

NO CONES

PE

MORE GAME



ATHLETE GUIDE

## OUR PURPOSE

*Athletes are not passive recipients of coaching. They are active participants in their own development.*

## OUR PURPOSE

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Being an athlete in our program means more than attending practices and playing games. Athletes take ownership of their learning, contribute positively to their team, and represent the game with respect.

Our coaches create an environment that is positive, challenging, competitive, and fun. Athletes bring that environment to life through their effort, decisions, questions, response to feedback, and treatment of others.

## WHAT ATHLETE CENTERED MEANS

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Athlete centered does not mean athletes make every decision or that learning is always easy. It means the athlete's long term development is at the center of the program.

### OUR COACHES WILL

- Create opportunities for athletes to think, decide, and solve problems.
- Use games and game like situations to develop skills that transfer to competition.
- Encourage creativity and allow athletes to learn through success and failure.
- Provide honest, specific, age appropriate feedback.
- Develop the physical, cognitive, social, and emotional sides of every athlete.

### OUR ATHLETES WILL

- Arrive prepared, participate fully, and give honest effort.
- Look for solutions before waiting for the coach to provide an answer.
- Accept challenges, ask useful questions, and apply feedback.
- Support the learning, confidence, and development of teammates.

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**COACHES CREATE THE ENVIRONMENT. ATHLETES TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR LEARNING.**

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### THE DEVELOPMENT ZONE

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Our mission extends far beyond developing great hockey players. We are committed to creating a Development Zone, a positive, safe, and challenging environment where every athlete can develop confidence, character, resilience, leadership, and a lifelong love for the game.

Hockey is one of the greatest classrooms for life. Every practice, game, and interaction is a chance to learn lessons that extend beyond the rink.

### THE THREE PILLARS OF OUR CULTURE

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#### PLAYERS

Players bring effort, respect, coachability, and a willingness to learn. They compete, support teammates, learn from mistakes, and pursue continuous improvement.

#### COACHES

Coaches create an environment where athletes feel challenged, supported, and valued. They teach the game while building confidence, character, teamwork, and resilience through positive coaching and high standards.

#### PARENTS

Parents encourage effort over outcomes, trust the development process, support the whole team, respect officials and coaches, and model positive behavior.

### OUR STANDARDS OF EXCELLENCE

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A positive culture does not happen by accident. Our Code of Conduct applies to players, parents, coaches, and family members at home, away, while traveling, online, and at every USA Hockey sanctioned event.

- Create a safe and welcoming environment for every athlete and family.
- Respect teammates, opponents, officials, volunteers, coaches, and rink staff.
- Demonstrate sportsmanship, accountability, and integrity.
- Support long term athlete development over short term results.
- Contribute positively to the culture through words, actions, and body language.

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**EVERY INTERACTION EITHER STRENGTHENS OR WEAKENS OUR CULTURE.**

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## **BELONGING AND TEAM SAFETY**

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Every athlete deserves to feel accepted, respected, and safe being themselves. Great teams are built when athletes know they can speak up, ask questions, make mistakes, and try new things without being embarrassed or judged.

### **AS AN ATHLETE, I WILL**

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- |                                                                                                   |                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Welcome and include every teammate.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Listen when someone else is speaking.                                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Respect differences in ability, experience, background, and personality. | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask questions and seek help when I need it.                                         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Use words and actions that build others up.                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Speak up when something does not feel right.                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Never bully, exclude, embarrass, or intentionally isolate someone.       | <input type="checkbox"/> Accept coaching and respectful feedback with a positive attitude.                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Encourage teammates after mistakes.                                      | <input type="checkbox"/> Help create an environment where everyone feels comfortable learning and competing. |

### **WHAT GREAT TEAMMATES DO**

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Great teammates understand that everyone develops at a different pace. They celebrate one another's success, support teammates through challenges, and make it safe to learn from mistakes. They do not form exclusive groups, criticize teammates, or make others feel as though they do not belong.

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**EVERYONE BELONGS. EVERYONE HAS A VOICE. EVERYONE DESERVES THE OPPORTUNITY TO GROW.**

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SECTION 1

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# OWN YOUR LEARNING

### LEARN THROUGH THE GAME

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Hockey is a game of continuous decisions. Players read what is happening, choose a response, act, and adjust. That is why practices include small area games, competition, puck touches, problem solving, hockey IQ, and creativity.

