving an opponent, and how to close the gap (space between the defensive player and puck carrier). The common denominator for all these skills is, of course, skating.

## POSITIONING AND ANGLING

Positioning yourself in the best position, approaching the opponent from the proper angle and keeping your balance during and after the battle for the puck, are the keys to checking success. It is true to say that your checking ability largely depends on your skating skills. These skating skills are equally important when it comes to avoiding a check, protecting yourself and the puck.

Pure speed can sometimes be enough, but more often it is the agility skills that will make the difference. The continuous training of all skating skills, including quick starts, stops, crossovers, turns, pivots, and lateral movements, is crucial to the development of checking skills. Skills to close the gap when playing man-to-man are also essential to learn. So, in addition to the skating skills above, every player should learn to master these three skating techniques:

1. Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward
2. Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward
3. Forward Stop to Backward Start

### **Lateral Pivot Backward to Forward**

If you have backed off and would like to move forward to regain control of the gap, the lateral pivot backward to forward is a good move. Skate backwards; keep your body weight on one skate, so you are now going laterally. Turn the other skate outward, so the heel is pointing in and the toe and knee are pointing out. Step over on this skate, make a forward c-cut and start moving forward.

### **Lateral Pivot Forward to Backward**

After approaching the opponent you need to start moving backwards without losing your momentum. Make a forward c-cut with one skate. Twist the other foot inward, so the toes and knee are pointing in. Step over to this skate and make a backward c-cut and continue backwards.

### **Forward Stop to Backward Start**

If you have limited space, you will have to stop and start backwards. To still keep part of the momentum, do a one-foot snow plow stop. Prior to coming to a complete stop, pushoff with a powerful backward c-cut and continue with a crossover stride. The better you learn to move laterally with either the heels or the toes pointing inwards, the more able you will be to move laterally and forward/ backward with the opponent, keeping him contained, and waiting for the best situation to follow up with a check.

## **STICK CHECKING**

Stick checks are the most common checks in hockey. Choosing the right check for the right situation is only an option for the players who master them all. This section will help you with the following stick checking techniques:

- A. Poke Hold the stick in one hand and project the blade of the stick toward the puck
- B. Lift Use your stick to lift the opponent's stick
- C. Press Lock the opponent's stick down by pressing your stick over it
- D. Sweep your stick in a circular motion towards the puck
- E. Tap your stick on the opponent's stick
- F. Pry Use your stick to pry the opponent away from the boards

***How to effectively use the stick for poke checking, sweep checking, lifting or locking the opponent's stick.***



#### LIFT THE STICK CHECK KEY ELEMENTS

- Approach the puck carrier from behind
- Skate with puck carrier
- Lift the stick as quickly as possible
- Bring stick down quickly and pull puck away



#### STICK PRESS KEY ELEMENTS

- Close 1 on 1 coverage situations
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## **STICK CHECKING: EXTENDED STICKHANDLING SKILLS**

Have you ever wondered why some players frequently end up with the puck? It is almost as if their sticks had “puck magnets” on the blades when they effortlessly dig out the puck or take it away from an opponent. These highly skilled players gain puck control without going through the steps of finishing the check and holding the pin. By doing so they save both energy and time which can now be used for the attack. It is not possible to explain all the reasons for these players’ success, but the stick checking techniques presented here will enable your players to obtain instant puck control and launch immediate attacks. Stick checks are an effective way to separate the opponent from the puck. An active stick will stress the opponent, which might force him to lose the puck. Combining an active stick with specific stick checking techniques creates a very effective defensive method of play. In fact, stick checks are by far the most common checking method. For every body check, there are at least 10 stick checks in a hockey game. Having an active stick is described as continuously moving the stick blade to confuse the puck carrier. In most defensive positions it is important for the defensive players to have one hand on their stick and the stick blade on the ice. This allows players to have influence over a greater area of the ice. As a checker closes in on the puck carrier, it is a good habit for the checker to approach with one hand on the stick and the blade on the ice. We say the checker should approach “stick on puck.” By doing this the checker makes himself bigger. The checker then has influence over the opponent from outside body contact range. The right stick checking techniques are an essential part of your team’s checking ability, and developing these skills is paramount for all players’ success. This section will describe stick checking skills such as poke check, lift check, press check, sweep check, tap check and pry check.

### **POKE CHECK**

The most common stick check is the poke check. The poke check is used all over the ice and by all players, including the goaltender. Correctly executed, it is highly effective, but overuse or poor execution can be counterproductive. Keep the stick in one hand and the elbow tucked back so the blade of the stick is fairly close to the body. Be patient and wait until your opponent moves the puck within striking distance. Focus on the opponent’s chest and hands while still seeing the puck in the periphery of your field of vision. Keep the blade flat on the ice. Extend the arm with a powerful push. Think, “extend with the elbow.” It is important that you not over extend by thrusting with your shoulder. You need to maintain good balance and be centered over your skates. This allows for easy recovery and the ability to continue the play. In more extreme circumstances, by stopping and launching your body forward, you can significantly increase the reach of the poke check. Be aware that an unsuccessful launch will put you in a poor defensive position, with the risk of being beaten by the puck carrier.

