



**HOCKEY**



A beginner's guide

sport**se**ngine





## Have a child starting hockey?

Congratulations! Hockey is a fun, unique game that has provided some of the world's most memorable sports moments ("Do you believe in miracles?!"). While trying a new sport can be a bit scary for all involved, we know once you get started you and your child are going to love the thrill of the ice!

Once confined to mostly cold northern climates, hockey has seen an explosion of popularity all over America in recent years. In fact, participation has tripled in the last 30 years. And for good reason! It's considered the fastest sport, promising a thrill for all who play and watch.

But hockey can be a new experience for many, especially for those without a background in the sport. However, with a little more understanding of how the game is played, gear needed, and key terms, you'll fit in at any rink. This guide has all the information you and your child need to join America's fastest team sport.



## WORDS OF ADVICE

Parents and coaches shared information they wish they had before their kids started hockey.

### **Get to know the game.**

While hockey shares certain elements with lacrosse and soccer, it also has several rules and features completely unique to itself. Even experienced hockey players and coaches can get confused sometimes. Don't hesitate to run some questions by coaches, refs, and other parents to learn the game.

### **Skate, skate, skate.**

One of hockey's unique features is the ice playing surface, called a rink. Experienced hockey players can skate forward and backward, turn left and right, and stop on a dime. Look up open ice times at your local rink, or, if your climate allows, find outdoor rinks to skate on in the winter. Better yet, take the whole family to the rink. Great memories can be made skating at the local "barn" or backyard pond!

### **Play other sports too.**

Encourage your child to hang up the skates once in a while to try other sports and avoid hockey fatigue. Certain hockey skills—like stick handling, quick reactions, and conditioning—can be practiced by playing lacrosse, baseball, and soccer. Hockey coaches love multi-sport athletes for the creativity and skills they bring to the game.

### **Become familiar with your child's coach.**

At the youth levels, your child's coach will likely be a parent volunteer. Introduce yourself to the coach and get to know his or her coaching philosophies. Then communicate anything you feel he or she should know about your child early in the season. A good coach will be open and honest about goals, expectations, and methods. Don't forget to ask the coach if there is anything you can help with!

### **Be positive and respectful.**

Unless otherwise appointed, your job at the rink is to support and cheer for your kid. Focus on the positives as he or she learns the game and avoid yelling instructions from the bleachers.

### **Focus on life skills, not scholarships.**

Hockey, like any other sport, is not a financial plan for college. Fewer than 1 percent of high school athletes receive athletic scholarships and even fewer go on to play professional sports. Encourage your child to focus on the valuable lessons they can learn from hockey like how to handle winning and losing, how to manage relationships with coaches and teammates, and the benefits of being active. Above all, focus on having fun!

### **Pick the right program for your child.**

There are many hockey programs to choose from that vary in cost, time commitment, and competition level. Choose a program that suits your child's interests and skill levels. [See: "Ways to Play"]

**For more information, visit:**

[sportsengine.com/hockey/words-advice-hockey-parents](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/words-advice-hockey-parents)



The U.S. is one of the most successful national ice hockey teams in the world and a member of the "Big Six," the unofficial group of the six strongest men's ice hockey nations: Canada, Czechia, Finland, Russia, and Sweden.



## FUNDAMENTALS OF THE GAME

Before your child laces up his or her skates, it's helpful to understand the basics of the game and what to expect.



### Time

Game time and number of periods vary depending on the level of play and league or program. Most games are either one or one-and-a-half hours.



### Team

The number of players on the ice varies based on age.

8U

4

PLAYERS PER SIDE  
+ NO DEDICATED GOALIE

10 +

5

PLAYERS PER SIDE  
+ DEDICATED GOALIE



### Goal

The puck must cross the thin red line in the net, called the goal line, entirely to count as a goal. One point is awarded per goal and play restarts with a faceoff at center ice.



While the origins of ice hockey are murky, its modern rules were established by Canadian James Creighton. The first game using Creighton's rules was played in Montreal, Canada in 1875.



## THE BASIC RULES

Following these guidelines will help your child as he or she gets ready to play hockey.



