



# HOCKEY CANADA

## NOVICE PROGRAM

### *Resource Guide*



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***Introduction to Novice  
Hockey***





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### ***“DEVELOPING SKILLS FIRST”***

*The Hockey Canada Novice Program is an essential component in developing the hockey skills of all young girls and boys playing hockey in Canada. The Hockey Canada Novice Skill Development resource is the official hockey instructional curriculum of Hockey Canada.*

## Introduction

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How a player gets their initial taste of hockey is crucial. The first few years of hockey must be a positive experience full of fun and excitement.

If the beginner has fun, develops basic skills and builds confidence, there is a better chance that player will go on to enjoy hockey for a lifetime. But if a young player has an unhappy, unrewarding experience, they may quit at an early age and never discover the real joy of Canada's game. Every young player should have the opportunity to enjoy hockey for life!

Almost all local minor hockey associations organize house leagues and/or representative teams. But more and more minor hockey associations are also delivering age-appropriate programming. It is obvious that unprepared young players who are put directly into playing the adult version of the game are at a distinct disadvantage to youngsters who have had the benefits of experiencing progressive skill development.

The goal of Hockey Canada is to see the day when every youngster across Canada getting started in hockey will have the opportunity to participate in and benefit from a program designed to meet their specific needs. One that ensures progressive skill development through well-delivered practice sessions and age-appropriate game play in an environment well-suited to their skill level.

A minor hockey association's programming at the Novice level will serve as the foundation upon which the entire minor hockey association is built. Youngsters at every level in minor hockey benefit from getting the 'right start' in the game. Programming at the Novice level is a crucial piece in building the skills of house league and rep team players alike.

More than 30 years ago, Hockey Canada developed the Initiation Program to ensure a fun, safe and positive hockey experience. It served as a structured, learn-to-play program designed to introduce beginners to basic skills. It also enabled young players to build a solid skill base and become contributing members of a team effort, develop self-confidence and experience a sense of personal achievement – goals achieved in an atmosphere of fun and fair play.

Dating back to 1995, Hockey Canada passed a motion requiring the Initiation Program to be implemented by every minor hockey association across the country and to change their constitution/bylaws to reflect the creation of a new division in hockey.



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*"Learning the basic skills at a young age will set the foundation for everything a player will accomplish in the game of hockey."  
Corey McNabb, Director of Hockey Development Programs, Hockey Canada*

## Hockey Canada Policy for Novice Hockey

The future of hockey lies with today's youth. Because of this, Hockey Canada has developed age-appropriate programming as a way to encourage the growth of foundational skills. Minor hockey associations and coaches lead the implementation of the Initiation and Novice programs with the assistance of volunteers, parents and others associated with hockey. The programming must provide opportunities for a wide range of people to get involved in order to improve the quality of the hockey experience through sound instruction and enjoyable play.

The success of grassroots hockey programming is measured by the level of development young players achieve. To optimize these levels, dedicated adults must play a large role as leaders and teachers who will create a challenging and motivating environment for all young players.

The goals and objectives of Novice hockey programming are to:

- Teach all basic skills of hockey so players can enjoy the game.
- Assist in development and enhancement of physical literacy and basic motor patterns.
- Develop and encourage the concepts of being a team member through player participation in both on-ice and off-ice activities.
- Encourage aspects of fitness, fair play and cooperation while having fun.

## About the 8-and-Under Program

- Programming should be delivered through a progressive learn-to-play teaching curriculum that spans the five- to eight-year-old age group. Children learn best through participating in practice drills and sessions as well as informal and modified games such as shinny, freeze tag and obstacle courses.
- The program consists of two levels of instruction, designed specifically for young hockey players. Each level consists of a series of practice plans (lesson plans) that follow a defined path of progressions.
- The skills of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are introduced and refined in a progressive 'one step at a time' manner.
- Although the emphasis is on fun and skill development, hockey at these ages should also allow youngsters to experience fitness, fair play and cooperation.



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- To ensure a positive experience for the children, a coaching clinic has been designed for the on-ice coaches that focuses on communication, teaching skills, leadership, skill analysis, lesson organization, and safety and risk management.

## PROGRAM PHILOSOPHY

- Hockey Canada developed the program to ensure that the child's early experiences with hockey are delivered in a safe and positive experience.
- The program enables participants to become contributing members of a team effort, develop self-confidence and experience a sense of personal achievement.

