



# LEADERSHIP

*Building Self-Esteem*



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*The USA Hockey Coaching Education  
Program is presented by*



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## OBJECTIVES

- To identify the primary processes that influence the development of an athlete's self-esteem including social acceptance, social reinforcement and social comparison
- To develop techniques through the use of these processes to assist players in the development of high levels of self-esteem

An athlete's personality can be defined as the sum total of those attributes that make the individual unique. Self-image and self-esteem are two important components of each athlete's personality.

**Self-Image:** How one perceives or views oneself

**Self-Esteem:** How one feels about oneself

The key difference between the above two components of a player's personality is that self-esteem brings into play self-evaluation or self-appraisal.

Upon completion of this chapter, you will be better prepared to:

- Identify the primary processes that influence the development of an athlete's self-esteem
  - social acceptance
  - social reinforcement
  - social comparison
- Develop techniques through the use of these processes to assist players in the development of high levels of self-esteem.

## CHARACTERISTICS OF SELF-ESTEEM

- A high level of self-esteem is characterized by positive feelings about oneself.
- Self-esteem is learned. It is acquired through personal experiences and feedback from important people (e.g., parents, peers, and coaches) in one's life.
- Self-esteem can be changed.

- Self-esteem is extremely important as it affects one's motivation, learning, performance, personal relationship, and life satisfaction.

## HOW DOES SELF-ESTEEM DEVELOP?

Young hockey players receive feedback through constant interaction with their physical and social environment that provides them with information about what they are capable of doing and how others view them. The individuals in an athlete's life who are most important in shaping a player's self-esteem are parents, teachers, coaches, and peers.

The three main processes that influence the development of one's self-esteem are social acceptance, social reinforcement, and social comparison.

## SOCIAL ACCEPTANCE

Social acceptance is the extent to which other people make athletes feel they are accepted as important persons.

Coaches can make athletes feel accepted by:

- showing a genuine interest in how they are getting along in situations outside of hockey (e.g., at school, work, or home)
- warmly greeting the players each time that you see them
- talking with each athlete individually at every practice and game
- joking with them (but do not be a clown to them)
- asking their advice in certain areas (e.g., warm-ups)

- listening attentively to what the athletes have to say
- being willing to help the players solve personal problems

As a coach, you can do a lot to assist athletes in the development and acceptance of high levels of self-esteem by demonstrating a genuine interest in each athlete as a person and a hockey player.

### **SOCIAL REINFORCEMENT**

Social reinforcement refers to the positive or negative feedback that an athlete receives from other people.

- Feedback consists of the information that individuals transmit to an athlete by what they say and do.
- Young athletes are constantly seeking information about how well they are doing. Their coaches', peers', and parents' comments and gestures are important sources of such information.
- Positive reinforcement (praise or encouragement) will usually help the development of a positive self-esteem, whereas constant criticism or lack of interest in players will have a negative effect on the development of their self-esteem.
- Remember, praise is the highest form of motivation.

As a coach, try to use a lot of positive reinforcement to help players build high levels of self-esteem.

### **POSITIVE REINFORCEMENT**

Positive reinforcement consists of any form of praise or encouragement that indicates approval of what an athlete is doing.

- Praise should be provided for good effort as well as good performance.
- Praise should be specific rather than general.
- Following a mistake in a game, a coach should show patience and explain to the player exactly what the error was and how to correct the error. Play the individual on

the next shift to show your confidence in the athlete.

- Encouragement should be provided when athletes are working on new skills, especially after mistakes or setbacks.
- Use gestures such as a pat on the back, a smile, a wink, a nod of the head, or a thumbs-up sign to indicate approval.
- Encourage teammates to give one another positive feedback.
- Provide constructive feedback that will help the player improve performance.
- Do not use too much positive reinforcement or it will lose its effect. Make sure your positive feedback is sincere and meaningful.
- Set goals for each player that are specific, measurable, and attainable.
- Make sure that players feel that they have important roles on the team. Define the role for each athlete in a specific manner.

### **NEGATIVE REINFORCEMENT**

Negative reinforcement consists of any type of criticism or punishment that indicates disapproval of what an athlete is doing.

- If you must use criticism, make sure it is directed at a specific, undesirable action that you want to eliminate. It should not be interpreted by an athlete as a comment on their worthiness as a person.
- Negative comments should always be accompanied by specific corrective information.

#### **For Example:**

Never just say "Don't do that." Instead, you should:

- explain to the players what they have done correctly
- explain to the players precisely what they have done wrong
- offer clear, corrective advice which shows them how to carry out the desired behavior
- offer encouragement

As another example:

If the center on a line is a right-hand shot and has a tendency to use a forehand pass (rather

than a backhand pass) to the right winger, you should not just say “Don’t use a forehand pass, use a backhand pass.” Rather, you should explain that:

- by turning to the forehand to pass to your right winger, you are taking too long to execute the pass and are telegraphing your intentions, thereby giving the opposing player time to intercept the pass
- by using a backhand pass, you will be able to execute the pass more quickly and thus increase the chances of success
- players at all levels make this basic mistake and must practice their skill

Remember, following a mistake, offer corrective feedback and encouragement.

## **SOCIAL COMPARISON**

Social comparison is the process by which athletes constantly compare themselves with others in order to conduct self-evaluations.

- Athletes discover through social comparison how well they are doing in the areas of physical, social, and mental abilities.
- Through their hockey experiences, players get answers to the following questions:
  - How effective am I?
  - How effective are my skills in, for example, skating, passing, shooting, and stick handling?
  - How strong am I?
  - How well-liked am I by my teammates?
  - How smart of a player am I?

As a coach, you should be aware that players are constantly comparing themselves with their teammates, peers, and significant others.

The rating that players give themselves is an important determinant of their self-esteem.

For athletes with a low level of self-esteem, the coach should make a strong effort to point out positive

events in the physical, social, or mental areas.

Examples may include:

- “You’re a good team player.”
- “You’re very unselfish.”
- “You showed a lot of hustle.”
- “You showed a lot of discipline by not retaliating.”
- “That was a smart play.”

You should also explain to players their specific and overall roles within the team. For example, if specific players have good defensive skills, the coach should emphasize the importance of their contribution to the team that otherwise may go unnoticed. Defensive skills, such as blocking shots, freezing the puck when a change is needed, or taking faceoffs, are necessary for the overall success of the team.

## **BODY IMAGE**

Players’ perceptions of their body and their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their physical make-up are also important factors influencing the development of their self-esteem.

- Young athletes who have experienced a growth spurt may be gangly and uncoordinated and have a poor body image.
- Likewise, young athletes who are very late maturers may have a poor body image because of their small size.
- In both cases, poor body image may lead to low levels of self-esteem.
- A coach who recognizes a player who seems to have a poor body image due to being an early or late maturer should show patience with the athlete. The coach should also explain that many players pass through this growth pattern and eventually they all grow out of it. The coach should try to help the low self-esteem athletes realize the positive attributes they possess (e.g., hard worker, disciplined, unselfish, and honest).