

Games for Improving Physical Literacy

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Many coaches, parents and athletes believe that the secret to becoming an elite-level or professional hockey player is early specialization. However, according to the USA Hockey American Development Model (ADM) improving physical literacy (i.e.-fundamental movement skills and fundamental sport skills) at an early age is one of the best ways to provide kids with the necessary movement and body awareness skills required for long-term athletic success.

The following are example games are excellent for improving physical literacy. These drills can be done on both dryland or on ice when available.

Red Light, Green Light

This drill is excellent for improving reactive agility coordination and teaching athletes how to effectively accelerate and decelerate. Place two cones 40 yards apart with the athletes at one cone and the coach on the other. On the “green light” command the athletes will sprint/skate forward as quickly as possible before the coach yells "red light!" signaling the player to immediately decelerate and stop in place. Players resume running/skating toward the second cone when the coach calls “green light”. This is repeated until the first player passes the second cone.

Heads or Tails

Begin by placing two cones 20-40 yards apart and place another cone half-way between them. Instruct the athletes to face each other and outstretch their hands so their fingertips are touching directly over the center cone and assume an athletic-ready position. The coach should designate one player as “heads” and the other as “tails”. Once in the proper position the coach will flip a coin and call out either “heads or tails” depending on which side of the coin is up. The athlete whose designation is called will turn and attempt to sprint/skate past the cone behind them before being tagged by their partner. Points are given to any athlete who makes it to their scoring zone without being tagged or to any player that tags the fleeing runner before they make it to their designated cone.

Sharks and Minnows

Use four cones to create a playing area measuring approximately 40 yards by 20 yards. Select two athletes to be the sharks and position them in the center of the playing area. The remaining players, the minnows, are on either end of the playing area. On command the minnows should attempt to sprint/skate from one side, end to end, of the playing area without allowing the sharks to tag them. When a player is tagged they will switch places with the athlete's in the center.

Everybody Is It

Begin by setting up four cones approximately 15 yards apart in a square pattern. Allow three to four athletes to spread out over the designated playing area. On the “go” command each

athlete will attempt to tag as many athletes as possible without being tagged themselves. If an athlete is tagged, then that athlete must immediately perform a pre-assigned task or movement; i.e. - five jumping jacks or push-ups, if on dryland, before returning to the game. If on ice players may be required to skate to a designated point with their hands overhead, indicating they have been tagged. Once they have made it to this point they may rejoin the game. If a dispute arises about which athlete was tagged first, then both athletes must perform the assigned task. This drill should be performed for approximately 15-20 seconds with a 45-60 second rest between sets.

Team Keep Away

After dividing the athletes equally into two teams, instruct them to spread out in their designated playing areas. At the whistle, start the stopwatch and pass a basketball or football to one of the teams. The team in possession of the ball passes it among themselves while trying to prevent the other team from gaining possession. Athletes may pass, intercept, and strip the ball as necessary to gain possession of it. If on ice it is not recommended to use a puck, rather using a ball shifts the focus to having fun and developing movement skills versus improving hockey—specific skills.

Ultimate

The rules to this game/drill are similar to football. However, limited physical contact is allowed and the receiving athlete's role is slightly modified. After dividing the athletes equally into two teams, instruct each team to go to its side of the playing area. One team begins the game as the offense and the other team begins as the defense. The game starts when a designated athlete on the defensive team puts the ball in play by throwing it to the offensive team's side of the playing field. When an athlete on the offensive team catches or picks up the ball, that athlete must remain stationary and throw the ball to an athlete on his team. This process is repeated to move the ball down the playing area toward the opponent's goal line. A point is scored each time an athlete crosses his opponent's goal line and catches the ball in the air. If a throw is intercepted, or if a point is scored, then the defensive team becomes the offensive team. Different types of balls, such as basketballs, rugby balls can be used in this game.