

10-and-Under (Squirts)

At the 10-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
- Engagement
- Active Practices
- Age-Appropriate Training
- Basic Hockey Knowledge

FUN

These players are entering the Golden Age of Skill Development, and coaches should ensure that every session, both on-ice and off-ice, is fun for the players. Hockey is a game that requires a tremendous amount of skill to be proficient at any level, and developing this skill takes a substantial amount of time. If fun is not incorporated into every practice and game, then many players will not invest the amount of time necessary to develop their skills. Fun is a crucial component in the long-term athlete development process. A lack of fun can limit the potential of many young players by deterring them from fully engaging or causing them to quit.

ENGAGEMENT

Coaches should recognize the importance of engagement. It goes hand-in-hand with fun, but it's more than just fun. It's targeting the optimal skill level for each player – not too easy and not too hard. It's designing small games that do the teaching. The players don't need a coach to provide the feedback. The games themselves give the players opportunities to successfully demonstrate targeted skills and concepts. The coach becomes the facilitator – less talking from the coach and more learning by doing.

ACTIVE PRACTICES

Coaches should strive to activate players for the majority of each practice session and avoid the archaic practice in which kids spend much of their time standing in line waiting to participate in drills. These archaic practices activate players for only 12-15 minutes in a 60-minute practice. Coaches at the 10-and-Under age level should aim to have much more activity than this for each player in each practice. Coaches should also consider the number of repetitions that each player executes while performing the desired skills in a practice. Coaches are encouraged to take a statistical look at their practices. This includes analyzing the number of minutes each player is active, the number of shots each player takes, the number of passes each player makes, how many shots each goaltender faces, etc. All of these are important skills and it is imperative that coaches consistently maximize the minutes of activity and the number of repetitions. 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.

Station-based practices are an effective way to teach 10-and-Under players the skills they need, while also maximizing the activity level and increasing the number of repetitions for each player. Coaches might consider modifying the stations to better fit their players' needs, however high activity levels and age-appropriate skills must remain the main focus.

AGE-APPROPRIATE TRAINING

Coaches must be very careful when determining what is appropriate for the 9- and 10-year-olds in this age group. It's not what the adults want them to be doing at this age that matters. Instead, it should be about what the players are actually ready to do at this age.

Although these players should be ready to learn more of the rules and concepts related to the game, skill development is still the top priority. Players will begin learning and executing skills and concepts related to team play.

GOLDEN AGE OF SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Players between the ages of 8-12 are considered to be in the Golden Age of Skill Development. This is the prime age period for kids to acquire and develop athletic skills. Coaches of players who are in this age range should spend the majority of practice time working on skill development. Although skill development should be a focus at other ages, too, there is no better time than during this Golden Age of Skill Development to optimally affect the long-term skill development of each player.

RULE KNOWLEDGE

While players at this age will be able to understand more of the game's rules, coaches must recognize that these players are at an age where skill development must be the priority. All practices should reflect this. Players should gain knowledge related to the rules of the game through the use of small games and drills. Young players learning by playing small games is a far more effective teacher than being told the rules (learning by doing rather than learning by listening). Coaches must be patient throughout this learning process and allow players the opportunity to make mistakes and then encourage them to try again. Failing to create an excellent learning environment can stifle creativity, confidence, learning, and a player's work ethic.

PRACTICE FOCUS

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

- 1. Individual skill improvement (hockey skills, activities, and games) — 75%**
- 2. Hockey sense (teaching concepts through small area games) — 15%**
- 3. Systems (team-play training) — 10%**

While these percentages are approximations, they emphasize the key principle that individual skills are the most important part of development at this age and that the majority of practice should be spent improving those skills. The percentages also indicate that hockey sense and concepts are still more important than systems and team-play training.

SMALL AREA GAMES

Coaches should utilize small area games on a consistent basis in every practice for fun, practicing skills and teaching basic concepts. As young hockey players age, they will be increasingly able to understand important concepts related to the game. 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. Refer to the *Small Area Competitive Games Handbook and CD* 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 the 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. **Speed** – constant stopping, starting, changing direction, and puck races in small areas
2. **Suppleness (Flexibility)** – perform a variety of activities and exercises through a full range of motion
3. **Skill Acquisition and Development** – 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

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 and checking from behind*
 - c. *cross-checking and charging*
 - d. *head contact, elbowing, and high-sticking*

- e. tripping and hooking*
- f. interference and holding*

3. Penalties

- a. minor*
- b. major*

INDIVIDUAL HOCKEY SKILLS

Players must learn and master:

1. Skating

- a. ready position
- 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 turn*

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)*

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*

4. Shooting

- a. wrist shot
- b. backhand
- c. flip shot*
- d. screen shot*
- e. deflection*
- f. off rebound*

5. Body Contact

- a. stick on puck
- b. stick lift
- c. poke check*
- d. gap control concept*
- e. body positioning and angling*

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*
- d. recovery**

TEAM PLAY

Players must learn and understand:

- 1. Offensive Concepts**
 - a. 2-on-1 situations*
 - b. 1-on-1 situations*
 - c. triangle offense*
- 2. Defensive Concepts**
 - a. gap control*
 - b. protect center of the ice*
 - c. stick on puck*
 - d. backchecking*
 - e. body position: man-you-net*
 - f. basic defensive zone coverage*

NUTRITION

Players should continue learning about:

- 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.

OFF-ICE ACTIVITIES

Players should perform exercises that improve their agility, balance, coordination, and speed (ABCs). For off-ice activities and exercises, 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. Exercises and activities should include:

1. Warm-up exercises
2. Cool-down exercises
3. Stretching exercises
4. Flexibility exercises
5. Eye-hand coordination exercises
6. Fun games
7. Relays

8. Exercises related to improving the ABCs
9. Jump-rope activities
10. Off-ice stickhandling

INJURY PREVENTION

Players and parents should be introduced to:

1. Heads Up Hockey Program
2. Proper care of equipment
3. Proper fitting of equipment
4. Rink safety
5. Safety precautions for practice
6. The importance of warming up and cooling down

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY

Players should be taught:

- the difference between being relaxed and tense (fun vs. nervous).
- that making mistakes is common and a part of sports. Players should be allowed to make mistakes in practice and game settings. Coaches should not squash a player's creativity by making them feel uncomfortable while trying to perform a hockey move or skill. In order to execute a move properly, the player has to be allowed to fail along the way. The key is to establish an environment where players are willing to try again after failing.
- the benefits of positive reinforcement. Everyone involved with youth sports needs to understand that positive comments help reduce stress and enhance the self-image of a player and team. Most of all, positive reinforcement increases the enjoyment of practices and games for the athletes.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND LIFE SKILLS

Players must learn to:

- demonstrate high levels of sportsmanship.
- have respect for their teammates, coaches, opponents, officials and parents.
- balance family, school and other activities.
- be on time for practices and games.