

COACHING GIRLS

Much of the initial information provided here is directed toward male coaches. This is not meant to devalue female coaches. It was intentionally done this way because most women naturally know how to handle girls, we feel comfortable talking about feelings, we communicate differently, we are at ease talking about female changes in life. Most men on the other hand, are less communicative by nature and most prefer not to talk about feelings let alone what's happening developmentally with females during puberty.

The information shared here is general. It is not hockey skills driven. This is in part because communication with female players is key. The more you understand them, the more effectively you will be able to communicate with them. The better the communication the better the coach/player relationship and ultimately the better outcome on the ice.

Information was taken from a variety of sources including but not limited to: www.womenssportsfoundation.org, www.soccerexpert.com, www.responsiblesports.com, www.bridgescamp.com, various developmental books, and comments from those who have coached various girls sports and educators in our community. USA hockey has a section called "Ask the coach" where you can email in questions you might have on anything coaching related. All of these are excellent resources and we encourage you to check them out for yourself. We have also included articles specific to issues for girls hockey.

We all know coaching hockey is more than just teaching hockey skills. It's about imparting/teaching character in children. Studies show that if a girl has a good, strong relationship with an adult male she can trust, she will be more confident in herself as a woman, like herself more, and be less likely to seek negative attention from boys during her teen years. The most important person for this job is her father. Unfortunately, statistics show many girls either do not live with their father, have a father who is at work/activities more than at home, or might have a very nice, well-intentioned father who just doesn't know how to interact with his daughter. Thankfully, many studies also support the idea that another adult male can fill this role. And the more positive adult males in a girl's life the better the outcomes. Considering the amount of time you spend coaching these young girls, you're it! if not just by default.

Girls watch the adult males in their lives and see how they treat them as well as the other girls around them. If all the males in their lives are constantly putting them down the likelihood of them marrying a man who does the same thing is high. If they are treated with respect they are more likely to marry a man who is respectful of them. Our sharing this with you is not meant to make you feel pressure. It is meant as a reminder that you as their coach need to practice what you preach in regards to fair play, respect for others, being positive, being trustworthy, etc.

Attention/Approval

Girls yearn for approval. It is not predicated upon behavior but rather a sense the girl has that she is liked just the way she is. This sets her free to become her own person. If she feels comfortable being her own person and knows that her coach will be proud of her just because she tries her best, whatever the result, she can risk failure.

Girls have a greater desire to please than boys normally do. Inability to become pleasing and acceptable to others can become far more wounding to them. They need the security of their coaches caring attitude openly and consistently expressed.

Don't error by your lack of awareness. It is important to notice things about girls and to complement them. "Wow Sara, you really worked hard on the ice tonight. Keep it up!" You should know that this can mean more than just hockey skills. If you notice that Sara got her haircut, be sure to let her know that you noticed. "Sara, you got your hair cut. It looks nice." You MUST be sincere, if you are not, the girl will know, and this will be worse than not saying anything at all. Your comments just need to be tasteful and appropriate, without sexual undertones. These seemingly little things help girls to grow confidence in themselves. If a girl gets this positive and appropriate attention from adult males in her life she is less likely to need to find this from boys as she moves into her teen/early adult years.

Physical Touch

Girls are touchy feely. You always see them hugging. You are no exception. Girls need physical touch from adults as long as it is done in a clean, clearly defined, and understood coaching role with absolutely no sexual undertones. Some appropriate touch includes: a tap on the helmet, a nudge on the arm, a hug from the side with your arm across her upper back/shoulders, or a high five.

There is never a reason that a male coach needs to be alone in a locker room with a player. It is now a rule that all coaches/staff must have another responsible adult (of the same sex as the player) with them when speaking to an individual player. It is better for all involved, to always have a female present if you must speak with the player in a locker room. It is better to pull your player aside to a private (no parents/teammates around) yet clearly visible area in the arena and speak with her.

Discipline of teenagers

For the teen, discipline needs to be in terms of, "Look, here is the line. You're on your own, but you know if you step over the line, you're the one who made the choice. Here are the penalties. They have to be observed, but I need you to know I am here for you no matter what."

To give them too much warning and advice is to communicate mistrust to them.

Menstrual Cycle: What's really going on here?!

I'm sure all you male coaches are feeling a bit uncomfortable about now. But this information is important for understanding females. Knowing what's going on with girls bodies at various times in their cycle can help you tremendously.

Remember as crazy and erratic as it may seem, this is a natural part of a females life. So, never make a girl feel embarrassed. This means NO comments like, "Is it that time of the month?"

Girls are getting their periods younger and younger. It is not uncommon these days to have girls 11- 12 years old (and sometimes even younger) get their period. For those coaches who don't have girls of their own, this is important to know. It takes some time after a girl first gets her period for her to understand what is going on with her body and her reaction to this. It can be an embarrassing time as she not only learns how to physically manage the new issues, but also as she learns how to deal with her mood swings.

Stage 1: Weeks 1 & 2 of her monthly cycle

Estrogen and endorphin levels are gradually rising. Serotonin, dopamine, norepinephrine, and other cells that regulate mood are high in response to higher hormone levels. Her mood appears relatively stable, even upbeat, as they rise. She might be doing pretty well with her game play and life might seem rather easy. Now's the best time to approach her on specific skills/techniques she needs to improve upon. "Sara, things are looking pretty good today but something I want you to work on is ...can you try that?"