### **LIFT CHECK**

From the neutral strong side position, the stick lift check is an effective skill to separate the opponent from the puck. When protecting the puck, most players pressure the stick firmly onto the ice. This is often referred to as playing with a lot of weight on the stick. This means that you have to act both powerfully and surprisingly to be successful with a stick lift check. Lowering the bottom hand on your stick will increase the power, but decrease the reach. This technique is



only useful when you are in tight on the opponent. Making contact with the opponent's stick close to the blade will have a similar effect – more power but less reach. The ideal would naturally be to attack the lower part of the opponent's shaft using a wide grip. However, the ideal situation is rarely an option, so for lack of power you need to increase the element of timing and surprise.

## **SWEEP CHECK**

Correctly executed, the sweep check can be an effective way to break up an attack. The advantage to the sweep check is its reach can be useful as a last resort for odd-man rushes or a loose puck in front of the net. For maximum reach, you should hold the stick in one hand. Make a semi-circular sweeping motion with the stick, keeping the blade flat on the ice, and aiming directly for the puck. It is important to stay centered and balanced over your skates, so try not to rotate or twist your body, as this might take you out of the play. Even after successfully executing the sweep check, you still need to be in a position to control your opponent. The large motion involved makes it difficult to use the sweep check as a surprise, but can be an effective tool in forcing the opponent to make a move or disrupting his play. Therefore, be patient and time your movement.

## **USING THE FRONT CHECK**

If you have the choice between using a front check or a side check, the side check should be your premier option. The side check takes better advantage of your equipment's shoulder and hip protection, and it is generally easier to launch the check and to maintain the power. The front check allows you to use a longer reach, can be launched more quickly, and enables you to maintain your initial skating direction.

### **Boxing Out In Front Of The Net**

If the opponent is about to make a play in front of the net, you can lean into him with the top of your shoulder and use your leg power to drive him away.

### **Standing Up On The Blue Line**

If an opponent is carrying the puck into your defensive zone, there is usually only a narrow lane open where he can come through. If you can anticipate where he will enter, you can confront him and use a front check to bring the attack to a halt.

### **Driving To The Net**

This is the front check version of the offensive check. If you are driving to the net and the opponent tries to body check you, you can lean into him and use the top of your shoulder to force him aside. This check often comes as a surprise to the opponent, and it enables you to continue skating in the same direction.

### **Body Contact**

## **DEVELOPING BODY CONTACT SKILLS**

With 12 players and two or three officials on the ice, there is very little room. Players are certain to run into each other. Body contact is natural to the game. Players who learn how to use the body to control the opponent, and how to protect themselves and the puck, will have a decisive advantage. In this section we will focus on the following skills:

- A. Receiving by the Boards Stay tight to the boards and use the arms to brace yourself
- B. Receiving Open Ice Contact with the hip and shoulder, and unload the closest foot
- C. Receiving from Behind Get your stick and hands up against the glass
- D. Rubbing Out Cut off the opponent's line of travel as you are moving parallel
- E. Screen Out Hold your ground to prevent the opponent from continuing
- F. Pinning Control the opponent against the boards
- G. Box Out Move the opponent away from an area

## **BODY CONTACT**

### **The Combined Power of Skating Stability and Physical Strength**

Often when two players collide, one falls down and one keeps his balance. It is not always the bigger and heavier player that remains standing. Frequently, smaller players are more stable. In hockey, keeping your balance is important since falling down will take you out of the play for a moment, and create an advantage for the other team.

Players who master the skills of body contact know how to position themselves for maximum stability. The higher the level of hockey, the less space there is and the more frequently body contact occurs. Younger players have to learn how to skate, stickhandle, pass, and shoot while being pressured by opponents. It takes a long time and plenty of training before they start to feel comfortable and safe when being pressured from behind or along the boards. It is essential they learn how to protect their head, knees, and other injury-sensitive body parts. The third step of USA Hockey's checking progression deals with contact confidence and safety in body contact situations. It is vital for younger players to develop solid body contact skills to prepare for body checking later in their hockey careers. This section focuses on the defensive part of body contact and the protective skills when being pressured. Under the concept of body contact, the players should also learn how to safely receive body checks and how to avoid them. Learning these skills will make players more confident and more reliable when playing both offense and defense.

This section will also explain how to use the body to restrict an opponent's options by using the skills of rubbing out along the boards, pinning, screening and boxing out in front of the net.

These body contact skills make up the base of body checking. They are the fundamental skills that every player needs and every checking system depends on. This skill is primarily a body checking skill. It is important to learn, within the concept of body contact, since incidental collisions occur.

***Hockey is a dynamic game and often takes unpredictable turns. We must keep this in mind when working with children.***

**This information has been adapted from the USA Hockey "Checking the right way", and "Introduction to body contact" manuals.**