### WHAT OUR PRACTICES WILL LOOK LIKE

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Our goal is to create a fun, challenging, and competitive learning environment. Practices combine physical skills and decision making through realistic hockey situations.

- Expect game based activities, small area games, competition, and frequent puck touches.
- Be ready to solve problems, make decisions, and learn from the result.
- Work with different players and coaches across teams or within the full age group.
- Understand that coaches may ask questions instead of immediately providing an answer.

Multi team and age group practices allow athletes to use the ice efficiently and learn with different teammates and coaches. As athletes mature, team specific and full ice practices become a larger part of the experience.

#### REMEMBER

Your practice group may change. The development standard does not.

### THE CONSTRAINTS LED APPROACH

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A constraint is something that changes the challenge or affects the options available. A coach may change the space, number of players, time, rules, nets, or scoring method. These changes guide athletes toward discovering solutions without being told exactly what to do.

For example, a smaller area may demand quicker decisions, better puck protection, and closer support. The activity itself helps the athlete learn.

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**THE COACH DESIGNS THE CHALLENGE. THE ATHLETE DISCOVERS SOLUTIONS.**

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## WHAT THE ATHLETE DOES

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- Notice how the challenge changes your options.
- Try different solutions and learn from the result.
- Stay creative while working toward the purpose of the activity.
- Adjust when the situation, rule, space, or pressure changes.

## PERCEPTION ACTION COUPLING

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Perception action coupling means connecting what you see and sense with what you do next. Before and during every play, gather information. Where is the pressure? Where are my teammates? Where is the open ice? How much time do I have? What is the opponent's body position?

Then act on that information by skating, passing, shooting, defending, supporting, or protecting the puck. Continue looking and adjusting after the decision.

### THE STANDARD

A hockey skill is not only what you can do. It is knowing when, where, and why to do it.

## THE LEARNING CYCLE

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- 1 Scan**  
Gather information about pressure, teammates, space, and time.
  - 2 Choose**  
Select the best available option for the situation in front of you.
  - 3 Commit**  
Act on the decision with confidence.
  - 4 Read the Result**  
Use what happened as feedback.
  - 5 Adjust**  
Apply what you learned and try again.
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SEE IT. UNDERSTAND IT. ACT ON IT. ADJUST.

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## DEVELOPING PLAYERS, NOT JUST POSITIONS

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At younger ages, especially 8U and 10U girls half ice, we intentionally simplify the game. Instead of assigning permanent positions, athletes learn offense and defense. Offense means our team has the puck. Defense means the other team has the puck and we are working to regain possession.

### WHY WE DO NOT SPECIALIZE TOO EARLY

Rotating through different areas of the ice helps athletes learn to attack and defend, support teammates, read the game from multiple perspectives, and become confident playing anywhere.

### PLAYER POSITIONS, 10U COED THROUGH 16U

Beginning at 10U coed, players start learning traditional positions. This does not apply to 10U girls half ice teams. An athlete may have a primary position and may also be asked to play other positions to broaden understanding, strengthen hockey IQ, and become more adaptable. Injuries, special teams, line combinations, and changing game situations all require positional versatility.

### GOALIE DEVELOPMENT

At 8U and 10U, young goalies are encouraged to spend time both in net and skating out whenever possible. Playing as a skater develops puck skills, hockey IQ, and overall athleticism. Beginning at 12U, athletes who choose goalie generally transition to full time goaltending.

## POSITIONING IS ABOUT DECISIONS, NOT SPOTS

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Hockey is fast, fluid, and constantly changing. Great positioning comes from reading the game and making good decisions, not memorizing where to stand. Every moment falls into one of the Four Roles of Hockey.

- Offense with the puck.
- Offense without the puck.
- Defense on the puck carrier.
- Defense away from the puck carrier.

