

Playing Ice Hockey is Fun!!

Playing ice hockey is fun. Don't tell the kids, but it is also good for you. With winter approaching, the weather is cooling down. Children get outside to play less in the winter. School is in session and exercise time is diminished. Playing on an organized ice hockey team is a great way for children to have fun, get some exercise in the winter, be involved with a team, and learn some new skills.

The main benefit derived from playing ice hockey is having fun. Specific to ice hockey is the ability to get some exercise during the winter when children are less active. Children need an outlet for their energy. Children sleep better at night after exercising. Children eat better after exercising. Teachers and counselors have reported that children who have had difficulties paying attention in school improve during the hockey season.

Playing ice hockey can make getting exercise fun. Ice hockey also offers many health benefits. Drills, scrimmages and games provide aerobic as well as anaerobic training. Playing ice hockey also tones and strengthens every major muscle group. Ice hockey gives kids a chance to get off the couch and expend energy. Twenty percent of children in the United States are overweight. These children have a greater chance of being overweight as adults. Being overweight increases their risk of developing diabetes and high blood pressure. Playing sports including ice hockey helps children develop life long healthy exercise habits.

Playing ice hockey teaches children about teamwork. It can teach them to interact with others. It teaches children how to win and how to lose. Learning that losing is part of competition makes life's bumps easier to absorb. Children get many opportunities to succeed in hockey because there are only a handful of players on the ice at any given time, each skater must play a very active and important role.

Playing ice hockey is good for a child's self esteem. It teaches them to have pride in their accomplishments whether it be learning to skate backwards or making a good pass to a teammate. The kids see the results of their hard work as they learn new skills. This makes children feel better about themselves. Studies show that children who play sports work harder in the classroom. Children learn problem solving skills and time management skills when they are part of a team. Children also learn the meaning of a commitment to a team and their teammates. Getting encouragement from their coaches and teammates makes children feel good about themselves. Studies show that teenagers who are involved in sports are less likely to use drugs or alcohol. Girls are less likely to get pregnant during their teen years if they are involved in sports.

Many people think of ice hockey players as big goons. In actuality, at the youth level, children with skating speed, balance, and agility are the ones that shine. For children who lack these qualities, ice hockey may improve their coordination, balance, and agility. I have talked with parents who feel their child is not aggressive enough to play hockey. Ice hockey is a finesse sport. If you look at the best ever NHL players like Bobby Orr, Wayne Gretzky, or Sidney Crosby, they are not aggressive players. They are finesse

players that are creative with their skating and stick handling to find ways to put the puck in the net.

Children do not need to have any specific skills to play ice hockey except a willingness to learn and participate. It is the job of the coaches to develop their skills. USA Hockey, which is the overseer of the Brattleboro Hockey Association, has mandatory coaching training sessions, which every coach at the Brattleboro Hockey Association must attend. These sessions range from all day sessions to 5 day seminars. Each coach is certified through these training sessions to coach their age level team.

Some people express concerns about the safety of ice hockey. Studies of all sports show that the majority of injuries to players occur in games as opposed to practice. Studies done for USA Hockey by Dr. Michael Stuart, Professor of Orthopaedics at the Mayo Clinic, show that game injuries for children age 6 to 8 years old were NONE over 1,000 hours of game play. There were only 2.7 game injuries per 1,000 game hours for children age 9 and 10. Extensive work has been done on hockey equipment to decrease the risk of injury to players. All children involved in the Brattleboro Hockey Association wear a full face mask on their helmet with a mouth guard. In fact, all coaches even wear helmets while on the ice with the children. All children are instructed in injury prevention through a program called "Heads Up Hockey".

Youth hockey is about developing children into good people, learning to be part of a team, learning some basic hockey skills, and having fun.

By Elizabeth McLarney, MD
Head Coach – '07-'08 BHA Squirt White team
Brattleboro, Vermont
September 2007