### Use your stick

Hockey players use their stick, and sometimes their skates, to handle, pass, and shoot the puck. The blade (the bottom part of a stick) of a hockey stick is often curved to help players elevate the puck. Don't assume your son or daughter will need a stick curved the same way they do other sports. Not sure which hand your player is? Have them hold a stick. If their left hand is on top, they need a right-handed curve. Right hand on top means they need a left-handed curve.



### Play the boards

Hockey rinks are surrounded by walls called boards. This barrier helps keep the puck in play for much of the game. Players often use the boards to pass the puck to themselves or other players.



### Checking

Hockey includes a fair amount of body contact used to remove an opponent from the puck known as checking. A legal body check consists of a player using his or her trunk (hips to shoulders) to deliver a check to an opponent's trunk from the front or side. Teaching players how to safely administer and receive body contact at an early age allows them to practice and become comfortable with this aspect of the game. However, checking isn't allowed until 16U (Bantams) in boys. Girls hockey never officially allows checking, although body contact is common.



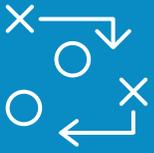
### Penalties

Player safety and rules are enforced by referees and linesmen who skate alongside the players. The mildest rule violations, like offsides and icing, result in a brief stop in play restarted by a faceoff. Minor penalties, including interference, tripping, and hooking, result in the offending player sitting in the penalty box while his or her teammates play shorthanded (usually for two minutes or until the other team scores). Major penalties, including boarding, charging, and more, result in a five-minute stay in the penalty box, even if the other team scores.



### Changing on the fly

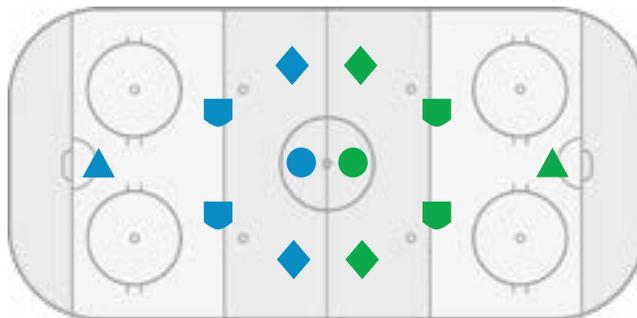
Unlike many other sports, substitutions are allowed as play occurs in hockey. Players are on the ice for an average of 60 seconds before heading to the bench to swap out for another player. It's common for all three forwards (known as a "line") to swap out simultaneously to give way to another line. The same is true for defensive pairs. Hockey teams are often comprised of four lines of forwards and three defensive pairs.



## GETTING INTO POSITION

There are four basic positions in hockey that require unique skills and responsibilities.

Players 10 and younger often rotate positions to get a better understanding of the game and what makes them happiest. As players mature, they tend to dedicate more time and attention to one position.



### Center

Centers take faceoffs to start play and resume stoppages and split their time between offense and defense. Centers are free to roam the entire ice to support their teammates while other positions tend to stick to one side of the ice.



### Right and left wing

Wings or “wingers” are offensive-minded players that tend to stick to the left or right side of the ice in the defensive zone. While their primary duties are to score goals and maintain possession, they also help on defense by covering the top half of their defensive zones.



### Defenders

Defensemen are also split into right and left sidemen, based largely on their preferred shooting hand. Their primary goal is to prevent shots on net by positioning themselves between the opposing players and their goalie. These players skate backward just as much as forward and use their sticks and bodies to remove opposing players from the puck.



### Goaltender

The goalie’s role is simple: keep the puck out of the net. Goalies use heavy padding, a large glove, and a wide stick to ward off oncoming shots. These players rarely venture more than a few feet from their net.

**For more information, visit:** [sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-positions](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-positions)



Some of the very first hockey pucks were believed to be made from frozen cow dung.



## KEY HOCKEY TERMS

Part of learning hockey is getting to know the game's lingo. Successful players communicate well with their teammates, coaches, and referees both on and off the ice.

### Blue line

Two thick blue lines mark the beginning of each team's offensive and defensive zones. The distance between the two blue lines is called the neutral zone.

### Power play

When a team has more players on the ice because one or more players are serving time in the penalty box. The opposite of a power play is called a **penalty kill** or being **short-handed**.

