

# HOCKEY PARENT PLAYBOOK

How to Develop Players Without Losing the Joy of the Game

A guide for hockey families navigating development, pressure, confidence, team choices, and long-term growth.

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Scoring Concepts • AI Hockey Advisor • Hockey Development Network

## **Introduction**

Youth hockey has changed dramatically. Families today face constant pressure: AAA vs AA. Exposure. Recruiting. Social media. Team politics. Private lessons. Spring hockey. Somewhere along the way, many families stopped asking the most important question: **Is my child still enjoying the game?** This playbook was created to help players, parents, and coaches refocus on long-term development, emotional health, confidence, and love for hockey.

## **1. Stop Chasing Labels**

The right development fit matters more than the biggest logo.

## **2. The Car Ride Home Matters**

Support and encouragement often matter more than criticism after games.

## **3. Confidence Is Fuel**

Confident players take risks, stay creative, and compete harder.

## 4. Development Isn't Linear

Players improve at different rates physically, emotionally, and mentally.

## 5. Hockey IQ Matters More Than Hype

Smart decision-making translates at every level of hockey.

## 6. Social Media Distorts Reality

Comparison culture creates unnecessary pressure for families.

## 7. Burnout Is Real

Players need rest, recovery, and time away from structure.

## 8. Ownership Creates Growth

Players develop faster when they advocate for themselves.

## 9. Parents Need

**Perspective** Not every loss or

mistake is a crisis.

## 10. Keep the Joy in the Game

Players develop best when they genuinely love hockey.

## The Modern Hockey Family

Players and parents today face more noise than ever before. The healthiest hockey environments reduce anxiety and increase clarity. Development should not feel like panic. The goal is not perfection. The goal is sustainable growth.

“Everything we build should help players grow — not make families

more anxious.”

## Bonus Feature

### 5 Myths of Parental Involvement

By Andrew Trimble

A new season is upon us and players (and parents) have new challenges ahead for each of their teams. For players that is exciting. It is an opportunity for each of the athletes to improve on and off the ice, while also growing and expanding and developing their mental toughness. For parents, that means the investment you've put into your teams and organizations for your child to participate will be tested. Will you allow your child to experience the inevitable ups and downs?

With this article I'll try to debunk some of the common myths I've seen and experienced with parental involvement in our sport. I hope it comes at a time when players and parents can apply it so they can get the most out of each season. I hope it's light and fun, but also informative.

#### MYTH #1- Parents are just looking out for the best interests of the Program

##### Exhibit A- Holding Players Accountable Leads to Coach Being Fired

*“We don't blame the player. We blame the school administration for bowing to the pressure,” Emanuel told the Daily Post. “He loves coaching water polo, he loves the kids, he loves the families and he was and is a very devoted coach. He is fighting this because he was terminated for reasons that have nothing to do with his performance or moral character.”* Water polo coach: Disciplined student's parents got me fired (usatodayhss.com)

##### Exhibit B- Parent Physically Confronting Coach

*According to Elston, an angry parent put Pokorny in “an impossible position” after he entered the gym during a wrestling practice last Wednesday, “pointing and yelling” at the coach about how he was treating his son.*

*In the appeal sent to the district, Pokorny said the parent “baited me, saying ‘you are a pansy and there is nothing you are going to do. You need to man up.’”* Wrestling coach fired for altercation with angry parent wants job back (usatodayhss.com)

##### Exhibit C- False Accusations

*Parents also sent emails, in some cases several, to school officials looking for an explanation.*

*“I emailed the superintendent,” said Mark Wickersham, parent of a girl on the team. “I've written to the athletic director. There has been no response. Dave is overqualified for the job. He is all you could ask for, particularly in a JV coach. I do think there is a youth sports problem. There is a problem with crazy parents in sports.”* Andover's JV soccer coach fired after parent complaint | Merrimack Valley | eagletribune.com

Creating a positive culture within a program is a difficult process. Whether it be a business, a team, a school, a family... individuals have different personalities, values and goals, and finding ways that they can work together for the collective good takes consistent effort, dedication and concentration.

