



FUNdamentals Stage

Ages 6-8 females

Ages 6-9 males

The objective of the FUNdamentals stage is to refine fundamental movement skills and begin to acquire basic sports skills. This is the time when a foundation is laid for future acquisition of more advanced skills.

General Description of the FUNdamentals stage:

- This is the stage where children learn physical literacy; the interrelationship between movement skills and sport skills.
- The skills that children acquire during this stage will benefit them when they engage in any activity regardless of their level of participation.
- Bypassing the acquisition of 'basic and specialized movement' and 'sport skills' during the FUNdamentals stage is detrimental to a person's future participation in physical activity and sport (A, B, C'S = Agility, Balance, Coordination, Speed; gymnastics, swimming, running, gliding; throwing, striking, kicking).
- Basic sport skill development in this stage should be well structured, positive, and done in a FUN and social environment.
- All programs should be structured with proper progression, and monitored regularly by trained certified coaches, volunteers and parents.

USA Hockey's key focus for this stage:

- Help ensure our participants gain physical literacy
- Develop a passion for hockey in all our children (keep kids & families in the game)
- Encourage participation in a variety of complimentary sports to help our children maximize their ability to reach their genetic potential in hockey
- Develop on-ice balance, coordination, agility and speed
- Introduce basic puck control skills

Programs:

USAH Hockey member clubs offer 8 & Under and 6 & Under programs as well as a first-year participant Learn-to-Play program.

Monitoring:

Children have not yet begun their growth spurt. It is helpful to keep track of annual height measurements to provide a baseline for future growth.



Coach and Instructor Recommendations:

Coaches must all have Level 1 USA hockey Coaching Education Program (CEP) certification, however it is recommended that additional 8 & Under (Mite) Coaching Program instruction be obtained. Coaches need a sound knowledge of child growth and development principles for this age group and have an understanding of physical literacy through LTAD. Competency at teaching basic skills is also a key component for coaches at this stage.

LTAD Window of Opportunity:

- First window for speed development at ages 6-8 for girls, ages 7-9 for boys (agility, quickness, change of direction).
- Suppleness, flexibility throughout the stage
- Movement skills throughout

Components of the Hockey FUNdamentals Stage

Physical Development:

- Practice and master fundamental movement skills before sports specific skills are introduced (running, swimming, gliding, gymnastics)
- Emphasize the overall development of the athlete's physical capacities, fundamental movement skills and the ABC's of athleticism; agility, balance, coordination and speed.
- Bilateral balance must be well developed in this stage though sliding, skating and gliding sports (skating, rollerblading, two-ski water skiing, alpine and cross country skiing)
- Provide opportunities for physical activity daily (formal and informal)
- Teach appropriate and correct running, wheeling, jumping and throwing techniques using the ABC's of athleticism
- Introduce flexibility exercises
- Emphasize motor development to produce athletes who have a better trainability for long-term development
- Ambidextrous sports for developing refined motor skills:
 - *Athletics, gymnastics, swimming for the ABC's (agility, balance, coordination, speed and suppleness)*
 - *Soccer, hockey, basketball, tennis, baseball, lacrosse for developing catching, passing, kicking, striking*
 - *Biking, skiing, dancing for developing speed, balance and coordination*
- Movement in 3 planes of balance (linear, lateral, spatial & aerial)
- Initiation to physical training (warm-up and cool-down)

Focus:

- Introduce basic flexibility exercises
- Develop speed, power and endurance using activity-based games and small area hockey games – cross ice games
- Encourage participation in a wide range of sports
- Develop linear, lateral and multi-directional speed with the duration of repetitions less than 5 seconds
- Include strength training using the child's own body weight as well as medicine ball and Swiss ball exercises



Psychological Development:

- Develop reasoning skills through various sports and activities
- Provide opportunities for activities that:
 - Are FUN, positive and motivating
 - Are exploratory and allow for self-discovery
 - Build confidence through a high rate of success
 - Promote individual and group participation
 - Introduce participants to simple rules and sport ethics (fair play)
 - Ensure that games focus on participation

Training and Competitive Environment:

- **Training/Competition Ratio:** No formal competition
- **Training Volume:** Hockey two times per week, with session length no longer than 50 minutes in the Learn to Play Program. A third session at the 8 & Under level can be held for an informal competition – cross ice/half-ice games
- **Training Year:** 4 weeks/month, 5 months/year
- **Competition format:** All competitions are held cross-ice/half-ice with the focus on skill development not outcomes. At 8 & Under, the occasional jamboree can be held as a third ice touch for the week.
- **Overall activity ratios:** 25% hockey, 75% other sports and activities

8 & Under (Mites)

9 – 13 skaters per team; no full-time goalies

2 - 3 ice touches per week

50-minute ice sessions

20 weeks per season

= 50 – 60 ice touches per year

Minimum of 16 cross-ice/half-ice games and 34 practices

Maximum 20 cross-ice/half-ice games and 40 practices

At this stage it is important to create an environment where participants want to play hockey. They need to enjoy being at the rink and learning basic skills. Play lots of fun, competitive games. Lessons must be varied, interesting and fun so participants want to come back to the rink. End each session with a game, with the goal of having everyone leave the ice with a smile on their face. It is important to build interest in our sport and to provide self-confidence and the enjoyment of performing. Keep in mind that early specialization in a late specialization sport such as hockey will not lead to greater performance later in life.



Coaching Considerations:

- Create a positive, fun and safe environment for the players
- Encourage active participation by all players
- Be clear and precise in communication and use terminology appropriate for the age
- Limit the amount of technical or tactical information to what is appropriate for the age
- Ensure that the ice surface size is in proportion to the age – cross-ice games
- Have a well-structured plan for each ice session
- Provide some opportunities that guarantee success for all participants
- Become knowledgeable with regard to the physical and mental capacities, and LTAD model
- Encourage all forms of creativity
- Encourage parents/players to explore other sports to assist long-term hockey development
- Include planned coordination exercises within training sessions both on and off ice

Technical Development:

Skating

- Ready position
- Forward stride
- 2 foot glide
- Forward turns
- Controlled stop
- Forward crossover
- Agility, balance and coordination
 - two feet and single foot skating
 - high knee run, multi directional
 - full body coordination; somersaults, roles jumps
 - Upper and lower body separation; skating with shoulder roles or exaggerated hand slides
- Forward start

Puck Control

- Lateral puck handling
- Forward-to-backward puck handling
- Diagonal puck handling
- Accelerating with the puck

Passing and Receiving

- Forehand
- Receiving – stick position, use of skates
- Eye contact

Shooting

- Wrist shot

Body Contact

- Body positioning in confrontational situations
- Angling skills
- Poke check
- Lift the stick check



Tactical Skills:

- Participants should learn how to listen and follow simple instructions
- Participants should engage in deliberate play and should learn basic decision making skills through activity games like tag and small area hockey games
- Competition at the puck – one-on-one battles and loose puck races for body positioning
- Participants should learn basic appropriate behavior within a team setting, such as how to support others and appropriate behavior in a locker room setting

Ancillary Skills:

- Off-ice training activities that provide several stations of purposeful games or activities
- Participation in other sport activities (gymnastics, public skating, alpine skiing, soccer, lacrosse, swimming)
- Participants, parents and support persons should be well informed about proper equipment for practice (equipment sizing, how to dress for training, water bottle for hydration, skate sharpening). Children should be able to dress themselves by the time they move into the 10 & Under (Squirt) age category.

Life Style:

- Key Concepts:
 - Fun
 - Safety
 - Social interaction
 - Creating a love of all sporting activities
 - Positive introduction to hockey
- Participate in hockey 2 to 3 times per week as long as there is **participation in other sports 4 to 6 times per week** to help insure future excellence.
- Because girls tend to be less active than boys, ensure that activities are gender neutral and inclusive so that active living is equally valued and promoted for all.
- Ensure that activities revolve around the school year and are enhanced by multi-sports though the spring, summer and winter holidays
- Healthy eating habits should be promoted
- Adequate sleep (American Academy of Pediatrics recommends 10 hours/night)