### Line change

When a player leaves the ice to substitute for another player. This often happens on-the-fly, while the game is still going on.

### Zamboni

The large machine that cleans and resurfaces the ice between periods.

### Hat trick

A term used to describe a single player scoring three goals in one game. The third goal—in appropriate situations—is celebrated by fans throwing their hats onto the ice with the ball in between.

### Tape to tape

A pass that goes from the blade (which is wrapped in tape) of one player's stick to the blade of a teammate's stick.

### Wrist shot

A shot with no windup in which a player uses his or her hands and wrists to shoot the puck toward the net.

**For more information, visit:**

[sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-terms-explained](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-terms-explained)



The "Miracle on Ice," dubbed the top sports moment of the 20th century by Sports Illustrated, happened at the 1980 Winter Olympics in Lake Placid, New York. Team USA, made up of collegiate and amateur players, defeated a Soviet team consisting of experienced, full-time players that had won five of the last six gold medals by a score of 4-3.



## HOCKEY SLANG

Along with a few nuts-and-bolts terms, hockey is full of unique slang your child will have fun learning. Try out these terms to feel like a crafty vet.

**Apple:** An assist on a goal.

**Bar down / Bardowski:** A shot that hits the crossbar and goes into the net.

**Biscuit:** Hockey puck

**Bucket:** Helmet

**Celly:** Goal celebration

**Dangle:** Stickhandling and dekes. An especially good dangle can be described as **filthy** or **sick**.

**Flow:** Long hair that extends out the back of the helmet her hands and wrists to shoot the puck toward the net.

**Sauce:** A pass that flies slightly above the ice

**Shorty:** Shorthanded goal

**Twig:** Hockey stick

**For more information, visit:**

[sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-slang](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/hockey-slang)



The Stanley Cup is the championship trophy awarded to the winner of the NHL playoffs each season. The trophy is named after Lord Stanley of Preston, the former Governor General of Canada and an enthusiastic hockey fan, who first awarded it in 1893. The original cup was barely over 7 inches tall while the current trophy which is 35.25 inches tall and 34.5 pounds.



## GEARED UP FOR SUCCESS

Hockey players are covered nearly head to toe with protective equipment. Gear can be borrowed, rented, bought second-hand, or purchased new. Check with our association for options.



### Stick

As a general rule, a proper-sized hockey stick held straight up in front of a player NOT wearing skates should reach between the chin and nose. For a player on skates, the stick should reach around the chin.



### Helmet

Hockey helmets are made of hard plastic and have a wire facemask. Consult a hockey equipment specialist or the helmet's box to get the proper fit.



### Mouthguard

Mouthguards should always be worn (just watch one period of professional hockey to see why) to protect the teeth and the head from concussions.



### Shin pads and socks

The shin pad should cover entirely from the boot of the skate to the top of the knee. The knee should sit in the center of the shin pad. Tall hockey socks cover the shin pad and are often secured with tape.



### Cup

Hockey pucks are very dense and can cause injury. It's important for players of all ages and genders to wear a protective cup.



### Hockey pants / breezers

Hockey pants (also called breezers) should sit on the top of the hips and hang to the top of the knee, overlapping with the top edge of the shin pad.



### Shoulder and elbow pads

Shoulder pads protect the tops of the shoulders, collarbone, and sternum. These should fit snug against the player's body but should not restrict movement. Elbow pads completely cover the elbow and parts of the upper and lower arm. These pads should be tight enough that they don't move, but loose enough that they do not cut off circulation or restrict movement.



### Gloves

Hockey gloves provide padding for players' hands and wrists. A properly-sized glove will extend to the bottom of the elbow pads and fingers shouldn't be pushing out at the end.



### Skates

Having a properly sized set of skates is crucial for playing hockey. Skate sizes, depending on the brand, are typically 1-2 sizes lower than your shoe size.



## WAYS TO PLAY

Availability of hockey programs can depend on your community’s interest and available rinks. However, many communities offer a variety of hockey programs that will fit your child’s interests and abilities. Go to [sportsengine.com/hockey](https://sportsengine.com/hockey) to find a program near you.

