

8-and-Under (Mites)

FOCUS POINTS • Fun • Engagement • Active Practices • Age-Appropriate Training (includes skills and concepts)

FUN 8-and-Under coaches should never underestimate the value of having fun. While this is true at all ages, it is especially true at this age, where the hockey-for-life seed is planted. If it's not consistently fun at this age, the novelty of the sport will wear off and the young player(s) may eventually quit. Players at this age should have fun every time they are on the ice.

ENGAGEMENT Coaches should recognize the importance of engagement. It goes hand-in-hand with fun, but it's more than just fun. It's targeting the optimal skill level for each player – not too easy and not too hard. It's designing small games that do the teaching. The players don't need a coach to provide the feedback. The games themselves give players the opportunity to successfully demonstrate targeted skills and concepts. The coach becomes the facilitator – less talking from the coach and more learning by doing.

TEAM CONCEPTS While the teaching curriculum recommends that no time be spent on teaching systems related to team-play in mite hockey, players should begin learning important skills and basic concepts that will be important when they get to an age where systems and team-play takes on added importance. Players should learn and understand: 1. Puck Pursuit – Players should pursue the puck aggressively and engage in battles to gain possession of the puck. 2. Puck Support – Players should learn to make themselves available for a pass whether they are close to the puck or further away. This is the beginning of near- and far-support concepts, as well as creating and finding passing lanes.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND LIFE SKILLS Players must learn:

- they are part of a team and are expected to follow team rules.
- to have respect for their teammates, coaches, opponents, officials, and parents.
- to always try their best.
- the foundation of a strong work ethic by consistently participating in practices with a high level of activity.

INDIVIDUAL HOCKEY SKILLS 8-and-Under Players must learn and master:

1. **Skating** a. ready position b. edge control c. forward start d. forward stride e. controlled stop: two-foot and one-foot snowplow f. controlled turn g. forward crossover h. backward skating i. backward stop j. ABCs of skating (agility, balance, coordination, and speed drills)
2. **Puck Control** a. lateral (side-to-side) stickhandling b. front-to-back stickhandling c. diagonal stickhandling d. attacking the triangle
3. **Passing and Receiving** a. forehand pass b. backhand pass c. receiving a pass properly with the stick
4. **Shooting** a. wrist shot b. backhand
5. **Body Contact** a. stick on puck b. stick lift
6. **Goaltending** At this level, coaches should not designate full-time goaltenders so that players may begin the development of skills that will help improve their long-term skating and athleticism. These are crucial for goaltenders as they progress to higher age levels.

PRACTICE FOCUS Practices should focus on (percentage of time listed after each):

1. Individual skill improvement (hockey skills, activities, and games) – 85%
2. Hockey sense (teaching of concepts through small area games) – 15%
3. Systems (team-play training) – 0%

PLAYER SAFETY Players should be in practice and game environments where their health and well-being is a priority. Expectations related to safe practices and acceptable on-ice conduct should be taught and reinforced with the young players.

PLAYER KNOWLEDGE Mite players are not at a cognitive level where they should be lectured on the following topics; however, throughout the course of playing mite hockey, they should learn:

1. **Puck Pursuit** – Players should be taught to pursue the puck aggressively and engage in battles to gain possession of the puck.
2. **Puck Support** – Players should learn to make themselves available to receive a pass from a teammate. This is the beginning of the idea of “getting open.”
3. **Acceptable On-Ice Conduct** – Acceptable conduct should be taught and reinforced. Unsportsmanlike conduct is the broad term covering this topic, but acceptable conduct should relate to teammates, opponents, coaches, officials, etc. This is the beginning of teaching players to be good sports and to respect everyone involved with the game.
4. **Allowable Contact with Opponents** – Players should learn what types of physical contact are allowed with an opponent. Players should learn the importance of having their stick on the ice in puck battles, so that good bodycontact habits are established early. The players should also begin to learn the types of physical contact that are not allowed, such as body checking, checking from behind, slashing, tripping, etc. While these young players are not at an age where they should be lectured as to the types of illegal contact, they should be made aware when they have made contact in a way that violates the rules.