Stage 2: About 2 weeks before her period

Estrogen levels shoot up and then suddenly drop. This causes the brain to go into a kind of withdrawal. Now you may notice her appear overly sensitive, more self-critical, less energetic, more irritable, overwhelmed, or anxious. You may also see a drop in self-esteem, decreased concentration, or angry outbursts. She may not seem like herself. If she is under a lot of stress she may experience severe mood swings. Now is not the time to push her too far. Use positive reinforcement and encouragement and pick your battles. She needs to know you are on her side even when her "ugly side" is exposed. You shouldn't however let her get by with extremely bad behavior, call her out on it but do so at a time when her teammates/others are not around.

Stage 3: Ovulation and Post-ovulation

Now estrogen levels begin to rise again. Progesterone levels also rise, reaching their peak about seven to eight days after ovulation, then declining over the next few days. Progesterone is a mood stabilizer. Like in stage 1, It's great to be a girl again!

Stage 4: The final days

Estrogen drops, followed by progesterone and the endorphins. This is stage 2 only amplified!

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS)

PMS happens about 7-10 days before a monthly period starts.

Symptoms: (some that can effect hockey) depression, mood swings, aches and pains often in your back or muscles, irritability, loss of control, insomnia, and headaches.

This means that a girl can be going through her day like normal and all of the sudden some little negative thing might happen or someone might say something she perceives as wrong and out come the tears. Whatever you do, don't deny the girl her feelings no matter how crazy they may seem. Instead respond with something like, "Take a deep breath and tell me what's going on." Ask her questions to help her to try and realize (on her own) how she may be over reacting. Help her to recognize what's happening and remind her not to let her feelings outrun her.

You should try and be understanding but not let it be an excuse for extreme anger or emotion. An extra amount of kindness, gentleness, and patience can go a long way during this time.

If she experiences cramps, let her know that cramps are worse on an empty stomach so she should eat something. Regular exercise actually will help regulate and decrease cramping.

Coaching Girls

- People oriented, democratic approach works best
- Coach should focus on the relationships among players
- Encouragement from the coach is a necessity
- More interaction between coach and players
- Shorter training sessions

From these points, you can say the main difference between coaching boys versus coaching girls is not the training sessions, but the different social and psychological factors.

Research has found that kids that play sports, especially girls, are more likely to have a positive body image and higher self-esteem. They also are less likely to be overweight.

Kids involved in sports are less likely to take drugs or smoke because they realize the impact that these destructive activities can have upon their performance. Girls who play sports are also less likely to become pregnant.

Girls have a different perspective on many aspects of hockey than boys, and their coaches, do. Girls value the social aspects of hockey more than their coaches and parents may realize. Girls mention teamwork, friendships, camaraderie, and bonding as important components of their hockey experience. Fairness, equity and respect are also important to them.

Optimal Times For Training Girls (vs. boys) (info taken from or paraphrased from: OMHA Player Development Guidelines and Programs Version 3 and Hockey Canada Long Term Player Development Plan)

Info provided shows girls compared to boys in order to show that there are differences in optimal training times between sexes.

Puberty/growth spurt for girls occurs around 12 years of age. Keep in mind that some girls may experience their growth spurt as much as 2 years early or later than the norm. *(FYI: puberty for males is about 14 years of age; again plus or minus 2 years)*

Stamina (endurance): at the onset of puberty/growth spurt. Aerobic capacity training is recommended before athletes reach puberty/growth spurt. Aerobic power should be introduced progressively after growth rate decelerates. *(ie. girls at about 12 years of age and boys at about 14 years of age)*

Strength: The optimal window of trainability for girls is immediately after puberty/growth spurt or at the onset of the menarche (“period”). *Boys: 12-18 months after puberty or at about ages 15-16 years old.*

Speed: For girls the first “speed training window occurs between the ages of 6 and 8 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 11 and 13 years. *Boys: The first “speed training window occurs between the ages of 7 and 9 years and the second window occurs between the ages of 13 and 16 years*

Skill: The optimal window for training girls is between the ages of 8 and 11 years. *Boys: The optimal window for training boys is between the ages of 9 and 12 years*

Suppleness (Flexibility): The optimal window is between the ages of 6 and 10 years. Special attention should be paid to flexibility again, during puberty/growth spurt. *(ie. girls at about 12 years of age and boys at about 14 years of age)*

Girls windows of optimal trainability times for the above items are very different than boys. You can see how this poses a problem to coaches of boys teams on which they have female players.

This is key for FLHA and coaches to start discussing with the parent’s of these girls. Yes, part of you can understand that on one hand if you have a daughter that excels at hockey, you want her to play on a more “competitive” team. But knowing the info we just discussed, do you want it to come at the expense of possibly missing key times for specific training?

Skills are best introduced and refined prior to the growth spurt. Delaying this will mean much more work further down the road when the player is attempting to play at higher levels. Following puberty/growth spurt emphasis on strength and stamina during practices will show greater amounts of improvement than focusing on these aspects prior to puberty. It should be noted that all of the aspects of the game can be trained before, during and after puberty. However, giving equal emphasis will not be the best long term strategy to maximize the potential of the athletes.

For both boys and girls, the speed of a child's growth has significant implications for athletic training because children who mature at an early age have a major advantage during the Training to Train stage compared to average or late matures. However, after all players have gone through their growth spurt, it is often later matures who have greater potential to become top players provided that they experience quality coaching throughout that period.

Because trainability varies between players (based on where they are developmentally) it is the coaches job to decide what skills/drills will best work for the team. The general rule of thumb is try and train where about 80% of your kids fall developmentally. It is ok to have a coach/asst coach spend some practice time (5-10 min/occasionally at practices) with the kids that are less/more advanced skill wise working on skills appropriate to where these children are at developmentally. This will avoid frustration at the lower skill level and boredom at the higher skill level.