## PROGRAM GOALS

- To have fun while playing hockey and engaging in physical activity.
- To learn the fundamental skills required to play the game of hockey.
- To develop and refine basic motor patterns.
- To be introduced to the concepts of cooperation and fair play.

## Components

The following resources are available to support minor hockey associations and coaches in the design and delivery of programming that meets the needs of young players between the ages of five and eight years old. A wide variety of materials are available for download [HERE](#).

### Administrator's Guide

The purpose of the Administrator's Guide is to acquaint local organizers with the half-ice program, and how to put the program to good use in the minor hockey association.

This guide includes an overview of Hockey Canada rules for half-ice hockey, model programs, information on setting up the Initiation program, supporting parent information presentations, the importance of instructor training and an outline of the programming resources to support proper hockey instructional methodology.

### Instructor's Manual

The Instructor's Manual was designed to give coaches all of the necessary information needed to teach hockey skills to players between the ages of five and eight years old.

Some of the areas discussed are leadership, communication, teaching skills and lesson organization. Each of these components contains valuable information when it comes time to implement each of the ice-session plans from the Hockey Canada Skills Manuals.

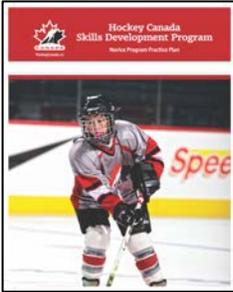


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### Ice-Session Plans (Lesson Plans)



The Novice Program Practice Plan Manual is a compilation of ideas from top hockey people across Canada. These plans are available through the Hockey Canada Network or the Hockey Canada Skill Development Program Manual series. These plans map out easy-to-follow ice sessions. Novice hockey players need to progress throughout these ice sessions to ensure they are exposed to age-appropriate drills and activities that will develop their confidence. The goal is to support the development of a sound skill base so young players will experience success playing the game.

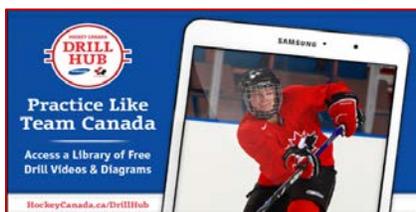
The plans are designed to serve as a model for on-ice delivery. Minor hockey associations are not required to follow each ice session exactly as planned, but the development of these resources takes into account the needs of young players who are new to hockey and on the road to building a sound set of hockey skills. Each minor hockey association should encourage their coaches to use these ice session plans so players will be guided through a skill-development program that has been specifically designed for Novice players.

The **Hockey Canada Network** is an iOS and Android app that contains a wealth of information for coaches and instructors. The entire series of Hockey Canada Skills Manuals and the Skills of Gold DVD series are available on the Hockey Canada Network. This includes the entire series of lesson plans designed specifically for the Initiation Program.



All lesson plans at the Initiation and Novice level are available to coaches and instructors at no cost. While there is a fee to access all the resources in the **Hockey Canada Network**, downloading the free version of the app will permit the user to create an account and log in to access all the resources that support the Initiation and Novice level of programming.

The **Hockey Canada Drill Hub** is located at [HockeyCanada.ca](http://HockeyCanada.ca). This coach resource tool also provides coaches of Initiation and Novice players with access to all of the program ice-session plans for free.



Coaches can sign up to have free access to Hockey Canada's growing library of drills.

- Coaches can create a practice plan with a set of drills or use suggested practice plans.
- Plans are easy to print or view on most devices.

Minor hockey associations must encourage coaches to access both resource platforms to ensure they have up-to-date resources to support the program implementation.



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### Cross-Ice and Half-Ice Hockey

At times, there can be concerns from parents about how small-area games may impact their child's hockey development. But we ask parents to trust the development experts and not worry about their child being the best player on the ice. It is also important to remind parents that putting young players into a competitive environment too early will compromise their development. Children need to be placed into competitive situations that suit their age-appropriate abilities. And parents need to be realistic about what children should be able to do all age levels. This is why Hockey Canada's Long-Term Player Development strategy is so important.

