



Active Start Stage

Ages 0-6

Starting at infancy, parents must provide opportunities for children to be physically active every day in a safe, fun environment. Physical activity through play is an essential part of a child's development. Activity should incorporate fundamental movement skills in the 4 environments of that lead to physical literacy:

In the water: Swimming
On the ground: Athletics
In the air: Gymnastics
On ice and snow: Sliding (skiing, skating)

General Description of the Active Start stage:

- Provide physical activity everyday regardless of weather conditions
- Starting at infancy, provide infants, toddlers and preschoolers with opportunities to participate in daily physical activity that promotes fitness and movement skills for a minimum of 60 minutes a day
- Encourage play, as it is an essential part of physical and mental development
- Develop basic gross motor skills and coordination with large muscle groups through unstructured activity
- Develop basic movement skills such as running, jumping, twisting, kicking, throwing, catching, swimming, wheeling and skating that form the base of physical literacy. These motor skills are the building blocks of more complex movement and help lay the foundation for lifelong physical activity and athletic development

Psychological Development:

Activity is essential for development; among its benefits, physical activity enhances:

- Development of brain function
- Social skills
- Emotions, attitudes and imagination
- Confidence and positive self-esteem
- Stress reduction by quality of sleep

Design activities that help children to feel competent and comfortable participating in a variety of fun challenging sports and activities.

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) window of opportunity for this stage is the initiation of movement skills, running, jumping, kicking, throwing, catching, swimming, sliding etc.



USA Hockey's key focus for this stage:

- Help ensure our participants gain physical literacy
- Develop a passion for hockey in all children
- Encourage daily physical activity
- Provide the opportunity to explore a new surface (ice) and mode of locomotion (skating)
- Develop on-ice balance, coordination and agility
- Introduce basic skating movement skills through a Learn to Skate program
 - Preferably without use of a hockey stick

Programs:

USA Hockey member clubs offer 6 & Under (Mite) programs as well as a first-year participant Learn to Play program.

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:

The Long-Term Athlete Development (LTAD) window of opportunity for this stage is the initiation of movement skills, running, jumping, kicking, throwing, catching, swimming, sliding etc

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, activity games and small area games should be incorporated into every ice session
- **Training Volume:** Hockey one to two times per week, with session length no longer than 50 minutes in the Learn to Play Program.
- **Training Year:** 4 weeks/month, 4 months/year
- **Competition format:** No formal competition
 - 6 & Under (Learn to Play)**
 - 9 – 13 skaters per team; no goalies at this stage
 - 1 - 2 ice touches per week
 - 50-minute ice sessions
 - 16 weeks per season
 - Players can be grouped into teams of like abilities, with the overall focus on evenly distributing the player ability pool across all teams.

At this stage USA Hockey recommends that parents guide their children to be physically active in building a base of physical literacy

- Structured and unstructured free play
- Activities that include swimming, running, jumping, balance, agility, gliding



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
- 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 parents/players to explore other sports to assist long-term hockey development