### Travel Hockey

DIFFICULTY LEVEL



<p><b>Age:</b> 10-18</p>	<p><b>Good for:</b> Players looking to increase their skills and compete at the highest level.</p>	
<p><b>Commitment:</b> Travel hockey requires a moderate time and financial commitment, depending on the team and age level. This level involves several practices per week and travel on a metro, regional, and state level.</p>		<p><b>Structure:</b> Generally, players try out and are placed on teams according to skill level. Commitment level tends to increase with the competitive level. This format is geared toward developing skills and high-level competition.</p>

### School Hockey

DIFFICULTY LEVEL



<p><b>Age:</b> Middle and high schoolers</p>	<p><b>Good for:</b> Skilled players looking to represent their school and play with their classmates.</p>	
<p><b>Commitment:</b> School hockey can be an intense overall commitment. Players practice or play most days of the week and are often expected to train year-round. Travel for away games and tournaments is required.</p>		<p><b>Structure:</b> Players are required to try out and placed on a varsity or junior varsity team according to performance. Competition is between other school teams and players can be scouted for collegiate opportunities at this level.</p>



## WAYS TO PLAY (CONT.)

### Recreational Hockey



<b>Age:</b> Young kids to adults	<b>Good for:</b> Those looking to stay active, play with friends and have fun playing the game.
<b>Commitment:</b> Recreational hockey costs less than club or school programs and requires less of time commitment. Expect to practice one to three times a week with no pressure to train during the off-season.	<b>Structure:</b> Learning the basics and enjoying the game is prioritized over competition and skill development. Players typically do not have to try out and coaching is on a volunteer basis. In general, anyone and everyone can play.

### Outdoor Hockey



<b>Age:</b> Young kids to adults	<b>Good for:</b> Those looking for an easy way to play and learn hockey while having loads of fun with family and friends.
<b>Commitment:</b> Playing outdoor hockey is one of the easiest ways to learn to play. Most public outdoor rinks (or even frozen lakes and ponds) do not cost anything to use. All you need is a pair of skates or boots, a stick, and a puck to start having fun.	<b>Structure:</b> While outdoor hockey is one of the most cost-effective ways to learn and participate, there is little-to-no structure. You might have the entire rink to yourself or there might be a pickup game to join. Typically you are free to learn skills on your own through trial and error, not a developed training plan put together by a coach.

**For more information, visit:**  
[sportsengine.com/hockey/ways-play-hockey](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/ways-play-hockey)



## HOCKEY HIERARCHY

Amateur hockey is made up of a variety of national and regional governing bodies, as well as local leagues and associations of different teams. Here's a rundown of the different levels and how they all relate to one another.

1

**INTERNATIONAL ICE HOCKEY FEDERATION** The International Ice Hockey Federation is the worldwide governing body for the sport. It is based in Zurich, Switzerland, and has 82 member countries.

2

**USA HOCKEY** USA Hockey is the national ice hockey organization in the United States. It is recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the United State Olympic and Paralympic Committee as the governing body for organized ice hockey in the United States.

3

**DISTRICTS & AFFILIATES (NATIONAL)** USA Hockey has 12 districts that compromise the 34 state governing bodies (affiliates). The affiliates oversee all in-season play, while the larger districts handle post-season and playoffs.

4

**ASSOCIATIONS** Each affiliate is composed of individual community associations, sometimes called leagues. For example, Stillwater Area Hockey Association, Edina Hockey Association, etc. The community-based model is the backbone of USA hockey.

5

**TEAMS** Every association is compromised of a variety of teams broken down by their age (Mites / U8, Squirts / U10, etc) and skill level (AA, A, B, C). The teams of one association compete against other associations in league and playoff games, hoping to be crowned state or regional champion.

**For more information, visit:**  
[sportsengine.com/hockey/hierarchy-hockey](https://sportsengine.com/hockey/hierarchy-hockey)



Minnesota Hockey is so large that it is the region and the affiliate. Within Minnesota Hockey, there are also 12 districts which support the roughly 140 community based associations



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It is a reflection of our passion for youth sports and mission to grow participation across North America. Together with NBC Sports, we fervently promote youth sports year-round online and on-air—driving interested families directly to **SportsEngine.com**.