It is important to fully understand and appreciate the benefits of cross-ice and half-ice hockey. The configuration of dividing the playing surface into cross-ice or half-ice is a decision that has been made in consultation with experts in athlete development. An overview of very simple statistics illustrates a number of advantages to the smaller surface games model (see Section 2: Rationale for Novice Programming).

- Increases the emphasis on skating skills, including elements like agility, balance, coordination and quickness.
- Number of puck battles increases.
- Puck control and puck protection skills are enhanced, which will help players succeed at higher levels.
- Fundamentals of skating, puck control, passing and shooting are reinforced at a greater rate.
- Increase in incidental body contact requires players to play with their head up, preparing players for proper use of body contact and checking skills in the future.
- Less time and space increase the frequency of making hockey decisions.
- Better environment for teaching ice awareness and boosts hockey sense.
- Over time, the intensity level of competition increases with the progressive skill development of players.

### NCCP Community Coach Stream – Coach 1 Clinic

The NCCP Coach 1 – Intro to Coach clinic supports Novice coaches across Canada and provides coaches with the proper content for working with children at this level, as well as providing instruction in the delivery of the program itself.

The Community Coach Stream clinic is part of the new NCCP Coaching Program and is available through Hockey Canada's online Hockey University.



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Recognizing the necessity to provide a positive experience for young hockey players, the Novice Program builds upon a number of values that provide quality experiences, including:

- Providing a safe environment in which to be introduced to fundamental skills.
- Developing an understanding of basic teamwork through participation in structured activities and adapted game-like situations.
- Introducing participants to the concepts of fair and cooperative play.
- Refining basic motor patterns and building self-confidence.
- Providing an environment that challenges individuals positively and rewards the participants for their efforts.
- Providing opportunities to experience a number of related activities in the building of a lifestyle of fitness and activity.

### Community Coach Stream Clinic Target Audience

- Leadership is a key component to the both the Initiation and Novice programs. Parents volunteer their time as coaches, instructors and administrators, providing a positive, non-competitive learning and playing experience for all children.
- As coaches and instructors, they are responsible to be effective leaders and teachers, acting as role models for cooperation and fair play.
- As administrators, parents are responsible for organizing the details that lead to the on-ice sessions, such as promotion of the program, registration, booking ice times and communicating with parents regarding schedules.

***“Scaling down is important and the research shows that when children are more actively engaged, they touch the puck more often, have the puck on their stick longer, and are interacting with one another to a greater extent.”***

***Dr. Stephen Norris, Consultant to Hockey Canada***

## Policy Overview

**Eight-and-under games will be played half-ice (modified ice) from October to December and may transition to full ice from January to April.**

- Use September as a development month – no games, just practices.
- Play a limited half-ice game schedule from October to December.
- Use January as a development month, helping transition kids to full ice.
- Play a full-ice game schedule from January to April.
- Development of a full curriculum for the eight-year-old and the transition to full-ice programming at Atom.



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**For mixed programming, there will be three options available to choose from:**

- Deliver half-ice programming for the full year to players 7-8 years old;
- Deliver half-ice programming for the full year to players 7-8 years old and provide a six-week transition program to the players that are eight years old in February and March;
- Deliver programming above for players eight years old for the mixed age group with the understanding that the players seven years old will repeat the programming as an eight-year-old.

## Conclusion

- Hockey Canada plays an important role in ensuring minor hockey associations have the necessary resources, tools and supports for young players from 7-8 years old. Hockey Canada believes developing the fundamental skills and attitudes to play the game and recognizes this will foster an enjoyment of hockey as a lifetime participation sport.
- Novice-level programming is intended to focus on children ages seven and eight years old and is age-appropriate for all young hockey players.
- Annually, the number of girls and boys between the ages of seven and eight registered with Hockey Canada is 75,000; these 75,000 players make up approximately 15% of all registered female and minor players in the grassroots Hockey Canada system.
- Approximately 8,000 coaches and instructors volunteer each season to teach and lead programming at the Initiation and Novice levels of hockey.
- Hockey Canada has approximately 2,500 minor hockey associations that receive education, training and resources outlining the benefits of participating in all levels of minor hockey programming, and these associations are encouraged to deliver age-appropriate programming to their membership.
- This resource guide outlines the significant benefits of delivering age-appropriate programming across Canada. The future of minor hockey in Canada lies within the quality hockey development programs offered to young players.