No person outside of these organizations knows better than the coach what is happening inside the organization.

He is the adult in the room. He is the person taking in first hand knowledge of each practice session, team meeting, game plan and contest for the organization. Yet, a simple google search shows thousands of parents acting out on their own to over step and get a coach dismissed from healthy organizations. Oftentimes they claim to be on the perceived moral high ground of “ Looking out for the best interests of the Program”. More often than not, however, they are making decisions that are looking only within the context of best interests for their kid rather than their kids program.

Take for example the effects of overly involved parents in the form of “Helicopter Parenting” Helicopter parents are so named because, like helicopters, they "hover overhead", overseeing all aspects of their child's life. A helicopter parent is also known to persistently supervise their children in all aspects of their lives, including in social interactions. Take for example this recent study in Psychology Today:

*Children and their parents were invited to a laboratory setting, where the children were encouraged to complete as many puzzles as they could in a 10-minute period. The puzzle tasks were designed to mimic the challenging and occasionally frustrating nature of homework and other academic tasks. Parents were permitted to help their children, but were not encouraged to do so.*

*The parents of children with social anxiety touched the puzzles significantly more often than other parents. Though they were not critical or negative, they attempted to help even when their children did not seek help. This suggests that parents of socially anxious children may perceive challenges as more threatening than the child perceives them. Over time, this can erode a child's ability to succeed on their own, and potentially even increase anxiety. [The Effects of "Helicopter Parenting" | Psychology Today](#)*

Parents... please let your kids advocate for themselves, and let your teams coaches coach. They'll be better in the long run.

## MYTH #2- Parents are Sober

From the rough estimate as listed above, you would need a minimum of five million, three hundred and forty – five thousand eight hundred and eighty USD (\$5, 345,880) to establish a medium – scale but standard single surface ice skating arena in any city in the United States of America.

<https://www.profitableventure.com/cost-build-ice-skating-rink/#:~:text=Ideally%2C%20ice%20skating%20rinks%20save%20money%20by%20buying,you%20are%20expected%20to%20spend%20your%20startup%20capital%3B>

The costs to build an indoor ice arena in the US are substantial, and the single use of renting ice slots throughout the season present significant profitability shortages. Operating a rink, and the substantial energy, labor, electrical, insurance, and water costs further exacerbate the profitability challenge. With this as a framework, owners of arenas use multiple streams of revenue to increase profitability; namely Pro Shops, Concessions, Room Rentals, and commonly Restaurants or Bars. That shortage creates an opportunity.

In many parts of the US, large “Super Rinks” are common. Multi- Sheet facilities that increase the spectator experience with all day programming for everyone in the family, designed to keep customers in the

building spending money. A player can play their game as mom and dad watch, then they can stay to have dinner, while also enjoying the arcade or another game after dinner.

A recent study showed 48% of fans at sporting events consumed alcohol during the events. 18% tailgated prior to the event, consuming on average 2 drinks prior to entering the venue. [Beer and Sports: Facts, Figures & Fan Favorites! || Fan Hospitality](#). This isn't limited to professional sporting events.

Parents routinely cross the line in Hockey with regards to consumption and involvement in their child's sporting events. Multiple drinks before, after and during the game lead to poor judgement. Go on youtube, and search these videos:

- Crazy Hockey Dad Breaks Glass
- Hockey Parent Argument
- Angry Hockey Parent Attacks Referee
- Hockey Parent Freakout
- Hockey Dads fight at RMU
- Hockey fan jumps stands to fight player inside locker room
- Crazy hockey parents aren't only in Canada

I'm not judging an adult's decision or right to enjoy their experience at the rink, and if that consists of having a cocktail or two, that is their right. Yet, if it leads to aggression outside of the glass, and violence towards other parents, players, coaches or officials then they cross a line. In this climate... Many times the only individuals routinely and consistently exercising good, clear-minded judgement are the players, coaches and officials.

