

16U/18U (Midgets)

At the 16-and-Under and 18-and-Under levels, coaches should focus on the following age-appropriate concepts and skills so that players have a good experience and continue developing as hockey players and teenagers.

FUN: Players who have reached this level of play should have experienced fun along the way. No one should ever underestimate the value fun has played in the development of these players or will play going forward. These are critical years where the intensity of practices and games will increase, and coaches must find ways to incorporate fun into team practices and activities on a consistent basis. This generation of players has opportunities for activities of all kinds, so if they don't find a satisfactory amount of fun in the practices and games, they may opt to quit.

ENGAGEMENT: Coaches must strive to find the optimal level when determining the targeted skills, concepts and systems that can be taught at this age. When the level is too low, it may lead to boredom, and when the level is too high, it may lead to frustration. Individualizing the targeted level for each player is a mission that, when achieved, can lead to players who are engaged and having fun, and it can therefore maximize their performance. Engagement occurs when the level of play is ideal for each individual player (i.e., not too easy, not too hard). It's important that coaches design practices where the games and drills teach the desired skills and concepts. When players have the opportunity to see and feel success when executing skills and showing that they understand concepts in game-like conditions, then engagement has an opportunity to take place.

PRACTICE STRUCTURE: Practices for players at this age level should be more intense than previous levels while maintaining proper work-to-rest ratios. While skill development is important, executing these skills at higher speeds and in smaller areas with more resistance should be an increased focus. Coaches must aim for proper work-to-rest ratios based on the desired outcomes of the drills performed within a practice. Refer to the Player Activity Chart found on the free Mobile Coach App and at admkids.com under Coaches/Repetition for a form to evaluate the developmental opportunities that occur for players in practice and in games.

TRAINING: Training is a critical component in the development process for 16/18-and-Under players. Players should find themselves in on-ice and off-ice workouts that stretch their limits. Training workouts should challenge players to break through previously established physical and mental limits. Coaches can and should increase the intensity of workouts, utilizing high work levels with proper rest to follow. It's important to remember that these workouts of increased intensity will challenge the athlete. Coaches will need to coach the athlete through the mental challenges as well as the physical challenges.

SPORTS PSYCHOLOGY: Players should learn: • to develop a pre-game routine. • relaxation exercises. • to focus on things that can be controlled. • to give maximum effort at all times. • to play with poise and confidence. • to be in control of emotions at all times. • basic visualization skills. • the benefits of positive self-talk. Positive comments can reduce stress, enhance self-image and increase fun at practices and games. • to set goals, strive to reach those goals, and periodically evaluate progress towards those goals.

BODY CONTACT/BODY CHECKING: Players are now at the age where body checking is allowed in games. Coaches should incorporate drills in practice that teach the skills related to good body contact and body checking. As these are very important skills, these drills should occur in every practice. The drills should focus on balance, stick position, angling, body contact, receiving a body check, delivering a body check, etc. Coaches should also teach players to check with a purpose (that purpose being to make body contact with the puck carrier in an effort to gain possession of the puck). Therefore, when delivering a body check, players should keep the blade of their stick on the ice and maintain stick-on-stick position. Refer to Checking the Right Way for Youth Hockey for information and drills related to body contact and body checking.

LEARNING TO COMPETE: One of the misnomers adults associate with youth sports is related to competing. Adults often throw the word "compete" around for players as young as 8-and-Under. The reality is that, because of physical and emotional development, players are not ready for this emphasis on competing until they are in their mid-teens. 16/18-and-Under players are ready, and now they are participating in practices and games with higher intensity levels (faster and more physical). They must execute skills and make quick decisions in this physical environment while keeping their emotions in check. Even though winning is not the only gauge which determines success, players will find themselves in tight games where they are required to execute the skills, tactics and systems which they have learned. Whether they are able to execute these skills, tactics and systems, and how they deal with success and failure, is part of the process of learning to compete.

TEAM CONCEPTS: 16/18-and-Under players are ready to grasp more team-play concepts and systems than they have before. Coaches should build on the concepts and systems introduced to these players at previous levels. Coaches should spend more time teaching forechecking concepts, power-plays, penalty kills, and defensive zone coverages. However, practices should include an equal amount of time devoted to skill improvement and understanding of concepts.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND LIFE SKILLS: Players must learn: • the importance of honesty and integrity in and away from the arena. • to accept responsibility for their actions and athletic performance. • coping strategies to deal with peer pressure and other adversity. • to balance family, school, sports, social activities, etc. • to develop a sense of team commitment. • about adversity and begin developing strategies to deal with it.