



Stillwater Area Hockey Association Mites & U8 Program



I. Objectives

- **Enjoyable, FUN introduction and experience in hockey.**
- **Teach basic fundamental skills. Focus is on individual skills.**
- **Keep them coming back!**

II. Philosophy

This philosophy document is the foundation and serves as a guide in development of all aspects of the Mites & U8 program. The Mites & U8 program is the first stage of a twelve year progression through the Stillwater Area Hockey Association (SAHA). Creating a positive, healthy environment for the youngest members of SAHA is essential to a player's long-term participation, growth and successful experience in hockey.

- **Develop important life skills** – skills that will enable kids to be successful at whatever they choose to pursue in their lives:
 - Do your best to make yourself better – give maximum effort
 - Importance of school and academics
 - Positive attitude
 - Genuine enthusiasm
 - Respect for others – parents, coaches, teammates, opponents
 - Responsibility
 - Teamwork - team first
 - Sportsmanship
 - Hard work
 - Discipline
 - Determination
 - Play with Heart – passion for the game
- **Maintain a positive environment** – coaches and parents must be positive in words and actions. Correct wrong behavior and performance but, look for positives and encourage the player to keep improving.
- **Develop fundamental hockey skills** – players need to master the fundamentals in order to progress and enjoy the game to its fullest.
- **Love and honor the game** - help kids learn to love and enjoy playing hockey – don't force it.
- **Encourage ALL kids to reach their potential** – meet players where they're at (both the confident and the struggling kids) in order to realize consistent improvement in their abilities.
- **Encourage risk taking** - push players beyond their boundaries and to learn from failures when they occur. It's okay to fall down – everybody does – but keep getting up.

III. Program Structure

The structure of the program is important in creating a successful participation experience for players and parents. SAHA realizes that families are stretched in many directions and is committed to creating as family-friendly an environment as possible.

- **The number of players per team will be kept as small as economically possible** – strive for no more than seventeen kids per team. The coach to player ratio target should be no more than one to five in order to give all players the attention they need.
- **Weekend ice time.** Most of the scheduled ice time for the Mite and U8 programs will be on the weekends. This is helpful so that the young kids are not practicing late on a school night and makes it easier for parents to come and watch and support their hockey player.
- **No “tryouts” for level 1 and level 2.** This is developmental hockey. We will not be putting the kids through a tryout process. Kids are placed into levels based on where their parents believe they should be.
- **Pre-skate for Level 3 teams.** The purpose of the pre-skates is so that we can do our best to create even teams for the oldest level Mites & U8s as well as to make sure kids are placed at the appropriate levels based on their skill. During these clinic sessions, we may time the kids on a few skills. We do this to get a baseline or where the kids are and will then do it again later in the season in order to see how they have improved.

IV. Player Development

Players/children are the reason this association exists. In everything we do as adults, we must put the children and their well being above our own desires and aspirations.

- **SAHA is committed to developing the hockey skills of all players who enter the Mites & U8 program.** Along with the hockey skills that are being taught, SAHA is committed to developing the life skills that are listed in the Philosophy section of this document.
- **Participants will be taught the proper way to perform skills.** Practice makes permanent, not perfect. By learning to perform skills correctly, players will eliminate the formation of bad habits.
- **Muscle memory is developed through repetition** – the more times players practice the fundamental skills, the more success they will experience and success translates into fun. Skills must be practiced repeatedly until performing each skill becomes second nature. For that reason, the number of games played at the Mites & U8 1 and 2 levels should be limited.
- **Participants will be asked to focus on what they can control – their own performance and effort.** We encourage parents to find 3 things positive that their child did at each practice.
- **Limited “Games”.** As stated previously, the mite and U8 programs are all about individual skill development and fun. Competitive game situations are not the best way to develop skills and often end up not being as “fun” as people hope. We will have limited game time so that players and parents can experience that, but it will be very minimal.

The USA Hockey Players Code of Conduct will be stressed throughout the year and is an integral part of player development.

- Play for Fun.
- Work hard to improve your skills
- Be a team player – get along with your teammates.
- Be on time for practices and games.
- Respect your coach, your teammates, your parents, opponents and officials.

V. Coaching Development & Support

For many players and parents, the coach will be their first contact with the sport of hockey. The impression the coach makes upon players and parents will have a lasting effect on their perception of the game of hockey. It is critical to have coaches who can relate to children and teach the skills that will ensure **ALL** participants are successful and enjoy their experience playing the game.

The Coach:

- Plays a prominent role in the lives of the kids in the program.
- Helps to shape the views of the kids by his/her actions and attitudes.
- At times, plays a more important role than the child's parents.
- Is a teacher, a leader and a role model.

The Coach should teach players to:

- Play for the love of the game.
- Respect the opponent.
- Work for the good of the team.
- Play within the rules of the game.
- Be generous in victory and graceful in defeat.
- Always conduct themselves with honor and pride.
- Love the game. [To play the game is great, to win the game is greater, to LOVE the game is the greatest]

Volunteering to coach children is a worthy task that demands responsibility. SAHA is committed to working with and supporting all individuals willing to take on the responsibilities of the coaching role. To fulfill that commitment, SAHA will:

- Train coaches how to teach skills properly.
- Create a resource directory for coaches to use in teaching skills - tapes, books and other coaches.
- Take advantage of resources and tools provided by USA Hockey to aid coaches.
- Hold a meeting, both on and off ice, prior to the season to explain the program and what is expected of them as coaches and role models.
- Provide a mechanism throughout the season to review progress, answer questions, and keep coaches on track and enthused about the program.
- Encourage coaches to stay the course – skill development is the single most important aspect of the program. **At the Mites & U8 level, hockey games don't develop skills. We will develop skills through small area games.**
- Develop a coaches' curriculum that will give all coaches a series of exercises that will help them teach the specified skills.

SAHA Will Adopt and Promote USA Hockey's Coach's Code of Conduct

- Hockey is fun.
- Honest representation and skills should decide the final outcome of games.
- Both players and opponents are to be respected and complemented.
- Rules and regulations are to be respected and followed by all participants.
- Officials are to be viewed as honest arbitrators.
- Winning is a consideration, but not the only one nor the most important one.
- Hockey is for all to enjoy.
- Set an example of good behavior.

VI. Parents

The success of our organization very much depends on the commitment and conduct of our parents. You are the support structure to our program and players. We encourage you to help us enforce the guidelines we have laid out in this document and expect you to always conduct yourself in a positive, healthy way. If you have any questions or concerns, feel free to raise them first with your team's coach, then the Mites or U8 coordinator, and ultimately the president of the association if necessary.

SAHA Will Adopt and Promote USA Hockey's Parents' Code of Conduct

- Players require a good example as opposed to criticism.
- Help make your child's participation rewarding for all participants.
- Be understanding and supportive of the coach and the officials. The coach is a volunteer and is giving his/her personal time, at his/her expense, to help provide a positive experience for your child.
- Support and assist the program in a positive manner.
- The parent is the most important example to which a child can relate.
- Be everything you want your child to be.