Parents... Please think twice about what frame of mind you are in before you text the coach.

### MYTH #3- Social Media is Just for Kids

In the last decade we have seen a massive paradigm shift in how and who we react with. Social media platforms have become, in many respects, the preferred method of communication and interaction. This shift has affected all aspects of our lives.

Takes these recent statistics:

- About 37% of young people between the ages of 12 and 17 have been bullied online. 30% have had it happen more than once.[\[1\]](#)
- 95% of teens in the U.S. are online, and the vast majority access the internet on their mobile device, making it the most common medium for cyber bullying.[\[2\]](#)
- 23% of students reported that they've said or done something mean or cruel to another person online. 27% reported that they've experienced the same from someone else.[\[3\]](#)

[11 Facts About Cyberbullying | DoSomething.org](#)

Social Media is not used exclusively for children. Today, 7 out of 10 adults are on at least one social media platform, up from only 5% in 2005 ([Demographics of Social Media Users and Adoption in the United States | Pew Research Center](#)).

With this shift, the same behaviors experienced in kids are being experienced in adults. Name calling, trolling, criticizing and other rude behaviors have become commonplace in the youth sports online landscape.

In my 15 years of coaching high school, youth and junior hockey, I have had parents, fans and players message me on social media **during or immediately** after a game for everything including, but not limited to:

- Officiating

- My players behavior after a Win
- My players behavior after a Loss
- About the quality of the internet connection in our home rink
- The announcer for our HockeyTV broadcast
- Playing time for their kid
- The quality of the HockeyTV broadcast
- Skate Sharpening at the rink
- Our Power Play Systems
- My Assistant Coaches
- LiveBarn connection
- My line choices
- LiveBarn blackout code
- The Temperature of the rink

Parents... just stop. Wait 24 hours. If it really is that critical, send me (or your coach) an email when you've cooled off, and maybe schedule a meeting face to face. Don't hide behind your keyboard.

More often than not, cooler heads prevail.

#### MYTH #4- The Squeaky Wheel Gets the Oil

*"Can the boy talk for himself?" Angelo Bumbacco finally blurted, the time passing in the Lindros living room without a word out of the 16-year-old the general manager of the Sault Ste. Marie Greyhounds was determined to pick No. 1 in the Ontario Hockey League draft. He could've changed Eric Lindros' life. All these years, Angelo Bumbacco has never stopped believing it. Twelve years ago, he could've rescued him.*

*"Looking back, the greatest thing that could ever happen to Eric Lindros was coming to play in Sault St. Marie, just to get the hell away from those parents," Bumbacco said the other day. "It would've been like when you send a kid away to university to give him a chance a chance to grow up. I'll tell you: That kid has never grown up." [ESPN.com: GEN - Lindros needs to get away from his parents](#)*

Eric Lindros was almost certainly the best, most complete player in the world for 5 years in the mid - 1990s. A generational talent with unmatched size and skill for the time, he played a rugged yet skilled game. After 6 years in the NHL, he had won an MVP, taken a team on his back to the finals, and at the time possessed the 5th highest point per game totals in NHL history.

Yet when people look back on Eric Lindros they remember a few significant things. He never won a Stanley Cup. The Concussions. The unceremonious exit from Philadelphia (as well as Quebec). Bonnie and Carl Lindros (Eric's Parents).

*As Lindros prepares for his seventh concussion, he's had his share of headaches born out of his parents' ridiculous antics. Lifting his career and the Rangers out of dire straits will be hard enough, without the Great and Mrs. Santini reaching out to Sather and instructing him on the linemates to use alongside little Eric. The ones, you know, that pass him the puck.*

*Reportedly, the parents kept charts on who regularly passed the puck to him in Philadelphia, and who didn't. [ESPN.com: GEN - Lindros needs to get away from his parents](#)*

The “squeaky wheel gets the oil” is a term that is often thrown around referring to how the people complaining or protesting the loudest or most frequently, will often receive the most attention from others. You often see these parents at hockey games sidling up to the coaches. Or firing off emails to the organization about ideas they feel could help to improve the team and program. Scheduling sit down meetings with coaches to talk about their kids' play or lack of playing time.

