



Learn to Train Stage

Ages 8-11 females

Ages 9-12 males

The objective of the Learn to Train stage is to refine overall sport skills and develop sports specific skills.

General Description of the Learn to Train stage:

This is the period of accelerated learning of coordination and fine motor control and is the critical stage for the acquisition of hockey skills. At this stage participants are developmentally ready to acquire the sports skills that are the cornerstones of all athletic development.

In late specialization sports such as ice hockey, early specialization can be detrimental to later stages of skill development and refinement of the fundamental sports skills. Participants should develop a solid base in a variety of sports in each of the physical literacy environments (e.g. swimming, athletics, gymnastics & skiing/ skating).

Club to club competitions should be introduced but they should not be the main focus of the program.

USA Hockey's key focus for this stage:

- Continue to develop physical literacy
- Continue to participate in 3 complimentary sports
- Participants at this stage should learn solid basic skills in skating and puck control
- There is no need at this stage to specialize at a specific skater position, however goalies may begin to focus on their position

Programs:

USA Hockey member clubs offer 10 & Under (Squirt) and 12 & Under (Peewee) programs at this stage.

Monitoring:

Children in this stage are often beginning their growth spurt. Coaches and parents should keep track of regular height measurements (every 3 months at 10 and Under (Squirt), every six weeks at 12 & Under (Peewee) to provide an indicator for the onset of peak height velocity (PVH). At the same time flexibility, especially in the hamstrings and lower back should be monitored. The growth spurt typically lasts 18 to 24 months.



Coach and Instructor Recommendations:

Level 2 CEP certification is required for coaching at the 10 & Under (Squirt) category, while a level 3 certification is needed to work at the 12 & Under Peewee level. Additional CEP training is encouraged for coaches working within these two levels as this is one of the two most important LTAD stages. USA Hockey offers a checking skills workshop that is recommended for 12 & Under coaches.

LTAD Window of Opportunity:

The Learn to Train and Train to Train stages are the most important stages in athletic preparation. During these stages we make or break an athlete.

- 'Sports skills' window of trainability is open during the entire phase
- Second 'speed' window for girls (ages 11-13+)
- Beginning of window for aerobic 'stamina' (girls 11-14, boys 12+)

Components of the Hockey Learn to Train Stage

Physical Development:

Mastering of fundamental sport skills

- Continue to encourage daily physical activity (formal and informal)
- Narrow focus to a minimum of three sports
- At this stage participants are ready to acquire the general sports skills and hockey skills that are the cornerstone of all athletic development
- Maintain and refine ambidextrous sports or sport movements (e.g. gymnastics, swimming, throwing with both hands, kicking with both feet, etc.)
- Participate in sports that require similar movement patterns

Monitor Growth:

- Keep track of growth spurts by regularly measuring height (3 months) and looking for a sudden increase
- Growth spurt can last 18 to 24 months

Early in the stage, 10 & Under (Squirt), introduce general fitness framework

1. Warm-up
2. Rhythm and coordination runs both on and off the ice
3. Spatial awareness (jump distance with a number of changes in direction)
4. Rest and recovery (fuel breaks, meals, sleep)
5. Reaction time and agility
6. Focus on skill and execution
7. Cool down with short stretch and muscle rebalance – important because of rapid growth of bones and soft tissues

Later in stage, 12 & Under (Peewee), same as 1-7 plus the following

8. More speed work
9. Explosive strength in upper and low body through jumping and gymnastic maneuvers
10. Develop general lower body and core stability
11. More stretching at the end of training
12. Monitor the volume, intensity, quality and duration of training



Throughout the Stage:

- Develop strength - using exercises that incorporate the player's own body weight, as well as medicine balls and Swiss balls
- Continue to develop endurance through small area games and relays and develop flexibility through exercises
- Speed can be developed by using activities that focus on agility, quickness and change of direction – short duration, less than 5 seconds

Psychological Development:

This is the sampling stage; provide opportunities for the participant to try activities that focus on fun, pleasure and socialization.

Encourage goal setting that is process orientated:

- Long-term goals (dream ahead)
- Short-term goals based on skill development and not competitive results

Important psychological skills to develop:

- Development of abilities to concentrate
- Development of visualization skills
- Deliberate effort; the ability to deliver effort and enjoy the feeling of the effort during the activity
- Team Spirit; learn how to relate to different groups of peers
- Responsibility; the ability to associate joy with effort and competition
- Success; the ability to take risk and accept failure as a normal occurrence of sport development
- Begin to introduce mental preparation

At this stage it is important to create an environment where participants want to play ice hockey. Practices must be varied, interesting and fun so they will want to continue. It is important to build interest in our sport, self-confidence and an enjoyment of performing.

Training and Competitive Environment:

Formal competition can be introduced in this stage, although it must not divert the focus from training. Competitions should be limited to the local geographic area. Competition should be fun, and structured to address differences in training age and abilities. Athletes should be recognized for their success and achievement. Training should include small-area games to encourage the application of skill techniques in game play. Small-area games help develop a player's decision making abilities.

- Training/Competition Ratio: 70% training, 10% competition specific training (Exhibitions/Scrimmage Games), and 20% competition
- Training Volume: 3 to 4 times hockey per week, with session length of 60 minutes at 10 & Under level.
- Training Year: 4 weeks/month, 7 months/year – a double periodization calendar will aid structuring and help maintain player interest.