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**RECOGNIZE YOUR ROLE. READ THE SITUATION. MAKE THE NEXT PLAY.**

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SECTION 2

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**RESPOND AND  
GROW**

## GROWTH MINDSET VERSUS FIXED MINDSET

A fixed mindset assumes ability cannot change very much. It avoids challenges and treats mistakes or correction as proof that an athlete is not good enough. A growth mindset recognizes that ability can improve through quality practice, effort, feedback, reflection, and persistence.

| FIXED MINDSET THOUGHT                   | GROWTH MINDSET RESPONSE                 |
|-----------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|
| I'm not good at this.                   | I cannot do this yet.                   |
| I made a mistake, so I failed.          | What did the result teach me?           |
| The coach corrected me because I'm bad. | The feedback gives me something to try. |
| I don't want to fail.                   | Challenge is part of improvement.       |

## NEUROPLASTICITY, HOW THE BRAIN CHANGES

Neuroplasticity is the brain's ability to change and build stronger connections through experience. Every time an athlete practices with attention, reads a situation, makes a decision, applies feedback, or tries again, the brain is learning.

Learning may not be immediately visible. A skill can still feel difficult while the brain is building stronger connections. An appropriate challenge encourages the brain to adapt. It should require concentration and adjustment while still allowing the athlete to keep exploring.

**IF IT FEELS HARD, THAT IS THE BRAIN BUILDING.**

### USE A MISTAKE RITUAL

Mistakes provide information, but athletes must avoid carrying one mistake into the next play. Use the same short reset every time.

- 1 Breathe**  
Take one deliberate breath.
- 2 Release**  
Tap your stick, brush your glove, or briefly shake it off.
- 3 Refocus**  
Use a phrase such as next play or I'm ready.
- 4 Reconnect**  
Scan, communicate, and return to your role.

#### THE RESET

Recognize it. Reset. Rejoin the game.

### TAKING COACHING AND FEEDBACK

Coachability means being open enough to listen, understand, try, and grow. It does not require silent agreement or perfection.

- Listen without arguing, blaming, or immediately making excuses.
- Try the feedback and ask for clarification when needed.
- Separate correction about a decision or behavior from your identity as a person.
- Return to the next repetition with purpose.

### ASK QUESTIONS AND JOIN THE CONVERSATION

Useful questions include. What did you see? What other option did I have? What should I look for next time? Was the issue my decision or my execution? What is one thing I should focus on now?

**PAUSE. REFLECT. ASK. ADJUST. TRY AGAIN.**

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SECTION 3

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**MAKE AN  
IMPACT**

## OUR PLAYING IDENTITY

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Our athletes play with purpose, creativity, and connection. Our identity is built around three responsibilities.

|                        |                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>PUCK PURSUIT</b>    | Pursue the puck with speed, determination, and a go for it attitude. Close space, compete to recover possession, stay engaged after losing the puck, and work together to create pressure. |
| <b>PUCK POSSESSION</b> | Value the puck and look to make a play. Scan, protect the puck, use open teammates, and play with creativity and confidence. Do not give the puck away without a purpose.                  |
| <b>PUCK SUPPORT</b>    | Help the player with the puck and remain connected without it. Move to become available, communicate, create passing lanes, and maintain strong offensive and defensive positioning.       |

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**PURSUE IT. POSSESS IT. SUPPORT IT.**

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## PURSUE MASTERY

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We compete to win, but the scoreboard does not define development. Athletes focus on what they can control through PCA's ELM Tree of Mastery.

|          |                                                                  |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>E</b> | <b>Effort</b><br>Give your best available effort.                |
| <b>L</b> | <b>Learning</b><br>Stay curious and look for ways to improve.    |
| <b>M</b> | <b>Mistakes</b><br>Use mistakes as information and keep playing. |

## BE A GOOD TEAMMATE

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- Encourage teammates after mistakes and celebrate their effort and improvement.
- Communicate respectfully and use positive body language, especially under pressure.
- Listen with empathy, include everyone, and give constructive feedback at the right time.
- Handle disagreements calmly and ask what does my team need from me right now.

### WHEN YOU DISAGREE WITH A CALL

Pause, avoid arguing or negative gestures, take a breath, and refocus on what the team needs next. Allow the coaches to communicate respectfully when necessary.

#### THE STANDARD

You cannot control the call. You can always control your response.

### WIN AND LOSE WITH CHARACTER

Win with humility. Celebrate together, respect the opponent, thank officials, and keep learning.

Lose with character. Feel the disappointment without blaming, congratulate the opponent, stay connected to the team, and identify what went well, what was learned, and what comes next.

THE RESULT BELONGS TO THE TEAM. THE RESPONSE BELONGS TO EACH ATHLETE.