In my 40 years in the game, I've never seen this behavior produce true advantages for those parents' sons or daughters. Witnessed as a player, I always felt like it was a distraction for the team. Witnessed as a coach, the increased workload in managing that parent relationship takes away from my ability to effectively work and focus on the team, lengthens the day and inevitably builds animosity towards that parent. Now witnessed, as a fellow parent with my own kids in youth sports, I view it as selfish and short sighted.

**Parents... Please teach your kids to advocate for themselves. Teach them to work within a team, and if things are not going their way... to work harder. Please teach them to have an honest assessment of their play and to set goals for themselves to improve their shortcomings. Teach them that they can not look to others for help (even though we all need help sometimes) but to try to problem-solve on their own and become a better version of themselves. To set high standards for achievement, and then to go out and earn them on their own. Teach them that the best feeling of success is the success that you earn on your own.**

Winston Churchill did NOT say, “It was really great when my Dad got me on the power play.” He said:

*Success is not Final;  
Failure is not Fatal;  
It is the courage to continue that counts.*

#### MYTH #5- It's always the Coaches Fault

*In so many ways, Walter Gretzky walked the walk. He often told Wayne when both of them were much younger that his sublimely gifted son had an obligation to play every game with the same level of effort because he would never know if there was some child there watching his first NHL game or an adult spending his hard-earned money on the only big-league game he would see that season. Walter kept that in mind when he encountered people, greeting them with a warm handshake, a look in the eye and a genuine interest in them. [Walter Gretzky Was The World's Hockey Dad - The Hockey News on Sports Illustrated](#)*

Hockey is an amazing game. Its a team game. Where 20 players get together, compete and work hard for one another, and, generally, the team that competes the hardest, is disciplined and works together wins. It's complex and simple at the same time.

Consequently, teams both win and lose games. Every team experiences both sides of success. This is healthy.

Studies have shown that well rounded, emotionally healthy, persistent kids, have greater chances for success in adulthood. The recent article- [Science Says the Most Successful Kids Have Parents Who Do These 5 Things | Inc.com](#) showed 5 key parenting characteristics that compelled future, successful adults. These were:

- 1) Mother's Happiness
- 2) Children's Persistence
- 3) Engaging the Child in Learning
- 4) Taking Music Lessons
- 5) Teaching the child to be Indistractable

Nothing I've read, learned or seen anywhere points to long-term child success if parents:

- Place Blame on Others (Coaches/ Teammates) for their own lack of success
- Handle adversity negatively
- Quit when faced with adversity
- Disengage from difficult challenges
- Get easily Distracted by outside conditions

So Parents, please allow your child to experience both success and failure, and don't blame someone else for simple outcomes. Sure, if your coach abuses the officials and takes a bench minor with a minute to go in the game... There might be merit to blaming the coach. Or your Coach only plays his son, and his son is unproductive relative to other players on the team... then maybe speak with the coach or administrator of the organization (not through text or email) face to face (or Zoom) and see if changes can be made. If the Coach is abusive to the players (verbally or physically) of course those situations have to be addressed.

But if the Coach is trying his best, the team is engaged and working hard, the team is disciplined.... Maybe it's not the coaches fault your team didn't win today. Maybe your son or daughter could have scored, stopped a puck or otherwise contributed to changing the outcome of the game.

Either way, it's the way you handle that outcome that will best position your child for success or failure later in life. Reinforce dedication, handling adversity, overcoming obstacles and working within a team concept. Applied correctly, Hockey can be the great learning tool your son or daughter has in the game of life.

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## Final Thoughts

Hockey can be one of the greatest teachers in life. It teaches: • resilience • teamwork • confidence • sacrifice • leadership The goal should not simply be producing better hockey players. The goal is producing healthier, stronger, more confident young people.

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# Wolves