- Team Composition: Team composition will include a roster of 10-12 skaters and one goaltender at 10 & Under. The physiological aptitudes of players at this age can easily handle the playing requirements of competing every other shift. This will increase each player's individual puck touches within the competition and make the individual game more productive in player development terms.
- Team Structure: At 10 & Under, all players within the club should be grouped into teams of like abilities at two different levels, with the overall focus on evenly distributing the player ability pool across teams within in their skill level. Teams shall be divided into two groups of equal abilities for competition purposes (top 50%; bottom 50%). Training/practice sessions can include teams from both levels.
- Competition Format: This is the stage when club to club competition can be introduced. Competitions are full ice for 10 & Under, with game length of 60 minutes.
- Overall Activity Ratios: 25% hockey, 25% fitness through sport, 50% other sports 10 & Under:
 - 95 – 100 total ice touches per year
 - 3 – 4 times per week for 60 minutes
 - 6 to 7 month season
 - 75 to 80 practices and 20 to 25
 - 10 – 12 skaters & one goalie per team
- Training/Competition Ratio: 70% training, 10% competition specific training, and 20% competition
- Training Volume: Hockey four times per week at 12 & Under (Peewee).
- Training Year: 4 weeks/month, 7 months/year – a double periodization calendar will aid structuring and help maintain player interest.
- Team Composition: At the 12 & Under level the roster size can expand to 15 skaters and two goalies.
- Team Structure: At 12 & Under, the club may begin to group players onto teams of like ability. While separation on ability is now allowed, the club must field more than one team at the highest level that the club participates in at the 12 & Under level. For example, if a club has enough players for three Peewee teams they would need to field two or more Peewee A teams before a B team. The club should balance the A teams in regards to talent level. The goal at this level is still the maximum individual development with a development process-driven model, not an outcome-based model.
- Competition Format: Full-ice competitions for 12 & Under. With game length of 60 minutes.
- Overall Activity Ratios: 25% hockey, 25% fitness through sport, 50% other sports
- 12 & Under (Peewee):
 - 105 – 120 total ice touches per year
 - 4 times per week for 60 minutes
 - 7 - month season
 - 80 to 90 practices and 30 to 35 games
 - 15 skaters and two goalies per team



Coaching Considerations:

- Coaches must be cognizant that this is the critical stage for sports skill acquisition.
- Players must be exposed to quality skill demonstrations as this creates a mental picture for them to emulate.
- Players must practice a high volume of skills training at a reduced intensity in order to achieve successful repetitions. As the success rate increases, intensity can increase, however, coaches must understand that performing skills incorrectly at a high rate of speed will only reinforce poor skills through this stage.
- Coaches must understand that skill acquisition is reduced as the fatigue level increases
- Coaches must manage the flow of information to their players. Limit instruction to 4 or 5 key points maximum as additional information will not be processed by the athletes.
- Provide opportunities for the players to execute their skills in game situations. Players must begin to gain an understanding of how skills and tactics are applied within different playing situations.
- Provide opportunities for repeated decision making in practice. Solutions to common tactical situations must be developed.
- Coaches must provide concise, specific feedback to the athletes. Tell them what you want done, not what not to do.
- Monitor players' growth for the onset of growth spurt, especially at the Peewee level.
- Introduce interval training

Technical Development:

Ensure motor learning issues are adopted into coaching practice

- This is the window of optimal trainability for peak skill development of core hockey skills
- Emphasis is placed upon refining skating and puck control skills throughout the stage with a clear focus on correct technical execution
 - Agility in skating skills with and without the puck
 - Refining edge control skills for balance and coordination
 - Combine the refined skating skills with puck control skills (multi-tasking)
 - Attacking skills, one-on-one and one-on-two or more defenders (one-on-three)
- Use small area games to applying core skills in decision making situations
- Added emphasis on passing and receiving skills should be incorporated at the 12 and Under (Peewee) level with special concentration on receiving skills
- Added emphasis on shooting and scoring skills, including shooting off a pass (one timing)
- Body contact and angling basics should be refined at 10 & Under (Squirt)
- Body checking skills are introduced at 12 & Under (Peewee) including the ability to deliver a check as well as receive a check (it is important not to overemphasize checking as to detract from core hockey skills development)
- Offensive body positioning and puck protection skills
- Deception skills should be incorporated in all facets of the player's development
 - Skating: change of pace, change of direction, spins
 - Puck Control: fakes and dekes on goalie
 - Passing: look off pass receiver, fake pass
 - Shooting: shoot off either foot, cadence – shoot in stride, camouflage – screen shots and looking off shot, fake shot



Tactical Skills:

- Continue to encourage unstructured play at 10 & Under (Squirt), emphasis should be on competing at the puck, winning one-on-one battles and loose puck races
- Introduce the four game situation roles; puck carrier, offensive support player, defender at the puck, defender away from the puck
- Develop basic situational role knowledge and experience in small area game play and specific situational drills
- Applying core skills in basic hockey decision making situations
- At 12 & Under basic team systems can be introduced, however the on-ice time spent should be minimal as to continue to take advantage of the skill development window of trainability
- Introduce elements of coordinated attacks, two-on-one, two-on-two, three-on-two, two-on-three
- Encourage vocal communication between players both offensively and defensively
- Reinforcement of ethics and rules (e.g. no hitting from behind)

Ancillary Skills:

- At this stage, participants should understand the importance of warm-up and cool-down, hydration and of the proper fit and use of equipment
- Off-season participation in 2-3 other sports (soccer, lacrosse, gymnastics, skating, tumbling) is recommended to develop core strength and balance
- Players should be able to dress themselves in their hockey gear and tighten their own skates at 10 & Under (Squirt)
- Participants should be learning how to listen to and follow instructions

Life Style:

Fun, adventure, social, music and art

Expose the participant to a wide range of cultural and lifestyle opportunities

Instill an understanding of healthy training habits:

- Warm-up and cool-down
- Staying hydrated
- Rules and ethics of ice hockey
- Healthy diet

Instill an appreciation for healthy lifestyle:

- Importance of school and education
- Importance of family and friends
- Importance of daily physical education and sports sleep (American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 10 hours/night)

