



## **Hockey Parent Survival Guide**

With the arrival of September the pre season anxieties for players and parents begins to build up. These anxieties are usually a symptom of internal competition in each association as parents hunger for recognition for their own kids and status for themselves. This holds true especially for the A team tryouts at the squirt/u10, pee wee/u12/and bantam/u14 levels.

After a summer of growing and maturing kids return in the fall for the inevitable reshuffling of the deck as team selections are held. Perhaps the best way to conduct team selections is to spend 6 weeks with groups of 25-30 players and observe the skills and habits of each player. Over that time the selections would be quite easy. Unfortunately the pressures to get the season going and start playing games shortens the process that is far too short and incomplete. We seem to live in a hurry up world and the administrative requirements of the season dictate how and when we organize teams.

**Tryouts** have been described by many parents as the worst week of the year. Parents want their child on the best team and thus their kids feel enormous pressure to perform. The summer has been spent watching all the kids play AAA, arguing about who will coach the winter teams, wondering if the new kids in the program are good enough to take their child's spot , and formulating the appropriate excuses in the event their kid "gets screwed" and does not make the desired team. The truth is that for the most part the tryout process is usually quite fair and the coaches do a good job selecting their players. It is easy to second guess the last couple picks on nearly any team because they are the hardest. I know that during the 8 years I coached bantam A the last couple player selections each year consumed the most time in the process. Sometimes we picked correctly and sometimes we were wrong in our evaluation. In any event there is no perfect process. Coaches do the best job they can and as parents you should recognize that it is equally a bad week for coaches as they also dislike cutting players.

You can help your son or daughter by being supportive during tryouts and not offering nor tolerating any excuses for your child. This is where one of the many valuable lessons that are offered in youth athletics occurs. Parents that make excuses for their kids rob their children of these lessons. Be supportive of the process and help your child by being positive and encouraging regardless of the out come.

**Be a team player.** How many times have you heard parents complain in the stands about a particular player not passing or performing in the spirit of a team? I would guess at most every game you attend. Well those complaints uttered out loud are detrimental to your team. You see, a team is comprised of all the players, the coaches, the manager, and all of the parents. The parents have a responsibility to help the team in a positive fashion. As in any group or team in sports, business or other goal oriented activity, the whole is stronger than the parts. If you have a couple knuckleheads in the stands criticizing the players, refs, or coaches you might as well be playing for the opponents. Team unity quickly dissolves and your son or daughter suffers as a result. If you cannot say anything nice, say nothing at all.

**Volunteer to help:** Running a youth hockey team takes lots of time and effort. Every family and parent needs to pitch in and help with the many functions that are required. At the parent meeting at the beginning of the season make sure every family contributes to the efforts needed to make the season a success.

**Be an adult;** That means act like an adult and be a good role model for your kids. It also means “relax it is just a game”. A catchy phrase for sure but it is the truth. Youth hockey is merely a game played by children, your children and your neighbors’ children. The parent group might consider a rotating schedule of game attendance so each player’s parents can skip 3-5 games a year. Who says you need to attend every game and video tape every moment your child plays? I was once told by a parent that I needed to understand that “hockey was their social life in the winter”. Well that is fine but there are other things to do besides sit in cold rinks for 5 months a year. A few nights away from the rink and your child might be good for all concerned.

**Addressing problems:** From time to time you may have a real concern that you wish to address with the coaching staff. How you do this is critical to a positive communication. Many programs have a process in place to handle issues. The best advice, however, is to deal with the coaches in a respectful manner. Contacting the coach by phone or email and requesting a private in person meeting is advisable. Most coaches will be on the defensive so avoid confrontational statements. Begin by stating the issue and indicating you want to be part of the solution in a positive manner is a good start. In most cases a solution can be reached that satisfies all parties.

**The Long Ride Home:** I know of many players who have quit the game because their parents/coaches were so overbearing that playing hockey was not fun. The worst part for these players was on the ride home after games. Although their parents had good intentions, critiquing, criticizing, pointing out their child’s errors during the game will drain him or her of any passion they may have for the game. Instead of making you child better you only defeat them and damage their self esteem. When my son and I return home from games we first decide on where we are going to stop for some food. At some point I may ask him how he thought he played. I just listen and maybe ask a question or two. If I have a thought or idea that I think may be helpful, I will ask him if he is interested in hearing about it. Sometimes he says yes and sometimes no. I let it go at that.

**Resources for Parents:** There are two valuable resources for parents who want to contribute to a positive experience for their hockey playing children. Minnesota Hockey offers the Hockey Education Program (HEP) and materials are available from your association ACE Coordinator and the Minnesota Hockey Website. A second source is from the Positive Coach Alliance. You can see all of the terrific materials for parents and coaches (often one in the same) at [www.positivecoach.org](http://www.positivecoach.org).

Playing youth sports for kids is as much a social event as it is a competition. Sure they want to win, but they mostly want to play and have fun. Less than one half of one percent of the players will get to play hockey for a living and very few will play Division 1 hockey. There is nothing you as a parent can do to make your child one of the lucky few besides being supportive of your child and their teammates throughout the journey.

Have a great season.

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