### BE A TRIPLE IMPACT COMPETITOR

|                |                                                                                               |
|----------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| YOURSELF       | Make yourself better. Pursue mastery, stay teachable, and respond resiliently.                |
| YOUR TEAMMATES | Make your teammates better. Encourage, support, include, and lead through your actions.       |
| THE GAME       | Make the game better. Follow ROOTS. Respect Rules, Opponents, Officials, Teammates, and Self. |

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SECTION 4

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**OWN YOUR  
DEVELOPMENT**

### OUR PLAYING TIME PHILOSOPHY

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Our approach balances athlete development, enjoyment, and competition at every age. Expectations change as athletes mature, but every athlete remains responsible for effort, attitude, coachability, team play, and sportsmanship.

#### 8U AND 10U

Equal opportunity to play. Every athlete should receive as equal playing time as possible. We do not shorten the bench, match lines, or adjust playing time based on game situations. The priority is development, engagement, confidence, and love for the game.

#### 12U

Development first, competition begins. Coaches continue to roll lines and provide consistent opportunities. Limited game management decisions may begin during power plays, penalty kills, and late game situations, but these moments do not replace the commitment to developing every athlete.

#### 14U AND 16U

Increased accountability. Playing time becomes more performance based. Coaches consider effort, attitude, coachability, performance, team play, and game situations while preparing athletes for higher levels of hockey.

### ACCOUNTABILITY APPLIES AT EVERY AGE

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Playing time may be reduced at any level when an athlete consistently demonstrates poor effort, a negative attitude, lack of coachability, disrespect, undisciplined play, or unnecessary penalties. Every coaching decision considers athlete development and the team's long term success.

- Control your effort, attitude, preparation, and response.
- Stay engaged and support teammates regardless of your current role.
- Ask your coach what you can improve at an appropriate time.
- Use every opportunity to learn, contribute, and earn greater responsibility.

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**OPPORTUNITY IS PART OF DEVELOPMENT. ACCOUNTABILITY GROWS WITH THE ATHLETE.**

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## **BE A 24 HOUR ATHLETE**

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Development is affected by the choices athletes make away from the rink. Prepare in ways that support your health, performance, team, and long term growth.

- Arrive on time with your equipment organized and ready.
- Prioritize appropriate sleep, hydration, nutrition, and recovery.
- Bring a learning mindset and be physically and mentally ready to participate.
- Make responsible choices away from the rink and represent the program positively.

## **USE YOUR VOICE**

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Athlete centered does not mean staying silent. Communicate respectfully with your coaches when you.

- Do not understand your role, an activity, or the feedback you received.
- Need help solving a problem or have a concern affecting your learning.
- Are injured, sick, or do not feel physically or emotionally safe.
- Experience bullying, hazing, exclusion, or disrespect.

### **IMPORTANT**

Being coachable does not mean staying silent when you need help.

## **RESPOND TO YOUR ROLE**

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Roles, positions, line combinations, and playing time may change. You may not agree with every decision, but you remain responsible for your response.

- Stay prepared, engaged, and supportive of the team.
- Focus on your effort, attitude, communication, and development.
- Speak directly with the coach at an appropriate time and ask what you can improve.
- Do not punish teammates through negative behavior, blame, or reduced effort.

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**YOU DO NOT HAVE TO LIKE EVERY DECISION. YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW YOU RESPOND.**

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### REFLECT AND SET GOALS

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Regular reflection helps athletes recognize progress and choose a useful next step. Ask yourself.

- What am I doing well?
- What am I working to improve?
- What feedback have I received, and how will I use it?
- What is one action I will take next?
- How am I helping my teammates?

### THE ATHLETE STANDARD

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- ☐ Prepare responsibly and come ready to learn.
- ☐ Compete with effort and purpose.
- ☐ Scan, decide, act, and adjust.
- ☐ Use feedback, challenge, and mistakes to grow.
- ☐ Communicate when you need help or do not feel safe.
- ☐ Make teammates better through words and actions.
- ☐ Respond to adversity with discipline and respect.
- ☐ Honor the team, the opponent, the officials, and the game.
- ☐ Take ownership of your development.

#### THE COMMITMENT

I will be an active participant in my development. I will compete, think, communicate, and learn. I will work to make myself better, make my teammates better, and make the game better.

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# PLAYER EXPERIENCE

ATHLETE GUIDE